

US to provide AstraZeneca

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The US has been making a list of the countries to supply vaccines, but Bangladesh was not listed among the countries that would be the first to receive the doses, because infections and deaths are low here.

"We then said that we are in crisis because some 1.5 million people, who had got the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine, have yet to get the second dose. This has created a crisis for us. If they don't get the second dose, the first dose will be ineffective," Momen said.

He said Bangladesh then reached out to the White House. Bangladeshi diaspora community -- over 1,600 doctors and other professionals in the US -- also petitioned the White House, seeking the AstraZeneca vaccine doses.

"Finally, we have been informed that they [the US] will give us AstraZeneca and other vaccines through COVAX. The number [of shots] has yet to be known."

He also said that six lakh Chinese vaccines are also arriving on June 13. Besides, the Chinese Communist Party will provide one lakh medical equipment.

Asked if the issue regarding the price of the Chinese vaccine has been settled, the foreign minister said, "In business, there is secrecy. We had signed a non-disclosure deal. We should abide by the law. We said it [revealing of the price] was an inadvertent mistake. They have understood it."

A cabinet division official last week told reporters that the price of each dose of the Chinese vaccine would be \$10. A health ministry official later said the Chinese government was annoyed about the matter and Bangladesh government regretted the unintentional public disclosure.

Momen yesterday said the government will soon make a formal announcement on vaccine co-

production in Bangladesh since there has been progress in an ongoing negotiation.

It is up to the vaccine-manufacturing countries to choose local pharmaceutical companies for vaccine co-production in Bangladesh, he added.

Bangladesh has been in talks with Russia and China over co-production of vaccines.

The foreign minister regretted that the rich countries are procuring 99.7 percent of the global vaccines despite the calls for making Covid-19 vaccines a public good as the poor countries are suffering from shortages of the doses.

He said for 25 million people in Australia, there are 93.8 million doses of vaccines.

ESSENTIAL MEDICINES FOR PALESTINE

Momen thanked Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries for donating some 1,400kg of essential medicines to Palestine, saying that Bangladesh has deep relations with Palestinians who have been persecuted for decades.

"Until an independent Palestine is established, we will continue to support them. We don't accept the occupation army of Israel. Israel repeatedly approached us [for establishing diplomatic relationships]. We did not agree," he said.

Bangladesh has helped China, Europe, US, UK, Kuwait, Maldives, India, Nepal, and Bhutan by supplying medicines, PPE and even sent doctors to some countries, but any help for Palestine has a different dimension.

The common people of Bangladesh came forward and donated money for the Palestinians. The prime minister also donated \$50,000 for Palestine.

Palestinian Ambassador Yousef Ramadan thanked the Bangladesh government, general public and also the pharmaceutical companies for the support.



Health workers brief people about precaution after receiving a dose of the Covaxin against the Covid-19 coronavirus at a health centre in New Delhi, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Model mosques to help spread essence

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The PM made the remarks while addressing the inaugural function of 50 luminous model mosques newly constructed across the country, fulfilling one of her election pledges.

She opened the 50 model mosques virtually from the Gono Bhaban on the occasion of the Mujib Borsho.

The mosques have been built as part of the government's move to set up 560 such mosques/centres of excellence at district and upazila levels, aiming to spread Islamic fraternity, real Islamic values and practices, conduct research, create strong infrastructures for prayers for both men and women, provide religious teaching and training and enhance public awareness against social diseases.

Hasina said Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country. "So, it's essential that Islamic rituals and values are practised here properly in addition to promotion of Islamic culture."

"We've already completed the construction of 50 mosques, out of 560, so that Bangladesh can also substantially contribute to preaching and spreading of our holy religion -- Islam -- in the future," she said.

The PM noted that it was delightful and glorious that Bangladesh emerged as a developing country following the footsteps of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who had served a lot for Islam and set up the Islamic Foundation.

She called upon all to be more conscious and mindful to keep the society free from the curses of child marriage, dowry, violence against women, and drugs. "You'll have to create awareness against these [social menaces]. We've built these model mosques in that way."

Hasina urged Islamic scholars (Ulema), teachers and guardians to make efforts to keep the young generation away from the path of militancy as it tarnishes the image of Islam.

She said militancy has been allowed to grow in the name of Islam. "Killing

people and unleashing militancy in the name of Islam were seen not only in Bangladesh but also elsewhere in the world."

