

BANGLADESH UPDATE



473

New cases in 24hrs



5,31,799

Total cases



8,023

Deaths



4,76,413

Recoveries



2,134,558

Deaths



99,548,883

Total cases

Bangladesh-US ties to reach new height

Momen says about days ahead under Biden admin; 25 journos get AmCham award for reports during pandemic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said relationships between Bangladesh and the US will reach a new height under the Joe Biden administration.

"We are very happy with the Joe Biden administration," said Momen.

He said Bangladesh does not want to see any events that led to movements like Black Lives Matter that took place in the US a few months ago and also the uprooting of more than one million Rohingyas from Myanmar.

The foreign minister lamented that while Bangladesh has a lot of positive achievements, the media outlets are not portraying the country's positive image, but negative ones.

Bangladesh is no more a case of bottomless basket, now the country is a land of opportunities, although media does not showcase the country's positive sides, the minister said while addressing the AmCham Frontline Journalism Award ceremony.

He added that technologies and innovations have created opportunities in modern journalism.

The American Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bangladesh in collaboration with Masthead PR awarded 25 journalists of print and

electronic media for their outstanding performance in journalism during the pandemic.

Earl Robert Miller, the US ambassador to Bangladesh, in the virtual award-giving ceremony highlighted the contribution of journalists when they covered the pandemic news putting their lives under threat of the deadly virus.

He said some 43 Bangladeshi journalists have died from Covid-19 so far. It took great courage and journalistic principles to put their lives under threat and go to report even during such a pandemic, Miller said.

The journalists give voice to the voiceless, he said, mentioning his country's support to the journalists.

Syed Ershad Ahmed, AmCham president, said the businesses are still reeling from the fallout of the pandemic.

It is great that the journalists came out from their homes and covered the reports defying the fears of virus, he said.

While moderating the event, Syed Mohammad Kamal, AmCham vice-president, said a jury board selected the best reports from published and aired reports called from journalists of the period between March 1 and August 31 last year.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Police look on as local administration demolishes a half-constructed building on vested property in Tangail's Akur Takur Para area that was illegally occupied by former minister Abdul Latif Siddique. The photo was taken yesterday.

Experts allay fear of major side effects

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So, there is no reason to hesitate to take this vaccine. As a frontline health worker, I will take this vaccine for sure," Prof Dr Mohammad Robed Amin, line director of the National Centre for Disease Control at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) told The Daily Star on Thursday.

MILD SIDE EFFECTS

Like any other vaccine, the Covid-19 vaccines may have some side effects, which are signs that your body is building immunity against the virus, according to the US Center for Disease Control (US-CDC).

These side effects may affect one's ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. Common side effects may arise on the arm where the shot is injected and throughout the rest of the body.

The vaccine recipient may feel pain or swelling on the arm where the shot is given.

Throughout the rest of your body, the side effects may appear as fever, chills, fatigue and headaches, according to the US-CDC.

Accordingly, such typical vaccination reactions have also been reported after receiving the AstraZeneca, BioNTech-Pfizer, Moderna, Sinovac and the Russian Sputnik V vaccines, which are already in use.

"Serious allergic shock is the only severe side effect of any

vaccine, which, in case of the Oxford one, was not reported so far," Robed Amin said.

OXFORD-ASTRAZENECA

SIDE EFFECTS

On September 6, the company paused the trial to investigate a patient who developed transverse myelitis -- a dangerous inflammation of the spinal cord, reports MedShadow, an independent non-profit health news site.

Researchers determined that the incident was unrelated to the vaccine and quickly restarted the trial in most countries. It, however, remained paused in the US until October 26.

On October 21, scientists reported a patient in the trial had died.

The trial resumed after it was reported that the patient's death was caused due to other reasons.

In earlier trials, many patients reported mild adverse effects similar to those associated with other vaccines, including injection site pain, rash, headaches, muscle soreness, and fever.

Referring to the primary study result, Robed said, "Most vaccine recipients will not face any side effect. Only 5-10 percent so far had mild to moderate side effects."

The Oxford vaccine has been approved for use in the U.K., Argentina, India, and Mexico, and received emergency approval in Bangladesh.

HOW TO TACKLE SIDE EFFECTS

The DGHS has set up vaccination centers only in healthcare settings like upazila health complexes, district hospitals or diagnostic centers.

"Every vaccine recipient will be observed for 10-15 minutes after a shot is injected. If anybody faces any side effects even after that, treatment will be arranged in each centers. In that case, a vaccine recipient can call 16263 for DGHS telemedicine service," said Prof ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of the DGHS.

DGHS officials have advised pregnant women, people over

90 or under 18, and those with serious allergic reaction to any drug not to take the vaccine.

