

US to give Bangladesh

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Maldives, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Laos, Papua New Guinea, Taiwan and the Pacific Islands, the White House fact sheet published late on Thursday said.

US President Joe Biden on Wednesday announced that the US will allocate 75 percent -- nearly 1.9 crore of the first tranche of 2.5 crore doses -- of unused vaccines from its stockpile through the UN-backed COVAX global vaccine sharing programme to countries in South and Southeast Asia as well as Africa.

The first consignment of Covid-19 vaccines from the United States will reach India by the end of June, White House Chief Spokesperson Symone Sanders said on Thursday.

Sanders in a brief statement said US Vice President Kamala D Harris had spoken on the phone with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier that day.

In New Delhi, the statement issued by the Indian PMO said Harris informed Modi about US plans to make Covid-19 vaccines available to other countries, including India, under its "strategy for global vaccine

sharing".

However, there was no mention of a timeline in the Indian statement.

Harris also spoke with President Andres Manuel López Obrador of Mexico, President Alejandro Giammattei of Guatemala and Prime Minister Keith Rowley, Chairman of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in separate calls.

The vice-president conveyed to each of the leaders "that the Biden-Harris Administration will begin sharing the first 25 million doses of Covid vaccines to their respective countries and others, as part of the Biden-Harris Administration's framework for sharing at least 80 million vaccines globally by the end of June," Sanders said.

Harris "reiterated that the administration's efforts are focused on achieving broad global coverage, responding to surges and other urgent situations and public health needs and helping as many countries as possible who requested vaccines".

"The four leaders thanked the vice-president, and they agreed to continue working together to address Covid-19 and advance our mutual interests around the world," Sanders said.

A conversation with Yahya

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that all bona fide refugees regardless of religious origin could and should return to their homes. Farland suggested that this type of pronouncement would be favourably received by the Indian government and should also have a salutary impact on world opinion.

Yahya's immediate answer was to the effect that his May 24 statement was all inclusive and that there was no differentiation between Muslims and Hindus. He added, however, that he had no objection whatsoever in making a statement as suggested, and that he would most certainly do so.

Farland went on to note that the flow of refugees continued and that this flow is symptomatic of the serious situation in East Pakistan. He pointed out that the embassy continued to receive reports of Hindu villages being attacked by the army, that fear was pervasive, and that until this situation changed the refugees will continue to cross over into India.

And Farland reiterated the US government's concern that at some point the Hindu exodus, if not checked, could lead to a military clash with India.

A DAY'S EARNINGS FOR BANGLADESH
The working people of Hungary contributed a day's earnings to a non-official fund launched in that country for relief of Bangladesh refugees

in India. Political and cultural organisations running the campaign hoped to send the first consignment of tents, blankets, medicines and foodstuff to India within six weeks to be followed by another in August.

CHOLERA TOLL REACHES 8,000
The death toll in the cholera epidemic sweeping through four million East Pakistani refugees in India's West Bengal state reached 8,000. Health ministry officials in New Delhi said the toll could be as high as that, but no precise statistics were available.

With a catastrophe on its hands, the Indian government continued its efforts to recruit international help and also to reassure the West Bengal government that it would not be left alone to face the problem.

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited West Bengal today for talks with the state government and said the central government in New Delhi had taken full responsibility for the care of refugees, who had fled from East Pakistan since the army began the attempt to crush the movement there.

UN CHILDRENS FUND TO SEND RELIEF SUPPLIES
The United Nations Children's Fund chartered a plane to fly 30 tonnes of relief supplies to refugees fleeing from East Pakistan to India, United Nations sources said.

Shamsuddoza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

Imposition of 15pc tax goes

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University's Madhu's Canteen, Private university students yesterday placed six-point demand -- withdrawal of the proposed 15 percent tax on private universities, looking into the income and expenditure of private universities, introducing uniform tuition fee policy and uniform grading system at all private universities and increasing budget for research at the universities and stimulus package for the students so that they don't drop out due to the Covid-19.

"We are giving the government time to withdraw the proposal of 15 percent tax till June 10. If the government does not meet their demand, we will go for tougher movement," said Mukta Rezwana, a student of a private university, at the conference.

There are 107 approved private universities in Bangladesh with about 5 lakh students, the statement said.

The government in 2015 also imposed a 7.5 percent value added tax on tuition fees of private universities, medical and engineering colleges.

It, however, had to backtrack from its decision following several days of students' protest which almost brought the capital to a standstill.

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Myanmar's NUG to draft new charter

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Revolution against military dictatorship in all possible ways," said a statement by the National Unity Government (NUG) Thursday.

The NUG, Myanmar's shadow government in exile, was formed by the ousted parliamentarians of National League of Democracy (NLD) in early April, more than two months after the military took control of the Southeast Asian country, alleging gross anomalies in the November 2020 elections. The NLD had won the election and was in the process of forming a government.

