



SPUTNIK V VACCINE IMPORT BAN Experts back Brazil

AFP, Washington

Scientists have backed Brazil's drug regulator's decision to stop the import of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine on the basis that batches they tested carried a live version of a common cold-causing virus.

Top virologist Angela Rasmussen told AFP the finding "raises questions about the integrity of the manufacturing processes" and could be a safety issue for people with weaker immune systems, if the problem were found to be widespread.

Russia's Gamaleya Institute, which developed the vaccine, has denied the reports. The issue centers around an "adenovirus vector" -- a virus that normally causes mild respiratory illness but in vaccines is genetically modified so that it cannot replicate, and edited to carry the DNA instructions for human cells to develop the spike protein of the coronavirus.

This in turn trains the human system to be prepared in case it then encounters the real coronavirus. The Sputnik V vaccine uses two different adenovirus vectors to accomplish this task: adenovirus type 26 (Ad26) for the first shot, and adenovirus type 5 (Ad5) for the second shot.

According to a slideshow uploaded online, scientists at Anvisa, Brazil's regulator, said they tested samples of the booster shot and found it was "replication competent" -- meaning that once inside the body, the adenovirus can continue to multiply.

They added that this had likely occurred because of a manufacturing problem called "recombination," in which the modified adenovirus had gained back the genes it needed to replicate while it was being grown inside engineered human cells in a lab.

Brazilian regulators did not evaluate the first shot. Rasmussen, a research scientist at Canada's Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization, described the problem as a quality control issue, rather than a problem inherent to the vaccine technology.

Another unknown is whether the manufacturing problem that led to the adenovirus vector being able to replicate also knocks out the DNA code for the spike protein -- rendering the shot ineffective as a coronavirus vaccine.

But it is not the first time such an issue has occurred. Earlier this month, Slovakia also said it had concerns over the composition of Sputnik V vaccines it had imported, saying they did not match the samples that were used in clinical studies.

Don't force 'democracy' on others

China tells US

AFP, BEIJING

China yesterday warned the United States against imposing its democratic ideals, while criticising trade sanctions and military moves in Beijing's backyard just hours after President Biden's speech on American geopolitical priorities.

In his first address to Congress, Biden said the country was in competition with China and others to win the 21st century. Biden added that "autocrats think democracies can't compete", while noting the US welcomes competition and isn't looking for conflict.

Asked about the speech, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said it was normal for the US and China to compete in some areas.

"But this kind of competition should be a track and field race, not a duel to the death," he told a regular press briefing. Wang also warned that "forcing other countries to accept one's democratic system... will only create divisions, intensify tension, and undermine stability."

China's defence ministry spokesman Wu Qian yesterday said in a separate statement that, since Biden came to power, the frequency of US warships sent to China's maritime territory increased by 20 percent from last year. The frequency of reconnaissance aircraft activity in the region also increased by 40 percent, Wu added, saying that China "resolutely opposes this".

America 'on the move again'

Biden pleads for unity, equality in first speech to Congress as president

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden triumphantly declared that the United States is "on the move again" in a rousing speech to Congress yesterday, calling for trillions of dollars to rebuild the post-pandemic US middle class and give new life to "forgotten" workers.

Lauding the success of mass vaccination against Covid-19, Biden told Congress and the nation on primetime television that "in America, we always get up."

"America is ready for takeoff," he said. "We are working again, dreaming again, discovering again, leading the world again."

Biden, who was celebrating the eve of his 100th day in office, called the vaccine rollout one of "the greatest logistical achievements" in US history.

But Biden quickly pivoted to insisting that this national effort must now focus on rebuilding the economy and fighting inequality with "the largest jobs plan since World War II."

In a line that could have come from his populist Republican predecessor Trump, Biden said working-class Americans had been ignored, while the top one percent got richer, and that his plans would give them a chance.

