

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,901
New cases in 24hrs



15,36,341
Total cases



27,058
Deaths



14,90,541
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



4,666,936
Deaths



226,906,513
Total cases

Country to get 24cr jabs by Apr: Momen

UNB, Dhaka

Expressing optimism about collecting Covid-19 vaccine jabs, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has said Bangladesh is on track to get 24 crore shots either by March or April next year.

"Vaccine doses are coming under the COVAX facility, as gifts and from other sources," the minister told reporters on the sidelines of the "Fifth International Conference on Inclusive Business".

The event was organised by the Dutch-Bangla Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Dhaka yesterday.

Momen said Bangladesh needs 26 crore Covid vaccine doses and some jabs would be produced at home too. "However, there is no update on vaccine cooperation with Russia due to the Covid-19 situation there."

He said half of Bangladesh's 16

crore people are young, while 2.22 crore have already been vaccinated.

"Despite significant vaccination in Bangladesh, the United Kingdom kept Bangladesh on the red list which is very unfortunate."

Earlier, Momen reiterated Bangladesh's call to remove the country from the red list, terming the British government's decision "unfair and discriminatory".

He said this while speaking to a small group of journalists at his office on Monday.

Referring to sufferings of more than 7,000 British-Bangladeshis currently stranded in Bangladesh, Momen said the UK government was doing disservice to its own citizens.

"The UK government gave an argument that the vaccination rate is low in Bangladesh, but Bangladesh says that the UK is allowing in people from other countries having lower vaccination rate," he added.



An artist works on an idol of Hindu goddess Durga at Gopaltila temple in Sylhet city's Tilagarh area yesterday. About 67 puja mandaps will be set up in the city to celebrate Durga Puja next month.

PHOTO: STAR

Open DU halls from Oct 5

Provost committee recommends

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University's provost committee yesterday recommended reopening residential halls for master's and final-year honours students from October 5.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the provost committee held at the vice-chancellor's residence in the evening, Prof Saiful Islam, provost of Sir AF Rahman Hall, told The Daily Star.

The meeting was chaired by DU VC Prof Aktheruzzaman.

Students who have the certificate to prove they have received at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccine will be allowed to enter their residential halls, said Saiful.

The recommendation to reopen halls on October 5 will be placed before the university's syndicate meeting, likely to be held next week, he added.

"First, students of master's and honours final year will be allowed into the halls. Once their examinations are done, they will leave the halls. Later, students of other sessions will be allowed into the halls gradually," he said.

The provost committee also suggested reopening the central library of the university on September 26, he said.

The students who have received Covid vaccine will be able to enter the library, said the professor.

Will jab 50pc by year-end

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from Pirojpur-3, during a question-answer session chaired by Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury.

The PM said the age bar for receiving the jabs was lowered to 18 for university students and the government now plans to vaccinate all citizens above that age.

"Arrangements have already been made to collect more than 24.65 crore vaccine doses. Steps have been taken to get more than one crore doses every month," she added.

In the scripted answer, Hasina said her government prepared the National Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP) and the plan has already been approved by the global Covax facility.

Initially, people aged 55 and above as well as front-line health workers and other professionals were given the vaccine on a priority basis. Now the government looks to gradually vaccinate 80 percent of the population under the NDVP, she said.

The PM said how many of every 100 people have to be vaccinated to develop herd immunity against the virus was still not clear. The matter is still under study and that is why the government currently plans to vaccinate all Bangladeshi citizens above the age of 18, she said.

In this connection, Hasina said the government is continuing its efforts to collect vaccines from different sources.

According to the WHO, at least 80 percent of the population has to be inoculated to contain the spread of coronavirus.

Hasina also mentioned that people with disabilities would also be able to take the shots using their social safety cards. The cards were handed to the ministries concerned.

Workers will be vaccinated on a priority basis as well, she added.

96.54 LAKH SHOTS IN STOCK
The PM told the House that six crore Sinopharm vaccine doses would arrive -- two crore each month -- from China between October and December.

Among the over 24.65 crore shots the government is supposed to get,

more than 4.4 crore have already arrived in the country as gift or under different bilateral purchase agreements till September 12.

Till that date, the government had more than 96.54 lakh doses in stock, she said.