The US-CDC has advised taking the second shot timely, even if anyone has side effects after the first shot, unless a vaccination provider or doctor suggests otherwise.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, said, "Some 98 percent of those who will face side effects will be ok within 24 hours after taking the shot. In rare cases, a few might need drugs like paracetamol [to tackle the side effects]."

"The vaccine is the best weapon we have so far to fight Covid-19. So, we have to take the vaccine," he added.

50 lakh shots arrive today

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vaccine doses timely and whether it has the capacity to store and transport those properly.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said there will be no crisis of vaccine in the country and everybody will get vaccines free-of-cost.

Dr Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, said, "We are happy that we are going to get the vaccine in time. This is a real morale boost for us."

He also hoped the vaccination programme will run smoothly.

DGHS officials said the government plans to give the first dose of vaccine to 60 lakh people in the first month and another 50 lakh in the second month.

The COVAX programme, led by the World Health Organisation and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, offered Bangladesh around four lakh doses of Pfizer vaccine earlier this month. The alliance has committed to give Bangladesh a total of 6.8 crore vaccine shots.

Pilot vaccination in the country will start on January 27 while mass vaccination will begin on February 8.

The online registration for vaccination starts tomorrow. A press conference in this regard will be held at the Prime Minister's Office today.

Experts, however, said one of major challenges for the government now is to make people aware of the necessity of taking vaccines and to get them vaccinated.

Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology department at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said the vaccine's arrival in the country is indeed good news.

But before launching vaccination,

the government should make an immediate assessment to identify the most vulnerable groups and the areas with high infection rates, he said.

"There should be a vaccine trial to see whether the process runs smoothly or not. Besides, it is also important to vaccinate people efficiently without infecting others."

The registration process should be hassle-free and measures need to be put in place to ensure that vaccines are administered at every designated centre in an orderly fashion to prevent chaos, Sayedur observed.

"There should be a backup plan in case there is any unexpected disruption during transportation and storage of vaccine. Another point is that the government should take some remedial measures to raise confidence among people about vaccines."

Prof Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) at the DGHS, said that now it's time to administer the vaccine to people efficiently and skillfully in an organised manner.

The aim of vaccination is to save lives and break the chain of virus transmission. And people have to be involved in the process to achieve that, he pointed out.

"There must be community mobilisation and also huge publicity. This will make people feel that they are very much part of this process. We got enough time for preparations but it seems that the government could not utilise the time properly."

Be-Nazir further said the listing of vaccine recipients could have been completed and more vaccination centres readied by this time to cover more people.

Covid has already claimed 8,023 lives and infected 5,31,799 people in the country. Besides, there are asymptomatic cases.

Antibody test for Covid-19

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setting some criteria for the approval of rapid antibody testing kits. It said antibody kits with a minimum 90 percent sensitivity and 95 percent specificity will be approved.

According to the government policy, the rapid antibody testing kit can be used for sero-surveillance, convulsant plasma therapy and research.

The kit will be permitted to be used only by the laboratories, according to the government policy.

This newspaper made phone calls to Md Salahuddin, director of the drug administration, to learn whether there any new antibody testing kits in the country that meet the standards, but he did not answer.

On September 17, the government permitted antigen-based rapid testing at public healthcare centres.

As of yesterday, a total of 56 government healthcare establishments had the rapid antigen testing facility, according to the DGHS.

Both antigen and antibody-based rapid testing for Covid-19.

However, there was no progress in this regard till yesterday.

Officials, however, said they have not finalised any plan on how the antibody kits will be used.

Prof Nasima Sultana, additional director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, told The Daily Star, "We are busy implementing the Covid-19 vaccine rollout. We have no plans regarding antibody tests right now. We will start working on it later."

On June 26 last year, the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) disapproved a rapid antibody testing kit developed by Gonoshasthya Pharmaceuticals as it was found capable of detecting antibodies in only "40 percent Covid-19" cases.

On June 24 that year, the DGDA published a draft policy on its website

Venezuela's Maduro willing to establish 'new path' with US

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said Saturday he was willing to "turn the page" with the US under President Joe Biden, calling for a "new path" after years of tension with Donald Trump's White House.

"We are willing to walk a new path in our relations with Joe Biden's government based on mutual respect, dialogue, communication and understanding," the leftist leader told supporters, adding that he "is willing to turn the page" with the new US administration.

Jail super, jailer also withdrawn

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Bari and assistant chief prison guard Khalilur Rahman were withdrawn earlier.

Tushar, brother-in-law of Hallmark Managing Director Tanvir Mahmud, was allowed a visitor in violation of the coronavirus restrictions.

