City

ROHINGYA REPATRIATION

Bangladesh has confidence in China

Says foreign minister; fate of tripartite talks today uncertain

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has confidence in China that it will continue to help repatriate Rohingyas, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen said yesterday.

He expressed optimism despite the fact that China on Tuesday exercised its veto power at the UN Security Council to block a statement condemning the military coup in Myanmar.

Talking to reporters at his office yesterday, the minister said, "We still have confidence in China. We maintain friendship with all. China and Japan have advanced. China has moved forward [regarding repatriation talks] a bit further. We take China into confidence.

Bangladesh has secured its border to prevent any possible Rohingya influx as feared by some Western countries and rights bodies, Momen added.

China told the UN Security Council that any sanctions or international pressure on Myanmar following the coup would only make things worse.

Both Russia and China have protected Myanmar criticism at the UN regarding the military crackdown on the Rohingya population in 2017 when some 750,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh. Rights bodies had termed the crackdown a genocide.

Myanmar also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice.

More than three years after the influx, no Rohingya returned to Myanmar citing that there is no

which always wanted a bilateral solution, is mediating the repatriation process and a DG-level tripartite meeting, is scheduled for today.

The Myanmar military took control of the country, raising fears that the Rohingya repatriation would be

"We want to continue the [repatriation] process. We had an agreement with the government, not with any individual in Myanmar. Earlier in 1980s and 90's, we repatriated Rohingyas when there was

"It is an opportunity for Myanmar to make repatriation happen. If they do it, all others will be with them," the foreign minister said.

if Bangladesh was condemning the military coup in Myanmar or welcoming the new regime, Momen did not give any

'Myanmar is our neighbour. We believe in democratic values. So, we also want the democratic values, peace, and stability to prevail in

Plan revised as response poor

setback," Dr ABM Khurshid Alam, of Health Services (DGHS), told The

"We do not want any hindrance in

Asked, the DG acknowledged that the online registration received a lukewarm response from the people, but said he was hopeful about people joining the

He said the decision to inoculate 35 lakh people in the first month was made in a national vaccination committee meeting held at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

commissioners, UNOs, civil surgeons

Khurshid Alam said there were some pitfalls in the online registration app, called Surokkha, adding that those

issues would be addressed soon. "Besides, community health care centres and union digital centres will

Since the Surokkha app was launched on January 27, the registration progressed slowly with some people complaining about difficulties in

the registration was slow initially, more and more people were getting registered

said the Experts, however, government must intensify its efforts to encourage people to take the jabs if it wants to make the inoculation campaign a success.

targeted group.

vaccine due importance while some are not confident about its safety and effectiveness. The registration process is complex. Besides, trust deficit of people and different propaganda against the vaccine are also contributing to the poor

Referring to the country's birth control and Vitamin-A capsule campaigns which were fruitful in the past, he said a massive awareness campaign was the key to success.

were very successful "Those campaign for Covid-19 inoculation has

the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) said, "The reason behind the poor registration rate is reluctance and hesitation among the people.

after the vaccination kicks off," he said. Mushtuq recommended accelerating publicity about the

Meanwhile, keeping in mind the mass inoculation, the government sent vaccine doses to all districts of the country. From those district shots have headquarters, been

guarantee of safety, citizenship and basic rights in Rakhine State. China,

Foreign Minister Momen said Dhaka could not establish contact with the Myanmar authorities in Naypyidaw. Therefore, foreign ministry officials were trying to contact the Chinese and Myanmar embassies in Dhaka, but it could not be confirmed as of yesterday afternoon whether the meeting was going to be held, he said.

a military regime.

direct response.

Myanmar," he said.

director general of Directorate General Daily Star yesterday.

the process," he said.

campaign spontaneously.

Meeting sources said all the deputy

and other officials from across the country were asked to complete the registration process smoothly and quickly.

start from tomorrow [today] to help people get registered," he added.

logging in. Officials said although the pace of

with each passing day.