Mentioning that the militants believe that they will go to the heaven by killing people, Hasina said, "Can anyone say who has made his or her way into the heaven by killing people? No one can say that. But they [militants] have badly damaged the image of the holy Islam."

Stressing that Islam is the best religion in the world, she said the most unfortunate matter is that a handful of people has given a bad name to the holy religion by creating militancy, killing people and blasting bombs. "It not only undermines the sanctity of our religion but also tarnishes its image throughout the country," she added.

The PM said Islam is the most tolerant religion as it allows all to enjoy their rights and teaches treating all people as human beings.

Referring to the glorious history of Muslims in knowledge and science, she said the Muslims had once been the progressive community in the practice of knowledge in every sector. "But why're the Muslims lagging behind today?" she said.

State Minister for Religious Affairs Md Faridul Haque Khan chaired the inaugural function, joining it from Osmani Memorial Auditorium here.

Later, Hasina heard speeches from devotees virtually from model mosques in Khulna, Rangpur and Sylhet.

On April 5, 2018, Hasina laid the foundation stone for the construction of Model Mosques and Islamic Cultural Centres involving Tk 8,722 crore.

The government is implementing the project with its own fund to fulfill the pledge Hasina made in the election manifesto before the 2014 national election to build a model mosque in every district and upazila of the country.

Besides, 100 more model mosques will be opened in the second and

third phases by 2021, marking the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, according to officials of the project.

Each model mosque is being constructed on a 40-decimal plot under three categories.

Sixty-nine four-storey mosques are being constructed in district towns and city corporation areas under Category-A, while 475 three-storey ones in upazilas under Category-B and 16 four-storey ones in coastal areas.

Each Category-A mosque has 2360.09-sq feet floor, while B or C-category mosques have 1680.16-sq feet floors each.

A district model mosque has enough space for some 1,200 devotees to simultaneously offer prayers. The upazila-level mosques can accommodate 900 devotees at a time.

Each spectacular mosque is costing Tk 15.62 crore in district town or city area, while Tk 13.52 crore in upazila areas and Tk 13.61 crore in coastal areas.

In a model mosque cum-Islamic cultural centre, there are separate prayer halls and ablution places for men and women.

The centres have Islamic libraries, Islamic book sale corners, training centres and pre-registration for hajj aspirants and Imams; Hifzkhana (where the holy Quran is taught and memorised by students) and the offices of Islamic Foundation.

Another significant addition to the mosques is autism corners and guest rooms for tourists (both local and foreign). They also have arrangements for Islamic research and religious activities and funeral activities. Besides, facilities are there for educating children and the mass people.

The mosques also offer housing facilities for Imams and Muezzins and offices for its staffers. One of the most interesting additions is the toilet facilities for the physically-challenged devotees.

Aviation sector faces rough

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The BPC decision, put in effect on June 8, has increased the price of each litre of jet fuel by Tk 3. A litre of the fuel now costs Tk 63.

In October, the price was Tk 46, meaning the BPC has increased the price by 37 percent in the last eight months.

In December, the price of a litre of jet fuel was Tk 48, in January, it was Tk 53, in February Tk 55, in March Tk 60, and in April it was Tk 61. Then in May, the price was lowered by Tk 1.

Mofizur Rahman, secretary general of Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh, told The Daily Star that there was no rationale behind the price hike at a time when prices were stable in the international market.

"The country's aviation industry is on the verge of collapse due to the first and second wave of the pandemic. The increased jet fuel cost will be an additional burden. The BPC's monopoly and whimsical decisions should come to an end," said Mofizur, also the managing director of Novoir.

"At a time when we need the government's support on an emergency basis, the BPC has illogically increased the jet fuel price," he added.

"Our survival is at the stake now." Kamrul Islam, general manager (public relations) at the US-Bangla Airlines, said, "Aviation is one of the worst-hit sectors by the pandemic. Operations on many international routes have been suspended since March last year. The number of flyers is also low.

"The increase of jet fuel prices is a severe blow to the local airlines.

"We will have no choice but to increase airfare."

He also said 40 to 46 percent of operational expenditure of an airlines is fuel.

"We will be bankrupt and the aviation industry will collapse if we don't raise the airfare in accordance with the fuel price," he said, adding that tourism and hotel businesses were related to the aviation industry.