Two committees investigating the incident have identified some of those involved from security camera footage, officials said.

In the footage, Tushar was seen

walking around wearing black clothes in the area where jail officials' cabins are located shortly before a woman in purple clothes was seen entering from outside and going to the said area around 12:55pm.

The footage also showed Saqlain greeting the woman and leaving a room after the woman walked in. Saqlain came back with Tushar and after around 10 minutes, Ratna left her room and two minutes later Tushar went towards Ratna's room with the

woman. Two minutes later, Tushar and the woman returned to Saqlain's room where they spent about 45 minutes.

A committee headed by Additional Deputy Commissioner Abul Kalam was formed on January 12 to investigate the matter. Another committee headed by Additional Inspector General of Prisons Col Abrar Hossain was formed on January 21.

Abrar said officials would look into whether the prison officials gave Tushar the privileges in exchange for money.

Wild elephants trample two teens to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Two teenagers were trampled to death by a herd of wild elephants in Alikadom upazila of Bandarban early yesterday.

The dead are Mansur Alam, 19 and Humayan Kabir, 18, of Konapara area in the upazila, said Kazi Rokib Uddin, officer-in-charge of Alikadom Police Station.

According to the police official, locals blocked the movement of the wild elephants. As a result, the elephants attacked the humans, leaving the duo injured.

"Of them, Mansur died at Lama Upazila Health Complex whereas Humayan breathed his last on the way to a local clinic in Cox's Bazar.

SM Kaiser, divisional forest officer (DFO), Lama, said humans have been blocking the passage of these wild elephants for a long time.

"It became serious in 2018 with the construction of Dohazari-Cox's Bazar rail line through the Chunati and Fasiakhali wildlife sanctuaries and Medhkachapia National Park."

It will be difficult to stop the human-elephant conflict in the future as the elephants' passages are already blocked in the area, said the DFO, adding that it would also pose a serious threat to wildlife and biodiversity in the region.

It may take

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report, "The Inequality Virus", released today.

The increase in the wealth of the 10 richest billionaires since the start of the crisis is more than enough to prevent anyone on the earth from falling into poverty because of the virus and to pay for Covid-19 vaccines for all, it pointed out.

Oxfam is an international confederation of 20 NGOs working with partners in over 90 countries to end injustices that cause poverty.

"Covid-19 has the potential to increase economic inequality in almost every country at once, the first time this has happened since records began over a century ago," the report mentioned.

"Rising inequality means it could take at least 14 times longer for the number of people living in poverty to return to pre-pandemic levels than it took for the fortunes of the top 1,000 billionaires, mostly White male, to bounce back."

It also noted that 711 billionaires in Asia have seen their fortunes increase by \$1.5 trillion since March last year, enough to give all the 157 million people forced into poverty by Covid-19 in the region a cheque for \$9,000 each.

In South Asia, the poorest sub region, 101 billionaires have seen their fortunes rise by \$174 billion in the same period, enough to give the region's 93 million people, forced into poverty due to the pandemic, a cheque for \$1,800 each.

Besides, 610 billionaires in East Asia and the Pacific region have seen their fortunes increase by \$1.3 trillion since March, enough to give all 64 million people forced into poverty by Covid-19 in the region a cheque for \$20,000 each, the report said.

The world's 10 richest men have seen their combined wealth increase by half a trillion dollars since the pandemic began -- more than enough to pay for Covid vaccines for everyone and to ensure no one is pushed into poverty by the pandemic.

The pandemic has created the worst job crisis in over 90 years with hundreds of millions of people now underemployed or out of work, said the report, adding that women are hardest hit, yet again.

"Globally, women are overrepresented in the low-paid precarious professions that have been hardest hit by the pandemic. If women were represented at the same rate as men in these sectors, 112 million women would no longer be at high risk of losing their incomes or jobs. Women also make up roughly 70 percent of the global health and social care workforce -- essential but often poorly paid jobs that put them at greater risk from Covid-19," it added.

Czech trainers teach dogs to sniff out Covid

AFP, KLINNY

In a dog training centre built inside a shipping container located in a Czech mountain village, Renda, Cap and Laky are being put to the test.

They sniff at six vessels, each containing a piece of cloth with scent from patients with Covid-19, negative donors, or fake samples.

"Good boy!" exclaims Lenka Vlachova, a trainer working at Prague's fire brigade, as jagdterrier Renda sits down by one sample, wagging his tail.

The team of dog trainers are working in their own time and report a 95-percent success rate in Covid-19 detection in samples of human scent.

"The study is designed to verify dogs' ability to detect Covid-19 and generate a method enabling the use of trained dogs in combatting the pandemic," project head Gustav Hotovy told AFP.