Prof Md Sayedur Rahman, chairman at the BSMMU's pharmacology department, said the government has revised the plan sensing that it would not be able to get the vaccine to its

He identified a number of reasons for the lukewarm response to the

registration. "Some people are not giving the response," Prof Sayedur Rahman said.

campaigns. But those were not for all spectra of life like this one. But the so far not been that visible.

Dr Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of

"Ît [the rate], hopefully, will increase vaccination campaign.

transported to the upazila level.

It has also almost completed the necessary training for the vaccinators volunteers, said officials

concerned. 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.

The government has already trained 14,688 vaccinators and 29,376 volunteers for administering the vaccine doses. There will be three vaccine centres in every upazila, officials said.

Bangladesh got 50 lakh doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from Serum Institute of India (SII) on January The government purchased three crore shots of the Oxford vaccine from SII. As per the contract, Bangladesh will

get 50 lakh doses every month. The country has also received 20 lakh doses of the Oxford vaccine as a gift

from the Indian government. Besides, The Covax programme led by the World Health Organisation and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has committed to give Bangladesh a total of 6.8 crore vaccine shots.

BANGLADESH TO GET 12.8M SHOTS FROM COVAX

The Covax list vesterday came amid concerns over whether lower-income countries will be left out of the immunisation race dominated by rich nations, a problem Covax was set up to

Some 145 countries are set to receive enough doses to immunise 3.3 percent of their population by mid-2021, reported AFP.

A statement said the initial distribution was in line with a target "to protect the most vulnerable groups such as health care workers" in the first half of the year.

Countries will receive doses in proportion to population size, with the most going to India (97.2 million), Pakistan (17.2 million), Nigeria (16 million), Indonesia (13.7 million), Bangladesh (12.8 million) and Brazil

(10.6 million). "This is fantastic. We can start vaccinating. It is coming in the next weeks," Ann Lindstrand, coordinator for a World Health Organisation immunisation programme, told a press

is covered through Funding donations for the 92 lower- and lowermiddle income economies involved while for richer countries, buying in operates as a back-up insurance policy

for their own vaccination programmes. The distribution list includes 240 million doses of the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine, licensed to the Serum Institute of India (SII); 96 million doses of AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine; and 1.2 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech

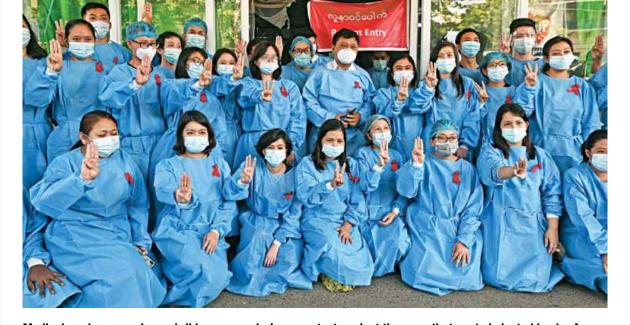
vaccine. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is the only one so far to have received emergency use approval from the WHO. Evaluation is under way for the

AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine. Both require two injected doses.

Wealthy self-financing countries were on the list in addition to lower-income nations, including South Korea (2.6 million doses), Canada (1.9 million) and New Zealand (250,000).

The list is non-binding and may change, the statement stressed, but would allow countries to plan for how many doses they will receive in the first rounds.

Longer term, Covax aims to secure enough vaccines for at least the most vulnerable 20 percent in participating countries by the end of 2021, added the statement.



Medical workers wearing red ribbons pose during a protest against the coup that ousted elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in Yangon General Hospital in Yangon, Myanmar yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Detained Suu Kyi faces charges

The radios were imported illegally and used without permission, it said.

The NLD's press officer said Suu Kyi was formally charged with an offence under Myanmar's import and export The document reviewed yesterday

requested Suu Kyi's detention "in order to question witnesses, request evidence and seek legal counsel after questioning the defendant". A separate document showed police

filed charges against ousted President Win Myint for violating protocols to stop the spread of coronavirus during campaigning for an election last November. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won the election in a

landslide but the military claimed it was marred by fraud and justified its seizure of power on those grounds. Reuters was not immediately able to reach the police, the government or the

court for comment. The chair of the Asean (Association Southeast Asian Nations) Parliamentarians for Human Rights, Charles Santiago, said the new charges were ludicrous.