A national disobedience movement across Myanmar faced brutal military crackdown and it has left more than 800 people dead since February this year.

The NUG, meanwhile, is seeking international recognition. It is also taking into cognisance various ethnic rebel groups that have long been fighting the military junta-led governments for autonomy.

In the process, the NUG is committing to grant equal rights to Rohingyas who have been living in Myanmar for centuries but denied citizenship, ethnicity and many other fundamental rights since the 1970s.

Facing persecution, they fled to neighbouring countries. In the most brutal crackdown against them in Rakhine State in 2017, some 750,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh and joined some 300,000 others who had fled following the previous waves of violence since 1970s.

Myanmar now faces a genocide case

at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while Rohingya repatriation has not been possible as conditions in Rakhine were not conducive.

Against this backdrop, the NUG in the statement uploaded to Twitter by its Minister for International Cooperation Sasa said in honour of human rights and human dignity and to eradicate the conflicts in Myanmar, the Unity Government intends to build a prosperous federal democratic union where all ethnic groups can live peacefully.

"All citizens who swear allegiance to the Union regardless of their ethnic origins are considered to have full enjoyment of citizens' rights. The National Unity Government will not tolerate any form of discrimination."

The NUG also invited all people of Myanmar to participate in the process of drafting a constitution. Promising amendment to the 1982 Citizenship Law, which denies Rohingya citizenship, it said the new act must base citizenship on birth in Myanmar or birth anywhere as a child of Myanmar citizens.

The NUG also committed to abolishing the process of issuing National Verification Card (NVC) that the military used against Rohingya and other ethnic groups coercively.

It also committed safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation of Rohingyas following the agreements signed with the neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh, and take up a special programme as soon as possible.

The NUG also pledged justice for Rohingyas and accountability of

16 die at RMCH Covid unit in 24hrs

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of them were Covid-19 positive and the rest suspected cases.

RMCH Director Brig Gen Shamim Yazdani said he had requested the health authorities two weeks ago to impose a "complete lockdown" in four districts of Rajshahi region -- Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Naogaon and Natore.

However, the Chapainawabganj district administration enforced "lockdown" since May 24, while the district's Covid-19 detection rate was 54 percent.

Out of 152 tested in the district yesterday, at least 82 were found to be positive.

Restrictions imposed in Rajshahi and Naogaon have been relaxed for mango trade.

Meanwhile, no restrictions have been enforced in Natore yet.

The infection rate in the three districts was 30 percent.

In Cumilla, four Covid-19 patients, including a woman, breathed their last in the 24-hour period at Cumilla Medical College Hospital.

Cumilla Civil Surgeon Mir Mubarak Hossain said 439 people have died of the virus so far.

Out of 242 samples tested in the 24 hours, 21 (8.7 percent) tested positive.

Chudanga Civil Surgeon ASM Maruf Hasan yesterday said "lockdown" was enforced in bordering Karpashdanga area of Damurhuda upazila, while several other areas in Jibannagar upazila were "under observation".

Also, 34 people out of 116 tested positive in Kushtia and another 12 people out of 130 were found positive in Meherpur in the 24-hour period.

Kushtia Deputy Commissioner Saidul Islam said the district health authorities were identifying the risky areas where most Covid cases were found.

Further decisions will be made after getting the report.

In Sathkira, highest 53 percent Covid-19 detection rate was reported on Thursday.

With yesterday's nationwide 34 deaths, the death toll reached 12,758 and the death rate stands at 1.58 percent.

Among the deceased, 20 were men and 14 women.

Meanwhile, at least 1,887 new infections were recorded in the 24-hour period, taking the total number of infected people to 807,867, said the DGHS press release.

The current positivity rate is 10.40 percent and the total positivity rate 13.42 percent.

Around 18,151 samples were tested across the country in the 24 hours.

[Our correspondents in Rajshahi, Cumilla, Kushtia and Sathkira contributed to this report.]

Bangladesh seeks

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diagnostics and other medical equipment, should get licences as well as technology and technical know-how to produce the vaccines and other health technologies for Covid-19. Those items should be provided to other developing countries free of cost, it said.

Besides, the Bangladesh delegation highlighted the timely and swift actions taken by Bangladesh, including health measures and stimulus packages, to combat the socio-economic impacts posed by the pandemic.

This year, the assembly focused on the production, supply and equitable distribution of vaccines to address the Covid crisis. Bangladesh also highlighted the leading role of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as co-chair of the One Health Global Leaders' Group on Antimicrobial Resistance.

It also emphasised the need for raising global awareness on tackling antimicrobial resistance.

In addition, Bangladesh called for paying due attention to the need to promote mental health across the globe and ensure sustainable funding for a strong World Health Organization.

Mustafizur Rahman, permanent representative and ambassador of Bangladesh to the UN in Geneva, delivered two joint statements on mental health and antimicrobial resistance on behalf of WHO's Southeast Asian region consisting of 11 countries.