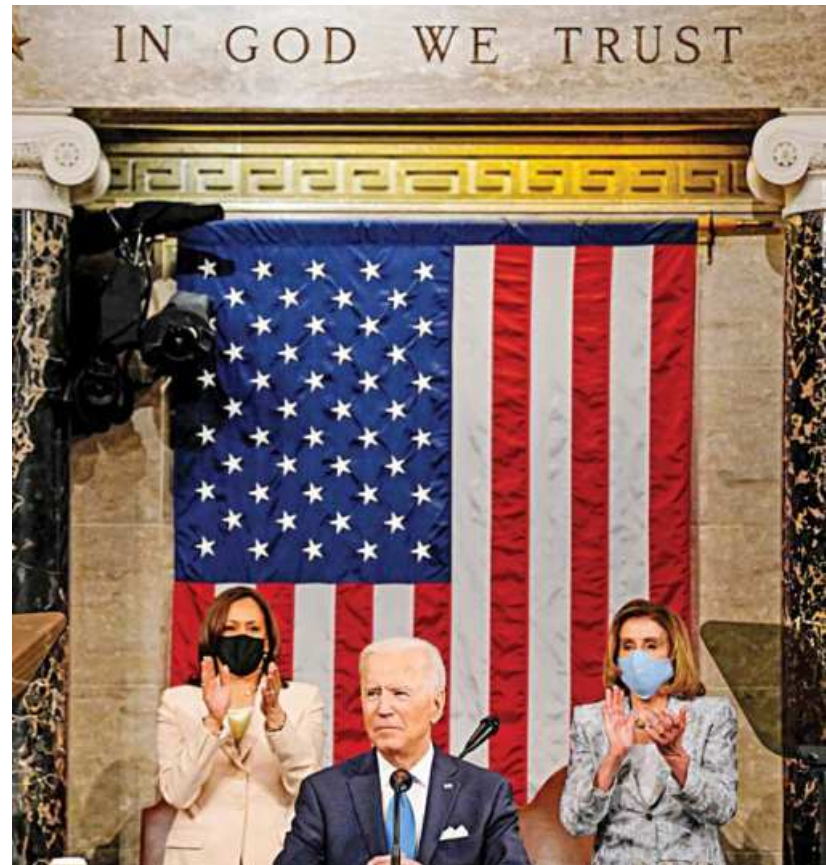
On foreign policy he underlined Washington's return to international partnerships damaged under Trump.

"No one nation" can succeed alone, he said, in a rebuke of Trump's isolationist policies.

Among his many references to arch-rival China, Biden said that while Beijing is seeking supremacy, "we welcome the competition" and "are not looking for conflict."

On domestic issues, Biden made the case for the Democrats' lengthy wish list, including police reform, pro-immigrant reforms and gun control -- some of the most sensitive issues in US politics.

"We have to come together to rebuild trust between law enforcement and the people they serve -- to root out systemic racism in our criminal justice



US President Joe Biden addresses a joint session of Congress as Vice President Kamala Harris and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi applaud at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, US, on Wednesday. PHOTO: REUTERS

system," Biden said, urging the Senate to pass a police reform bill already approved in the House.

He pleaded with Republicans and Democrats to work together on one of the nation's most hot-button topics, saying "let's end our exhausting war on immigration."

Biden is banking on popular support for his idea of leaning on the super rich to fund his latest new spending proposal, which he unveiled in the speech -- the \$1.8 trillion American Families Plan.

The plan, which will need approval by a deeply divided Congress, would

pour money into early education, childcare and higher education.

To fund this, the top income tax rate would increase from 37 percent, where Trump's plan put it, back to its pre-Trump 39.6 percent.

Americans earning less than \$400,000 a year, however, would face no extra taxes.

The proposed new splurge comes after Congress already approved a \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, which injected stimulus into almost every corner of the economy, and is now debating a proposed \$2 trillion-plus infrastructure plan.

Myanmar air bases hit by rockets

AFP, Yangon

Two Myanmar air force bases came under rocket attack yesterday, the military said, as the country grapples with violence in the wake of the February 1 coup.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the generals seized power, ousting civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and unleashing a wave of near-daily street protests calling for a return to democracy.

Security forces have sought to quell the unrest with a brutal crackdown on protests, with more than 750 civilians killed, according to a local monitoring group.

Fighting has also flared up between the military and Myanmar's numerous ethnic rebel armies, some of which have backed the protest movement.

A military spokesman said air bases in the central cities of Magway and Meiktila came under rocket fire early morning, but no damage was done.

It is not clear who was behind the attacks, but the military has launched air strikes in recent weeks against the Karen National Union (KNU), one of the leading ethnic rebel armies.

The KNU, which holds territory along the border with Thailand, on Tuesday attacked and razed an army post, prompting the military to respond with fresh air strikes.

