

COVAX VACCINE

Unicef says rich countries like G7 can afford to donate jabs to the scheme

SEE PAGE 6



Vaccine drives may be stalled

Govt yet to secure fresh deals to replenish the stocks of jabs

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

With the stock of Covid-19 vaccine depleting fast, the government's mass inoculation programme might soon come to a screeching halt.

The current stock of about six lakh AstraZeneca doses might be gone in a week and the government has yet to strike a deal with any of the potential vaccine suppliers to keep that from happening, officials said.

"We are trying. We have not yet got a positive response from any of the vaccine sources. If we don't get it soon, the vaccination campaign will be suspended," ABM Khurshid Alam, director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star yesterday.

The government suspended administering the first dose of the vaccine on April 26 over uncertainties of supplies. Online registration for inoculation was suspended on May 5.

"Vaccination has been suspended in Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Kushtia districts due to the shortage of doses," said Shamsul Haque, a line director of the DGHS. He could not say how many of the 2,500 inoculation centres across the country have stopped operation.

The otherwise smooth vaccination campaign stumbled after the Serum Institute of India failed to ship the vaccine purchased by Bangladesh.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

First dose administered:	58,19,912
Second dose administered:	37,00,083
First dose suspended:	APRIL 26
Total registration (now suspended):	72,48,829



As per a government directive, public buses must keep half the seats vacant as part of the Covid-19 safety rules. But it was not being followed inside a bus of state-run BRTC. The passengers alleged they were paying way more the usual fare even after being made to sit in close proximity. The photo was taken at Matuail on Dhaka-Chattogram highway.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Journalist harassed at Secretariat for 5 hours

Sued under official secrets act; rights bodies slam her detention

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prothom Alo Senior Correspondent Rozina Islam was kept confined at the health ministry for more than five hours yesterday before being handed to police.

It happened after the journalist went to the Secretariat to perform her duties.

While being confined to a ministry room at the Secretariat, Rozina fell sick. She was not taken to any hospital. She was sent to Shahbagh Police Station. She was still there when this report was filed last night.

Police later said the journalist of the Bangla daily was sued under the Official Secrets Act.

Shibbir Ahmed Osmani, deputy secretary of health services division under the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

ACCOUNTS WITH TK ONE CRORE AND ABOVE

Banks see deposit surge

Legalising black money, reduced scope for siphoning off money abroad amid pandemic behind swelling deposits, say experts

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Banks in the country saw a rapid surge of funds in certain accounts last year after the government gave the scope for legalising black money.

Funds in the accounts with deposits of Tk 1 crore and above each stood at Tk 364,466 crore last year, up by 18 percent year-on-year, shows Bangladesh Bank data.

In 2019, the deposit growth in such accounts was 7 percent. It was 13 percent in 2018.

The number of these accounts also

rose to 71,346 last year from 62,710 in 2019.

The Daily Star talked to a number of bankers, tax officials and analysts, who pointed out that there is a strong link between the deposit growth and the opportunity given to whiten black money.

They also referred to the reduced scope for laundering money abroad amid the Covid-19 pandemic and also cap on investment in national savings certificates.

In the current fiscal year, the government gave the opportunity

to whiten black money by declaring undisclosed wealth and income in tax returns upon payment of only 10 percent tax on the undisclosed amount without any questions about the sources of income.

The provision drew criticism and opposition from various sections of the society as it encourages corruption and non-compliance with the rules.

It, however, prompted more than 10,000 individuals to disclose their ill-gotten wealth in this fiscal year.

They legalised a record amount of

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Dhaka signs non-disclosure vaccine deal with Beijing

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The Bangladesh government has signed a non-disclosure agreement with its Chinese counterpart on purchasing Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccine and producing it here.

The NDA was sent to the Bangladesh government two to three days ago.

"We have signed the non-disclosure agreement today [Monday] and sent it to the authorities concerned," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told The Daily Star yesterday.

He expressed optimism that Sinopharm vaccine doses would reach the country by early next month if everything went smoothly. The minister said the negotiation was going on very smoothly and hoped the agreement would be completed at the soonest possible time.

Bangladesh last month signed an NDA with Russia for production of Sputnik V vaccine here.

Zahid said during discussions they proposed buying two to three crore vaccine doses from China.

Bangladesh has already received five lakh shots of the Sinopharm vaccine from China as gift. It is likely to be administered to people from May 25.

On April 29, the government approved the Sinopharm vaccine for emergency use.

On the same day, the government approved

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

GAZA STRIKES

Israel continues pounding Gaza

Int'l community's calls for de-escalation go unheeded; media campaigners RSF turn to ICC over strikes



AGENCIES

Israeli jets kept pounding Gaza yesterday afternoon, as the enclave's residents covered indoors and the violence that has killed more than 200 people, most of them Palestinians, entered a second week.