A total of 35 resolutions and decisions on various issues related to health were adopted by the WHA.

Initiatives underway to cover

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with Bhutan and is working to ink similar agreements with 11 other countries, he added.

Although the minister talked about multiple initiatives to overcome the post-graduation challenges, he did not give any indication about the government's steps regarding removing corruption.

He said the government was working on improving Bangladesh's position in the Ease of Doing Business Index to increase foreign direct investment into the country.

Kamal said the government was implementing various mega projects, including Padma Bridge, which would help create new jobs and increase national income.

The Committee for Development Policy (CDP) of the United Nations recommended taking Bangladesh out from the list of the least-developed countries (LDCs) in 2026. Bangladesh, before the advent of Covid-19, was set to exit the group in 2024.

In the 2021 review of CDP, Bangladesh stands strongly in all three criteria for the graduation, with a per capita income of \$1,827 (requirement \$1,222), Economic Vulnerability Index of 27 (requirement 32 or below), and human Asset Index of 75.4 (requirement 66 or above).

According to a government study conducted last year, Bangladesh's export earnings and the flow of cheaper foreign assistance and grants will decrease after the graduation from LDC status.

The projected loss of exports and grants and higher debt service costs would lead to higher current account deficit, said the study styled "Impact assessment and coping up strategies of graduation from LDC status for Bangladesh".

The report was prepared by the General Economics Division, a wing under the planning ministry.

The biggest blow will emerge in the form of the losing duty-free

market access. The projected export loss from garment products in the European Union and non-EU markets is estimated to be about 5 percent of the total exports in 2017-18 fiscal year, the study said.

This loss is estimated to be \$7 billion in FY27, which would steadily increase to \$13 billion by FY31.

Policy actions will be necessary to counter these projected losses, the study said, adding that the loss of concessional loans will lead to increased debt servicing costs.

The report, however, said the LDC graduation will open up the door for market-based borrowing by both the public and private sectors. Bangladesh will become more dependent on borrowing from relatively higher-cost sources. The private sector external debt will also see an increase.

The third important factor will be the loss of foreign grants, currently received by the public and private sectors.

The combined impact of these three types of losses will directly affect the balance of payment, and the current account deficit may swell to 0.9-1.4 percent of GDP in FY27.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said there should be a guideline for facing post-graduation challenges in 2026 as the export, soft loan, and trade benefit will decline.

"If the government take sudden decisions in 2027, it would not be wise. So, we should prepare from now to overcome the challenges," she said.

Fahmida said domestic resource mobilisation would be very important after the graduation and proper guidelines should be prepared in this regard.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute, said policy issue is important as the country is going to graduate out of LDC status after 2026.

He stressed the need for planning on internal resources mobilisation.

Budget doesn't

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Fakhrul said.

He added that the budget's tagline, "Bangladesh Towards a Resilient Future: Protecting Lives and Livelihoods", sounds good, but there is nothing specific for the poor people.

"Rather, we see an old-fashioned dependency on bank loans."

This budget has ignored the stimulus package for the poor that everyone expected.

There were so many discussions about the health sector, but allocation has been only around 1 percent of the GDP, he said, "It is painful. This allocation will not meet the demand of the health sector. The allocation should have been 5 percent of the GDP."

The government said 25 lakh vaccines will be administered each month. "But how this will be implemented is not mentioned in the proposed budget."

The small and medium entrepreneurs employ the largest number of people, but the incentives are for the industrialists, Fakrul said.

"The finance minister himself is a businessman. The middle class is frustrated but the business quarters are happy."

'Delta' variant

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Covax programme in June and July could undermine the efficiency of the roll-out.

Covax was set up to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines, particularly to low-income countries, and has already delivered more than 80 million doses to 129 territories.

But that is "about 200 million doses behind where we want to be", Bruce Aylward, the WHO's Covax frontman, told reporters in Geneva.

So while wealthy countries had pledged to give some 150 million doses so far -- on top of the doses Covax procures with donated funds -- that would not resolve the problem.

"We are setting up for failure if we don't get early doses," Aylward said.

On Thursday, WHO's top vaccines expert has said that immunising children against Covid-19 is not a high priority from a WHO perspective, given the extremely limited global supply of doses.

"Children are at (a) very, very low risk of actually getting Covid disease," said Dr Kate O'Brien, a paediatrician and director of the WHO's vaccines department.

"When we're in this really difficult place, as we are right now, where the supply of vaccine is insufficient for everybody around the world, immunising kids is not a high priority right now."

Canada, the United States and the European Union have all recently given the green light to some COVID-19 vaccines for children aged 12 to 15 as they approach their vaccination targets for adults.

Britain's medicines regulator yesterday said it had extended approval of the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech so it can be used on 12- to 15-year-olds.

Fewer than one percent of Covid-19 vaccines administered globally have been used in poor countries.



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