"If the aviation industry does not sustain, tourism and hotel businesses will be affected."

Aviation expert Kazi Wahidul Alam, who is the editor of travel magazine Weekly Monitor, said different countries were looking into how they could support their aviation industry.

"But our government has so far done nothing in this regard. Instead, it has increased the jet fuel price although oil prices have not increased in the international market.

"I can't find any reason that warrants the jet fuel price hike. Survival of the country's airlines industry is at stake. Due to the repeated hikes in fuel price, it will become a big challenge for the local airlines to compete with foreign airlines."

Syed Mehdi Hasan, director (operations and planning) at the BPC, yesterday said the local price of jet fuel corresponded to the international market.

Mehdi, head of a committee that decides jet fuel prices, also said jet fuel still costs less in Bangladesh than in India and other neighboring countries.

BPC had not hiked the price to make profits. "We did it to keep up with the international market."

Spike in guerilla attacks

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threatened "exemplary punishment" to those who threw the grenades. The authorities also said persons providing useful information about the activities of miscreants would be duly rewarded.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN JHA AND KISSINGER

In a lunch conversation with Indian Ambassador Jha, Henry Kissinger, the US President's assistant for national security affairs, said if India took unilateral military action, it would have to mean the end of any assistance on the US's part. It would turn the issue into an international problem involving China, the Soviet Union and other great powers, in which the Bengal problem would soon be submerged, he added.

The Indian ambassador made a very eloquent defence of the Indian position. He said six million refugees had already entered India. They were in the most heavily populated states, in the states with extreme radical elements. They could shift the voting balance in Bengal, for example, entirely in the direction of the Communists. It was a matter in India of its internal stability -- there was nothing that the government wanted to do less than to go to war, but something had to be done, he added.

When Kissinger asked Jha for a solution he replied that it wasn't enough to offer the refugees to come back while new refugees were being created all the time. What was

needed was a political conversation and a political solution, which he personally believed were unlikely except on the basis of independence for East Pakistan. He thought the US could stop economic aid to Pakistan or suspend it as an interim measure.

Kissinger asked for four or five months to work on the matters. He told the Indian representative that to show goodwill the US government would immediately review the aid request to see whether they could substantially increase the refugee aid.

AID TO BE DISTRIBUTED

An official of the United Nations who just returned from Pakistan said today that Yahya Khan's government would distribute United Nations relief supplies in East Pakistan. Ismat Kittani, an assistant secretary general, said he did not yet know how assurances could be obtained that the aid would actually reach the East Pakistanis but indicated that he was counting for verification on foreign officials and on the United Nations staff workers who are returning to jobs here.

On the other hand, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced today that 3 million extra doses of cholera vaccine would be flown into India to protect the Indian population as refugees were moved further inside the country to new camps.

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Buddhadeb Dasgupta no more

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He received accolades in the country and abroad for directing films. He won National Film Awards for movies such as 'Kaalpurush', 'Lal Darja', 'Charachar' and 'Bagh Bahadur'. He also received awards at the Madrid International Film Festival and Athens International Film Festival. He also taught at the University of Burdwan in India. Artistes from Bangladesh also condoled his death.

Noted actor Champa worked with the director in the film 'Lal Darja'. Dasgupta was impressed after seeing Champa's work at a festival in Delhi. He called her afterwards to approach her for a role in his film.

"He was one of the wisest directors I ever met," said Champa. "I feel very lucky that I had the opportunity to learn so much from him. 'Lal Darja' is one of the best films of my career. It helped me to see myself as an actor in a new light."

Dasgupta studied economics at Scottish Church College. He was the third child amongst his nine siblings. His mother was from Dhaka, and his maternal grandfather a registrar at Dhaka University.

Dasgupta started his career with a documentary in 1968, "The Continent of Love". His first film was Dooratwa (1978). Some of his most

renowned films are Neem Annappurna (1979), Grihajuddha (1982), Andhi Gali (1984), Bagh Bahadur (1989), Tahader Katha (1992), Charachar (1993), Lal Darja (1997), Mondo Meyer Upakhyan (2002), Swapner Din (2004), Kaalpurush (2008) and Janala (2009). Urojajah (2018) is his last film.