Before dawn, within just a few minutes, dozens of Israeli strikes bombarded the crowded Palestinian coastal strip controlled by Islamist group Hamas.

Flames lit up the sky as intense explosions shook Gaza City, sparking widespread power cuts and damaging hundreds of buildings, local authorities said.

Some 3,200 rockets have been fired by Palestinian militants toward Israel since the

conflict escalated on May 10 in the heaviest exchange of fire in years, sparked by unrest in Jerusalem.

Yesterday morning, an AFP reporter in Gaza saw huge plumes of grey smoke billow from a mattress factory, as civil defence members aimed high-pressure water hoses at the blaze.

Later in the day, dust clouds rose near Gaza's Mediterranean port from further explosions, with Israel's army confirming it had targeted "a Hamas submersible naval weapon".

West Gaza resident Mahdi Abed Rabbo, 39, expressed "horror and fear" at the intensity of the onslaught, saying: "There have never been strikes of this magnitude."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



Mohammad Hanif, who stitches clothes to earn his living, sits idle in front of his sewing machine while waiting for customers in the capital's Karwan Bazar. He said he used to earn Tk 500-700 every day before the pandemic, but things have gone bad now. He barely earns Tk 100-150 daily, making it hard for him to feed his family. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

NARADA BRIBERY CASE Mamata's 2 ministers sent to jail

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Calcutta High Court last night stayed the bail granted by a trial court to two senior West Bengal Ministers Firdhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee, and ruling TMC legislator Madan Mitra and former Kolkata Mayor Sovan Chatterjee.

The four were arrested yesterday morning by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in a graft case.

The bail order of the special CBI court in central Kolkata's Bankshall was stayed by the High Court in a hearing held in the evening, when the lower court's relief to the four arrested politicians was challenged by the probe agency.

The four TMC leaders will now be in jail custody till the next hearing on Wednesday. The arrested leaders were produced at Bankshall Court through a virtual hearing from the local CBI head office at Nizam

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Govt moves to rein in willful defaulters

Decides in principle to amend the banking companies act

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The government, for the first time, has moved to define habitual defaulters, a development that may stop delinquent borrowers from running businesses, travelling abroad, and participating in social and political activities.

As part of the move, the government yesterday decided in principle to amend the banking companies act at a virtual cabinet meeting presided over by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

According to the draft law, an individual will be considered a willful defaulter if he or she does not repay a loan, taken under their individual name or for their company, to banks despite being able to pay it back. In addition, any person will be treated as a habitual defaulter if he or she takes loans under the name of a non-existent company.

A borrower will also be defined as willful defaulter if he or she transfers any assets, kept as mortgaged in banks, to get loans without prior approval from the bank concerned.

Besides, every bank will have to form two separate bodies -- identification and confirmation committees -- to detect the habitual defaulters, according to the proposed act.

Bangladesh Bank (BB) will give instructions to banks to this end.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



আমরা গভীরভাবে শোকাহত

জর্জিগঞ্জ-কানাইঘাট (সিলেট-৫) আসনের সংসদ সদস্য, পূবালী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড পরিচালনা পর্ষদের সাবেক চেয়ারম্যান ও বাংলাদেশ রেডক্রিসেন্ট সোসাইটির সদ্য প্রাক্তন চেয়ারম্যান হাফিজ আহমদ মজুমদারের সহধর্মিণী এবং পূবালী ব্যাংক লিমিটেডের বর্তমান পরিচালক মিসেস রানা লায়লা হাফিজের মাতা

হাফছা মজুমদার

গত ১৬ মে ২০২১ রবিবার দুপুর ২.৪৫ টায় ইউনাইটেড হাসপাতাল, ঢাকায় ইন্তেকাল করেন (ইন্না লিল্লাহি ওয়া ইন্না ইলাইহি রাজিউন)। তাঁর মৃত্যুতে পূবালী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড এর পরিচালনা পর্ষদ এবং সকল স্তরের নির্বাহী, কর্মকর্তা ও কর্মচারীবৃন্দ গভীরভাবে মর্মান্বিত ও শোকাহত।

আমরা মহান আল্লাহ রাক্বুল আলামীর কাছে মরহুমার বিদেহী আত্মার মাগফেরাত কামনা করছি এবং মরহুমার শোকসন্তপ্ত পরিবার পরিজনদের প্রতি গভীর সমবেদনা জ্ঞাপন করছি।

মহান আল্লাহ রাক্বুল আলামীন যেন তাঁর পরিবার পরিজনকে এই অপূরণীয় ক্ষতি সহ্য করার ক্ষমতা দান করেন।

পূবালী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড
PUBALI BANK LIMITED