The upsurge in clashes between the military and ethnic rebels has prompted some observers, including the UN, to warn that the country's crisis could spiral into a broader conflict.



A relative of one of the sunken KRI Nanggala-402 submarine crew members hugs a photograph during a posthumous promotion ceremony at a navy airbase in Sidoarjo, East Java Province, Indonesia, yesterday. Indonesian President Joko Widodo said that authorities would build houses for the relatives of the crew of the submarine that went missing before being found in pieces on the bottom of the Bali Sea, killing all 53 inside. PHOTO: REUTERS

Glacier melt is speeding up, raising seas: study

India, Bangladesh may face 'water or food shortages'

AFP, Paris

Nearly all of the world's glaciers are losing mass at an ever increasing pace, contributing to more than a fifth of global sea level rise this century, according to unprecedented research released Wednesday.

Glaciers -- vast bodies of frozen water that sit above ground -- have been melting fast since the middle of the 20th century, but until now the full extent of ice loss had only been partially understood.

An international team of researchers has for the first time observed all of Earth's some 220,000 glaciers, excluding the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, to properly evaluate the amount and rate of melt over the past two decades.

Analysing images taken by NASA's Terra satellite, they found that between 2000-2019, the world's glaciers lost an average of 267 billion tonnes of ice each year. That's enough water to submerge Switzerland under six metres (20 feet) of water -- every single year.

But the team also found that the rate of glacier melt had accelerated sharply during the same period.

Between 2000 and 2004, glaciers lost 227 billion tonnes of ice per year. But between 2015-2019, they lost an average of 298 billion tonnes each year.

This glacial melt has contributed to 21 percent of sea level rises in the study period, the researchers said -- equivalent to 0.74 millimetres a year.

The study, published in the journal Nature, found that the fastest-melting



glaciers were situated in Alaska and the Alps.

The authors also expressed concern about the retreating mountain glaciers in the Pamir Mountains, the Hindu Kush and the Himalayas, which provide water for more than 1.5 billion people.

"During the dry season, glacial meltwater is an important source that feeds major waterways such as the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Indus rivers," said Romain Hugonnet, lead study author and researcher at ETH Zurich university and the University of Toulouse.

"Right now, this increased melting acts as a buffer for people living in the region, but if Himalayan glacier shrinkage keeps accelerating, populous countries like India and Bangladesh could face water or food shortages in a few decades."

The findings will be included in the forthcoming assessment report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Navalny in court as his network disbands

REUTERS

Alexei Navalny's political network yesterday said it is disbanding, as the jailed Kremlin critic appeared in court, gaunt and shaven headed, for the first time since ending his hunger strike.

During the hearing, which is part of an appeal by Navalny against a defamation sentence imposed in February for insulting a World War II veteran, the opposition figure said he had lost more weight but had started eating again.

Another court held a hearing yesterday into a request from prosecutors that Navalny's regional network and his Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) both be recognised as extremist, equating the organisations with the Islamic State group and al-Qaeda.

The head of the regional network, however, said it had already been decided to shutter it.

"We are officially disbanding Navalny's network," Leonid Volkov said in a video posted on social media yesterday.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Income Support Program for the Poorest (ISPP)-JAWTNO Project
Local Government Division
Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives
Level-8, Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) Bhaban
14, Shaheed Captain Mansur Ali Sarani, Kakrail, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh

Request for Expression of Interest (EOI) for Selection of Consulting Firm for Operational Review Services (ORS)