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Junta hits Suu Kyi with graft charges

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Democracy (NLD) party. CHARGES 'ABSURD'

Her lawyer, Khin Maung Zaw, dismissed the corruption charges as "absurd". "There is an undeniable political background to keep her out of the scene of the country and to smear her prestige," he told AFP, saying she could face long prison terms on the secrecy and corruption charges.

"That's one of the reasons to charge her -- to keep her out of the scene." Suu Kyi spent more than 15 years under house arrest during the previous military rule before her 2010 release.

The junta has previously said it would hold fresh elections within two years but has also threatened to dissolve the NLD.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has justified his power grab by citing alleged electoral fraud in the November poll, which Suu Kyi's NLD won in a landslide.

Elsewhere in Myanmar yesterday, twelve people were killed when a military plane carrying a senior monk and several donors to a religious event crashed in a central region of the country.

Lack of research

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on Wednesday, "Ranking is not our focus. We are working on improving the quality of education and basic research. If we can continue it, we will achieve a better ranking soon."

DU, which was in the 601-plus bracket in 2012, slipped to the 701-plus bracket in 2014 and slid further in 2019.

Contacted, retired professor of Dhaka University Syed Manzoorul Islam said, "We are far behind in all the criteria that are set for ranking. If we look at the state of our research, library facilities, the number of foreign students, the administration system, transparency in teacher selection process, etc., we will know the causes."

"We have publications but they do not have international acceptability," said Manzoorul Islam, who is now a professor in University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh.

"It is important to be well-ranked in terms of the amount of researches that are being cited in other studies. Several universities in India, China and Singapore are moving forward. If we look at them, we can understand our shortcomings."

"Every stage of education -- from primary to higher education -- is interconnected. But not a lot of planning goes into our education. We had an education policy which was inactive; we had a strategic plan [2017-2030] but that is also in deep freeze."

"Our budget for education is very poor. We should have allocated 25 percent of our national budget or six percent of GDP for education to improve its quality. All in all, we need a political will for it [to improve]," he added.

Anu Muhammad, an eminent professor of Jahangirnagar University, said most of the research in Bangladeshi universities was conducted by researchers on their own; institutions are not usually involved in it and do not even record those work. Rankings are related to the accessibility of information on the universities' websites.

"We have a lack of qualified teachers and quality research. When we look into our teacher recruitment process, we don't see any better situation in the future. The government does not want universities to improve; it thinks of the institutions as their own to do with them as it pleases."

"The government doesn't like people who come forward with competent and independent initiatives in education and research. This attitude is a threat for students," he added.

Prof Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan of DU international relations department said rankings have some criteria which are not suitable for Bangladeshi universities, such as foreign teachers and foreign students.

"We had some international students before 2012; now it's decreasing. We have reduced focus on the research sector, where the institutional effort is most important. While teachers are doing well, they don't have any good platform to exhibit it," he said.

"A website is the identity of a university, but we have been quite inattentive about it. In addition, our provided PhD and Mphil are not up to standard. Most of our teachers go abroad to get an advanced degree. We have some advanced research in science-related faculties, but the scenario of other faculties is poor."

Tanzimuddin aims to focus on publications, academic environment and teacher recruitment process to improve the rankings.

On the other hand, Salim Reza Newton, a Rajshahi University professor, said criteria of such rankings hurt the university's main spirit.

"We have to decide for ourselves what kind of universities we want. I don't think our universities are running well. We have lots of opportunities to develop our institutions, but it should be discussed among ourselves. If we decide to let rankings dictate to us, it will not be auspicious for us," he said.

Bangladeshi universities have no "systematic effort" to improve themselves, he opined.

The Daily Star tried to contact BUET VC Satya Prasad Majumder but failed to reach him over phone.

Twenty-six Asian universities were named in the global top 100 in the latest ranking like the previous year, the highest number from this continent till date.

In Asia, the top two universities are the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University, also in Singapore, at 11th and 12th spots in the global rankings respectively.

Eight Indian and three Pakistani institutes have made it to the top 500 in the latest rankings.

India sees record

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times, many experts believe India's death toll is several times higher than the official number, meaning it could be over a million -- which would make it the world's highest.

As crematoriums struggled to handle the wave of deaths over the past two months, many families placed bodies in the holy Ganges river or buried them in shallow graves on its sandbanks.

Those people would likely not have been registered as Covid victims.

"Under-reporting is a widespread problem, not necessarily deliberate, often because of inadequacies," Rajib Dasgupta, head of the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, told Reuters.