"This is an absurd move by the junta to try to legitimize their illegal power grab," he said in a statement. The electoral commission had said

the vote was fair. Suu Kyi spent about 15 years under house arrest between 1989 and 2010 as she led the country's democracy movement, and she remains hugely popular at home despite damage to her international reputation over the plight

of Muslim Rohingya refugees in 2017. The NLD made no immediate comment. A party official said on Tuesday he had learned she was under house arrest in the capital, Naypyidaw, and was in good health.

PARTY SAYS OFFICES RAIDED The party said earlier in a statement that its offices had been raided in several regions and it urged authorities to stop

what it called unlawful acts after its election victory. Opposition to the junta headed by Army chief General Min Aung Hlaing

has begun to emerge in Myanmar. Staff at scores of government hospitals across the country of 54 million people stopped work or wore red ribbons as part of a civil disobedience campaign.

The newly formed Myanmar Civil Disobedience Movement said doctors at 70 hospitals and medical departments in 30 towns had joined the protest. It accused the army of putting its interests above a coronavirus outbreak that has killed more than 3,100 people in Myanmar, one of the highest tolls in

Southeast Asia. "We really cannot accept this," said 49-year-old Myo Myo Mon, who was among the doctors who stopped work

"We will do this in a sustainable way, we will do it in a non-violent way...This is the route our state counselor desires," she said, referring to Suu Kyi by her title.

The latest coup is a massive blow to hopes that Myanmar is on a path to stable democracy. The junta has declared a one-year state of emergency and has promised to hold fair elections, but has not said when

G7 CONDEMNS COUP The Group of Seven largest developed economies condemned the coup yesterday and said the election result generals a major role in government.

must be respected.

"We call upon the military to immediately end the state of emergency, restore power to the democraticallyelected government, to release all those unjustly detained and to respect human rights and the rule of law," the G7 said in a statement.

China has not specifically condemned the coup in its neighbour but the foreign ministry rejected the suggestion that it supported or gave tacit consent to it.

"We wish that all sides in Myanmar can appropriately resolve their differences and uphold political and social stability," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a briefing.
At the United Nations on Tuesday, its

special envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, urged the Security Council to "collectively send a clear signal in support of democracy in Myanmar".

But a diplomat with China's UN mission said it would be difficult to reach consensus on the draft statement and that any action should avoid escalating tension or complicating the

US President Joe Biden has threatened to reimpose sanctions on the generals who seized power.

US Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, tried but was unable to connect to Myanmar's military following the

The military had ruled the former British colony from 1962 until Suu Kyi's party came to power in 2015 under a constitution that guarantees the

Saw all, heard all; what will we do?

censorship, but the media possibly chose to be influenced by late Ugandan dictator Idi Amin, who once said, "There is freedom of speech, but I cannot

guarantee freedom after speech. So, any attempt now to do a quality assessment of the report we did not publish could be called into question. Yet, at the risk of being levelled as morally disqualified, let's make an attempt. The Al Jazeera report -- "Gang close to Bangladesh PM extracts bribes for state contracts" -- could not prove beyond doubt that they're premier's men and that they're "profiting from links to PM Sheikh Hasina". Claims of the criminals were included to prove their closeness to Bangladesh PM. Those claims could as well be the typical trick of any criminal to prove

A title like "All the Chief's Brothers" "The Mafia brothers" could have been more fact-based. And, as it appeared from the one-hour 20-minute reportage, it would have been journalistically appropriate had the report left out the innuendoes and assumptions, sticking instead to its core findings against three murderconvicted brothers -- two fugitives and one pardoned from death row -who're profiting from the connection of fourth brother's office with security forces and boasting about alleged blessings of the Bangladesh premier.