She also said people were given over 3.47 crore shots till September 12. Of the people, 2.09 crore received their first doses while 1.38 crore got both the doses.

Hasina said the government was using 673 vaccination centres across the country to take the ongoing vaccine campaign to the doorstep of people in the divisional, district and upazila headquarters.

She hoped that the government would be able to successfully overcome the pandemic with cooperation from all.

Hasina reiterated her call to the people to follow the health protocols and take the vaccine.

The country reported the first Covid cases in March last year. The government closed all educational institutions across the country the same month to curb the spread of the virus.

The schools resumed in-person classes on this Sunday (September 12), after around 18 months of closure, as the infection rate came down significantly.

Recently, 1.5 lakh students of medical, dental colleges and other health institutions returned to the classroom after taking both doses of the vaccine.

Mass inoculation against Covid-19 had remained suspended for over two months due to a shortage of doses. Bangladesh suspended administering the first dose of the vaccine on April 26. Registration of people for vaccination was suspended nine days later.

The government resumed administering the first dose on June 19 on a limited scale and then gradually expanded it.

People here have been receiving doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and Sinopharm vaccines.

Kosovo war crimes suspect slams 'Gestapo' court

AFP, The Hague

A former Kosovo rebel commander compared a war crimes court to Nazi Germany's secret police as it began its first trial in The Hague yesterday.

Salih Mustafa is accused of murder and torture at a makeshift Kosovo

Liberation Army (KLA) detention centre during the 1998-1999 independence war with Serbia.

"I am not guilty of any of the counts brought here before me by this Gestapo office," Mustafa, 49, said as his trial started at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers.

Infights, economic crisis stalk Taliban

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hungry, they don't have a single bag of flour or cooking oil," said Kabul resident Abdullah.

Long lines still form outside banks, where weekly withdrawal limits of \$200 or 20,000 afghani have been imposed to protect the country's dwindling reserves, reports Reuters.

Impromptu markets where people sell household goods for cash have sprung up across Kabul, although buyers are in short supply.

Even with billions of dollars in foreign aid, Afghanistan's economy had been struggling, with growth failing to keep pace with the steady increase in population. Jobs are scarce and many government workers have been unpaid since at least July.

To make matters worse for the Taliban, a major row broke out between leaders of the Islamist group just days after they set up a new

government, senior Taliban officials told the BBC yesterday.

Supporters of two rival factions reportedly brawled at the presidential palace in Kabul. The argument appeared to centre on who did the most to secure victory over the US, and how power was divided up in the new cabinet. The Taliban have officially denied the reports.

The group seized control of Afghanistan last month, and have since declared the country an "Islamic Emirate". Their new interim cabinet is entirely male and made up of senior Taliban figures, some of whom are notorious for attacks on US forces over the past two decades.

The dispute came to light after a Taliban co-founder, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, disappeared from view for several days.

One Taliban source told BBC Pashto that Baradar and Khalil ur-Rahman

Haqqani - the minister for refugees and a prominent figure within the militant Haqqani network - had exchanged strong words, as their followers brawled with each other nearby.

A senior Taliban member based in Qatar and a person connected to those involved also confirmed that an argument had taken place late last week.

The sources said the argument had broken out because Baradar, the new deputy prime minister, was unhappy about the structure of their interim government.

Officials said the Taliban government is working to get services up and running again and that the streets are now safe, but as the war recedes, resolving the economic crisis is looming as a bigger problem.

"Thefts have disappeared. But bread has also disappeared," said one shopkeeper.

HC expresses discontent at explanation

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explanations," the bench of Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam and Justice KM Zahid Sarwar Kajol said during hearing a petition relating to this issue.

The HC bench also set September 29 for passing an order on this petition.

Investigation officer of the case, Golam Mostafa, will have to give an explanation on seeking remand of Pori Moni to the HC by this time, and he will have to appear before the court on September 29, said Justice Mustafa Zaman.

The HC bench delivered the order while hearing the petition filed by rights organisation Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) challenging the orders of metropolitan magistrates Devobrata Biswas and Atikul Islam placing the IO's prayers for taking Pori Moni on remand.

ASK's lawyer ZI Khan Panna told the HC bench that the metropolitan magistrates have undermined both the Appellate and High Court divisions by their explanations, as they did not directly confess their "fault" in placing Pori Moni on remand.