General Information		
1. Ministry	Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives	
2. Agency	Local Government Division	
3. Name of Procuring Entity	Income Support Program for the Poorest (ISPP)-JAWTNO Project	
4. Procuring Entity District	Dhaka	
5. Expression of Interest for	Selection of Consulting Firm of Operational Review Services (SF-04 A)	
6. EOI Ref no.	ISPP/PMU-9/ORS Firm/2016 (part-1)/ 2504	
7. Date	29-04-2021	
Key Information		
8. Procurement Sub-method	Consultants Qualification & Cost based Selection (QCBS)	
Funding information		
9. Budget and Source of Funds	Development Budget	
10. Development Partner	The World Bank	
Particular Information		
11. Project Code	IDA Credit-5553-BD	
12. Project Name	Income Support Program for the Poorest (ISPP)-JAWTNO Project	
13. EOI Closing Date and Time	19-05-2021 at 3.00 PM	
Information for the Applicant		
14. Brief Description of the Assignment	The Income Support Program for the Poorest (ISPP)-JAWTNO Project, a co-responsibility cash transfer (CCT) safety net program, implemented by the Local Government Division with the help of the World Bank, provides income support to poor mothers in 444 Unions in 43 of the poorest Upazilas in Dhaka and Rangpur Division. The objective of the Program is to (a) increase mothers' use of child nutrition and cognitive development services, and (b) enhancing local level government capacity to deliver safety nets. To achieve the objective of the project, the firm will: i. Conduct operational review of project activities to provide a qualitative assessment of the programs operational aspects. The brief objective of the assignment is to review the program implementation activities on the ground through process evaluations and spot checks to: i. Validate that program implementation is as per ISPP Operations Manual. ii. Assess whether program benefits are reaching the intended beneficiaries, including small ethnic communities and groups. iii. Assess whether the payment and distribution methods are functioning smoothly. iv. Evaluate roles of stakeholders at the Upazila and Union level. v. Provide feedback to LGD with evidence-based recommendations on future improvements where/when necessary. The services will be implemented with a period of 9 (Nine) months and the expected commencement date of the assignment is July 2021.	
16. Experience, Resources & Delivery Capacity Required	EOIS will be reviewed on the basis of the following criteria: (i) Age of the firm(s) including brochures/profiles; (ii) General & Overall Experience of the firm (s) over the last 10 years. (iii) Description of similar assignments (including nature, duration of the services, total value of the contract, employer/implementing Agency, location of services etc.) with supporting documents. (iv) Financial strength of the firm (Audited balance sheet/Annual Turnover of last three years or Bank Solvency Certificate etc.), (v) Detailed CV of Key professionals for performing the assignment (vi) Availability of resources (office space, logistics facilities, equipments etc.); (vii) Other relevant information (Updated Trade License, VAT & TIN Certificate, company Registration etc.). Consultants may associate with other firms to enhance their qualifications, but should indicate clearly whether the association is in the form of a joint venture and/or a sub-consultancy. The consulting firm(s) will be evaluated and selected based on Quality & Cost Based Selection (QCBS) method in accordance with the procedures set forth in the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers" July 2016 (Revised November 2017 and August 2018) in compliance with PPA'2006 & PPR'2008 of GOB. www.isppjgd.gov.bd. The EOI shall be submitted in one hard copy and one soft copy (In CD / Pen drive) in a sealed envelope clearly marked on top of Envelope "Request for Expression of Interest for Selection of Consulting Firm of Operational Review Services" at the office of the undersigned on or before 19 May 2021 at 3:00 PM. The Interested Firm(s) are requested to provide their information in a summarize format indicating page number in each page of the EOI document. Electronic Submission of the EOI (email: pd.isppjgd@gmail.com) is also accepted.	
17. Other Details	The EOI notice and Terms of Reference (ToR) will also be available on the following Website: www.isppjgd.gov.bd. The EOI shall be submitted in one hard copy and one soft copy (In CD / Pen drive) in a sealed envelope clearly marked on top of Envelope "Request for Expression of Interest for Selection of Consulting Firm of Operational Review Services" at the office of the undersigned on or before 19 May 2021 at 3:00 PM. The Interested Firm(s) are requested to provide their information in a summarize format indicating page number in each page of the EOI document. Electronic Submission of the EOI (email: pd.isppjgd@gmail.com) is also accepted.	
Procuring Entity Details		
19. Name of the official Inviting EOI	Dipak Chakraborty	
20. Designation of the official Inviting EOI	Project Director (Additional Secretary), ISPP-JAWTNO Project	
21. Address of the official inviting EOI	Project Management Unit (PMU), ISPP-JAWTNO Project, Level-08, DPHE Bhaban, 14, Shaheed Captain Mansur Ali Sarani, Kakrail, Dhaka-1000	
22. Contact Details of the Official Inviting EOI	Phone: 02-55130514; Mobile: 01521-255448, E-mail: moziabar1956@gmail.com or Mobile : 0173-2764448, Email: kaniz.procure@gmail.com Website: www.isppjgd.gov.bd	
The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject any/all EOI's without assigning any reason whatsoever.		

(Dipak Chakraborty) 29/04/2021
Additional Secretary (Admin)
Local Government Division (LGD)
&
Project Director
ISPP-JAWTNO Project

GD-866