Sensationalising apart, it goes

"Our foreign ministry and ISPR have

The minister was responding

to a question from a reporter at

Bangabandhu Corner at the River Police

and Awami League General Secretary

Obaidul Quader said the reports of Al

Jazeera against Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina's government are "motivated"

ones and a "dirty manifestation" of

working independently and criticising

the government. Even though the

country's active and vibrant media

did not find any information

[regarding reports of Al Jazeera], Al

Jazeera Television broadcasted false

information about Sheikh Hasina,

Quader was speaking at a press

conference on contemporary affairs at

which is very condemnable," he said.

Media in Bangladesh have been

inauguration ceremony

Road Transport and Bridges Minister

already replied in this regard," he said.

of journalism, said the minister.

Office in Dhaka's Police Plaza.

propaganda.

without saying what Al Jazeera did a vested group in the news channel through an investigation of two years across continents and with the help of high-tech surveillance is an eveopener, demonstrating once more the power of investigative journalism. It's opened up a Pandora's Box, to which the government has reacted as well by terming it "apparently politically motivated smear campaign by notorious individuals associated with the Jamaat-e-Islami

extremist group. But this wholesale denial of the sensational disclosures can turn out to be way too costly for the nation and doing more harm than good to the government in the end. A responsible response to any media disclosures would be: take in the facts and leave out the fictions.

Now, what are the facts that All the

Prime Minister's Men provided? A defence purchase of highly controversial listening device, hiding in the deal the country of origin- Israel, a country that Bangladesh has neither recognised nor allowed its citizens to travel, was helped manage by the company of one fugitive brother. A national identity card and a passport were obtained by that fugitive brother exploiting the links at his brother's

office in security forces. A release from the ISPR (Inter Service Public Relations Directorate) quickly binned the report, stating that (it was) "concocted and ill-intended report by

his official residence, reports BSS.

The AL general secretary said Sheikh

Hasina's government has taken a

harsh stance against corruption and

irregularities and it has already made

clear its "zero-tolerance policy" against

He said the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), within its

jurisdiction, is working independently to check corruption in the country.

"Linking the responsibility

an individual to the head of the

government makes the principles of

journalism questionable and it is not

most successful prime minister since

1975 and her courageous and skilled

leadership is highly lauded around the

against the country both at home and

abroad will not work and will backfire,

he added.

The conspiracies and propaganda

Saying the country's people remain

beside Sheikh Hasina, the AL general

He said Sheikh Hasina is the

proper journalism at all," Quader said.

Al-Jazeera." Still, serious investigations are more than required. If found true, the government must rush to fix the system and restore the reputation the disciplined forces are known for. A mere rebuttal to the Al Jazeera report is just not enough. Two fugitive brothers and the pardoned one flew into Dhaka and

partied at a gala marriage ceremony of big brother's son right in front of the police authority's nose. The two murder convicts are still most wanted by the home ministry, and what made them "see nothing, hear nothing" should be a subject of serious investigation by the government There is disturbing boasting by a

fugitive brother and Al Jazeera claims that suggested that systematic corruption by top law enforcement officials is going on in full scale and money is being laundered with blessings from a few political leaders in power. Days back, Bangladesh was ranked secondworst in South Asia in Transparency International's corruption index. Our Anti-Corruption Commission can care

to look into the report. We must commend the government for not trying to block the viewing of Al Jazeera report in Bangladesh. In the age of technology, such measures do not

work anymore. The government saw it all and heard it all. Will it do something at all? That's the big question.

Bangladesh mulls legal action: FM secretary said AL candidates' victory in the ongoing municipality elections is an illustration of this, despite propaganda against the government.

He urged the Al Jazeera authorities not to be a tool of implementation of anti-Bangladesh propaganda and not to release motivational, misleading and one-sided reports. "Those who have not acknowledged

country's

development, achievements and progress yet, are engaged in a series of tactical conspiracies of these reports,' Quader added. Information Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud said a known syndicate

independence,

renting slots of foreign media is carrying out anti-state propaganda. He said, "People are aware and cautious and the Awami League government has a stronghold at grassroots level. Therefore, this little bit

The information minister said this at a discussion programme organised at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity.

of tickling will not bring any benefit."