Contacted, the lawyer told The Daily Star that an accused cannot be taken on police remand. He or she should be interrogated at the jail gate if it is felt necessary according to Supreme Court directives, he said.

The accused person's health must be examined by a registered doctor before and after interrogation and his or her lawyer and relatives must be allowed to be present during the interrogation, but the lower court concerned and police have not followed the apex court directives while placing Pori Moni on remand, the lawyer added.

The two metropolitan magistrates (Devobrata and Atikul) have apologised to the HC for their "unintended mistakes and faults" in placing Pori Moni on remand for the second and third time in a narcotics case, saying that they have done it in "good faith".

They offered apology in two separate written explanations which were recently submitted to the HC through the Supreme Court Registrar General's office.

In their explanations, they mentioned that they ordered the police to execute the remand of Pori Moni in the presence of a female police officer under the SC directives.

The metropolitan magistrates also prayed to the HC bench to exonerate them from any proceedings, saying that they will remain more cautious while passing remand orders in future.

In his explanation, Judge Devobrata said accused Pori Moni alias Shamsun Nahar Smrity was arrested with narcotics, including foreign liquor and Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), which are awful for the society.

He said he granted prayer for two days' remand of Pori Moni as he thought it was reasonable to find out the source of LSD narcotics and the masterminds.

Judge Atikul in his explanation said his court allowed one day's remand of Pori Moni to extract concrete and exact information on how the terrible narcotics like LSD have entered the country and how they have spread and who are involved with the crime, HC sources said.

Cost 3.5 times the original estimate

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times more than the original estimate. The project has also taken five years longer than the stipulated deadline.

A poor initial feasibility study, which led to a major change in the bridge's design, long delay in land acquisition, a lengthy tender process and, more recently, problems caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have kept tens of thousands of people waiting for years.

That wait will finally end next month, but the exact date has not yet been finalised.

"Payra Bridge in the Lebukhali area will be like another Padma Bridge for the people of the southern region, and the bridge will open to traffic next month," Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday, reports UNB.

He inaugurated 11 bridges in three districts under the Barishal zone of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) virtually. The RHD is also the project authority of the Payra Bridge.

Chinese firm Longjian Road and Bridge Construction is building the bridge.

The distance from Barishal city to Patuakhali headquarters is around 40km, Payra Port is 50km away and Kuakata 110km.

The government has constructed several bridges on the Barishal-Patuakhali-Kuakata highway in the last few years, but people have to cross the Payra river on ferries, which takes around an hour.

THE LONG-DELAYED PROJECT

The government approved the project for construction of the bridge on the Barishal-Patuakhali highway in May 2012.

The foreign-funded project was supposed to be completed within December 2016 at the cost of Tk 413.28 crore.

The project has jointly been funded by the government, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and OPEC Fund for International Development.

But in the last nine and a half years, the project cost was revised thrice, the deadline deferred twice and the project director has been changed six times.

The project cost has now risen to Tk 1,447.24 crore, which is just over 3.5 times the original estimate. The revised deadline is June 2022, with a two-year defect liability period.

A two-year defect liability period means that if a defect is found in the construction within two years of the project's completion, the contractors will fix it at their own cost.

The two-year defect liability period would start once the physical work of the project is completed, and so the formal deadline -- which takes the liability period into account -- has to be extended further. The project authority has already sought another extension.

Project Director Abdul Halim said the bridge construction work is almost done (98 percent) and he hopes to complete construction of approach roads (currently at 95 percent) before the inauguration of the bridge if the weather permits.

However, 83 percent of river training work has so far been done and the rest would take around two more months, Halim, the seventh PD of the project told The Daily Star yesterday. That will not affect the timely opening of the bridge, he added.

He however said they are expected to save Tk 52 crore from the agreed contract price.

The Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED), in its June 2020 "In-Depth Monitoring Report", mentioned the failure to acquire the land on time, frequent

changes of project directors and consultants as some of the flawed aspects of the project.

REASONS FOR DELAY

Although the project was approved in May 2012, the physical work of the bridge started only in July 2016, just five months before the originally scheduled date of completion.

An RHD engineer, who is aware of project developments and preferred not to be named, said although there was a feasibility study before the approval, it was poorly done.