Surveillance

FROM PAGE 1

Western countries that there could be another Rohingya exodus amid the military takeover.

"In 2017, when Rohingyas were persecuted, our people welcomed them. Now our people don't want them. We have secured our border. Let others accept them if Rohingyas flee their country, but we don't want to accept them," he told reporters at his office yesterday.

However, the foreign minister added that Dhaka was not anticipating a

renewed Rohingya influx. "Some friendly countries fear that the rest of the Rohingyas would flee to Bangladesh from Rakhine," he said.

Dhaka is willing to continue talks with Myanmar about Rohingya repatriation, he added.

On January 19, it was decided at a secretary-level tripartite meeting among Bangladesh, China and Myanmar that a joint working group meeting would be held today for advancing the repatriation discussion. However, the scheduled meeting is now uncertain since Dhaka has yet to officially communicate with

Myanmar following the coup. Bangladesh is hosting over 1.1 million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar. They fled Myanmar amid military crackdowns that many rights groups call

an ethnic cleansing. A 2017 military crackdown in Rakhine State sent Myanmar's about 750,000 Rohingyas fleeing to Bangladesh, where they are still stranded in refugee camps.

"There are about 600,000 Rohingyas that remain in Rakhine state, including 120,000 people who are effectively confined to camps ... they cannot move freely and have extremely limited access to básic health and education services, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric told

reporters in New York. "So, our fear is that the events may make the situation worse for them," he said, reports Reuters.

Take legal action

FROM PAGE 1

Expressing dissatisfaction over the inclusion of new components in projects during revisions, the PM said, It's a dangerous thing. A PD [project director] takes up the responsibilities

of several projects and stays in Dhaka. "It's often seen that a few items components] get included during revisions of a project," the planning minister quoted the PM as saying.

"She then asked: 'didn't you [project directors] visit the project sites and see these things? Why these things were not raised earlier?'," Mannan said quoting the PM.

The premier also gave directives o prepare a master plan so that no bridge or culvert is constructed without proper assessment and

feasibility study.

BRIDGE ON RURAL ROADS The LGED took up the Tk 3,926-crore project to build 130 bridges in rural areas to boost the rural economy by creating commercial and employment opportunities which in turn will directly

built in 94 upazilas of 40 districts. The sites were picked on the basis of lists provided by lawmakers. However, LGED officials did not

The 130 bridges are supposed to be

benefit the poor and reduce poverty.

carry out any feasibility study on about 100 of the 130 bridges. All the bridges were supposed to open by June this year but only 13 percent

project work has been done so far.

The Ecnec yesterday approved extension of the deadline for project completion to June 2024 and also a Tk 2.530.43-crore rise in cost. According to the project documents, the main reasons for the cost hike

include increase in expenditure on

land acquisition, and payment of salaries of consultants and staffers for an additional three years. Planning Commission Member Zakir Hossain Akanda said some of the bridges to be built under the project are more than 100 metres long while many others are below 100

metres in length. WASA PROJECT The Tk 5,248.06-crore project, taken up by Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), was supposed to be

completed in June 2020. Now, the project cost has risen to Tk 8,151.07 crore, and the fresh deadline for its completion is June 2022. According to the project documents, the key reasons behind the rise in cost

are additional construction work, inclusion of new areas in the project, installation of 50 deep tube-wells, legal complications, appreciation of US dollar against taka and delay in and acquisition. Besides, additional money has to be

spent for various purposes, including payment of employees' salaries, consultancy fees and fuel costs. Though the project was taken up in 2014, work began in 2018 due to

problems in tender process and delay

in land acquisition. The documents show a 376-km pipeline was supposed to be set up under the project, but now it has to be extended by another 124 km for which an additional 24 months are

needed. About the cost, Commission Member Mamun Al Rashid said Wasa lacked manpower with technical skills for the project, and this resulted in failure to estimate its actual cost.

Eventually the project cost has gone up, he added.