When the consultants prepared the detailed design, they had to change the initial design significantly, resulting in cost escalation, the engineer said.

After the detail design, the consultants prepared tender documents and as a foreign-funded project, the implementing authority has to take concurrence at every stage of the bidding process, causing further delays to start of construction, he added.

Besides, the project authority faced complexities over land acquisition and were able to acquire the entirety of the land only last year, he added.

PD Abdul Halim said at the preliminary stage, the cost of the project was estimated on the basis of a tentative design but actual construction cost was finalised following the detailed design.

"So, the cost had risen after the detailed design," he added.

Besides, they had to change the design of the piles and erect 130-metre-long piles, which also hiked costs, he added.

Besides, the Covid-19 pandemic slowed the down progress as the contractor firm is from China and much of the materials was collected from China, which was also a major reason for overshooting the initial estimate and the deadline, he added.

No room for complacency

Officials warn amid downward Covid trend

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The declining trend of coronavirus transmission may be harder to maintain if health guidelines are not properly followed, said health directorate officials.

In an online briefing yesterday, Nazmul Islam, spokesperson for the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said the positivity rate declined to 6.46 percent on Tuesday.

"But there is no room for complacency because maintaining this [low rate] would be tougher if we do not adhere health safety rules by one hundred percent."

In the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the DGHS reported 1,901 new coronavirus cases. The positivity rate was 6.64 percent against a total of 28,615 tests.

Meanwhile, 51 people died with the virus across the country. Of them, 32 were male and 19 female.

The highest 20 of them were in Dhaka division, followed by 11 in Chattogram, five each in Khulna and Sylhet, four in Rajshahi, and three each in Barishal and Sylhet divisions.

With the latest count, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 1,536,341 and the total number of deaths to 27,058.

The death rate was 1.76 percent of all cases detected since the first cases were reported on March 8 last year.

Criticism makes

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In response, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said, "I like criticism because it makes me stronger."

However, the criticisms need to be based on facts, he added.

Jatiya Party MP Kazi Firoz Rashid alleged that the BNP created Doctors Association of Bangladesh (DAB) during their time and the ruling Awami League created Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad (Swachip).

"What will we do if doctors get involved in partisan politics?" he questioned.

Answering the question, the health minister said, "Everyone has the right to participate in politics as a citizen of the country."

In addition, he also said, "It will be difficult for us to get services [from the doctors] if we condemn them more."

Mujibul Haque Chunnun, another Jatiya Party MP, questioned the skyrocketing medical costs at private hospitals. He termed the medical facilities "dacoits".

He criticised the poor healthcare services at upazila- and district-level government hospitals and condemned the government-employed doctors practising at private hospitals.

To reduce the burden of excessive medical costs from the shoulders of mass people, the MP suggested the health minister to form a committee and fix a rate for treatments at private hospitals.

Adding to this, Pir Fazlur Rahman, another MP of the Jatiya Party, said people went destitute while paying bills at private hospitals.

The health ministry had failed to address the issue, he said.

Mentioning the shortage of medical staffers, he said, 59 doctors were supposed to remain at a hospital in his area -- Sunamganj -- but there were only 14.

He said if the minister had been a little more active many problems had been solved.

BNP MP Harunur Rashid lambasted the health ministry saying he failed to prevent corruption and mismanagement in the health sector.

Citing the sorry state of the health sector, the BNP MP said, 50 years have passed since the independence of Bangladesh but we have not been able to differentiate between government hospitals and private hospitals.

"Those who are working in government hospitals are doing business in private hospitals. This cannot be acceptable."

He said the health sector is in a state of shabbiness all over the country as there is a huge crisis of doctors and medical technologists there.

Citing an example of corruption, he said the curtains were purchased at a hospital for Tk 38 lakh.

BNP MP Rumeen Farhana said people were helpless as they could not get treatment at the government hospitals during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Responding to all the criticism, the health minister said, "You will find faults. If two buckets of dirt are thrown into the sea, the sea will not be wasted and the water will not be wasted."

The minister said, "I assumed what you can say in parliament today [yesterday] and that's why I was well prepared to answer you all."

He also said that yesterday's parliament was vibrant due to the debate.

About high fees in treating at private hospitals, the minister said the ministry would hold a meeting to determine different medical fees there.

Hopefully, that issue will be resolved, he added.