

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



1,233
New cases in 24hrs



15,49,553
Total cases



27,368
Deaths



15,09,202
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



4,746,351
Deaths



231,661,959
Total cases

US sending 2.5m shots to Bangladesh

Says a White House official

AFP, Washington

The United States is shipping another 2.5 million Covid vaccine doses to hard-hit Bangladesh, a White House official told AFP on Thursday, after the Biden administration announced a ramping up of global donations.

The latest shipment -- 2,508,480 Pfizer doses -- brings the total of US shots to the country above nine million.

Packing was underway and first deliveries, made through the World Health Organization's Covax program, arrive Monday, the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP.

"We are proud to be able to deliver these safe and effective vaccines to the people of Bangladesh," said the official, adding that there were "no strings attached" to the donation.

"We are sharing these doses not to secure favors or extract concessions," the official said.

According to an AFP database, only 9.3 percent of Bangladesh's population had been fully vaccinated as of this week.

The impoverished country of about 170 million people, which neighbors India, has struggled to get the pandemic

under control, imposing some of the world's longest lockdowns.

Children only went back to school two weeks ago after being out of classrooms for 18 months -- an example of the education gap that the United Nations children's agency, Unicef, recently warned is worsening inequity for millions of children across South Asia.

HOARDING ACCUSATION

Like other rich countries, the United States has been accused of hoarding vaccines and prioritizing booster shots instead of helping swaths of the world that remain largely unvaccinated.

On Wednesday, the United States authorized third doses of Pfizer vaccines for elderly and at-risk populations.

However, President Joe Biden has declared the United States the world's vaccine "arsenal" in the war on Covid-19 and US donations total more than those from the rest of the world combined.

Biden told a Covid-19 summit of world leaders Wednesday that the United States is donating a "historic" extra 500 million vaccine doses, bringing the total US commitment worldwide to 1.1 billion.

Commerce ministry keeps

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Every time such incidents of companies defrauding its clientele take place, the commerce ministry says recovering money from the companies is not its responsibility.

The ministry only holds some meetings and passes the buck to other ministries, like law and home, for taking punitive action against the companies.

However, those companies were registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC) under the commerce ministry.

The commerce ministry has once more been inactive regarding the fraudulent activities of 10 e-commerce companies. It is again saying that the home ministry will take punitive actions against the wrongdoers.

Therefore, consumers and merchants again face being cheated by the errant e-commerce companies.

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi in a briefing Wednesday said the government cannot recover the money from e-commerce companies as it did not take money from the people and also did not enjoy the profits of the businesses.

Instead, the commerce ministry has been taking some measures to be implemented soon so that people are not cheated by any fraudulent companies in future.

The minister also said people should keep their greed in check in order to avoid being cheated in this manner.

Ahsanul Karim, a Supreme Court lawyer, said in most cases, owners of the companies are sent to jail and money is not recovered.

"In such cases the commerce

ministry can form a board or appoint an administrator to run the companies so that the companies can start making profits and pay back consumers and merchants," Karim said.

The commerce ministry is responsible for recovering funds from fraudulent companies as those are registered under the RJSC, a body under the commerce ministry.

Filing criminal cases against wrongdoers is the only form of action available under the current legal framework as there are currently no specific legal measures for e-commerce in the country, said Mohammad Golam Sarwar, assistant professor of law department of the University of Dhaka.

So, it is very simple that the commerce ministry will also try to evade its responsibility, Sarwar said.

There is no precedence of paying back the money by those fraudulent companies, he said.

Punishing the frauds is just a form of eyewash, Sarwar also said.

Here consumers, investors and merchants also have the responsibility to make sure they are not manipulated by any errant company.

"Let buyers beware," he said.

Sayedda Anzu, professor of law department at Rajshahi University, said the commerce ministry cannot evade responsibility for recovering money from such companies to pay back affected investors, consumers and merchants.

The commerce ministry should file money laundering cases and those under the Digital Security Act so that owners of errant e-commerce companies are punished and money can be recovered, Sayeeda Anzu said.

Make vaccine access 'universal, affordable'

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"And that must start right here at the UN; with the member states; across regions; rising above narrow political interests ... it has also put a spotlight on the critical need for global solidarity and collaboration to effective Covid-19 response," the premier said.

Hasina said vaccine technologies must be transferred immediately across the globe to ensure vaccine equity, saying, "Bangladesh is ready to produce vaccines in mass scale if technical know-how is shared with us and patent waiver is granted".

She placed several proposals to contain the global pandemic, saying only a meaningful collaboration towards a resilient and inclusive recovery could combat the pandemic though it has so far brought to the fore the inadequacy of the global response to tackle emergencies.

Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the UN Rabab Fatima chaired the session coinciding with the prime minister's addressing the UNGA where 100 heads of government and state were speaking in person.

Climate change, Rohingya crisis, Palestine and Afghanistan issues concerning the globe as well as Bangladesh perspectives were featured in Hasina's speech.

On the Afghan crisis, she said Bangladesh wants Afghanistan's people to decide the course of the future themselves while Bangladesh is ready to continue to work with the international community for the country's economic development.

The PM said "Hope" being the theme of the 76th UNGA when Covid-19 was claiming lives across the globe and battering the economies and health system across the world by recurring waves of new variants.

She pointed out that the pandemic disproportionately impacted the climate vulnerable countries that need to be addressed with immediate measures and "otherwise, devastating impacts of climate change will be irreversible".

"No country, rich or poor, is immune from the destructive effects. We, therefore, call upon the rich and industrialised countries to cut emissions, compensate for the loss and

damage, and ensure adequate financing and technology transfer for adaptation and resilience building," she said.

Hasina, also the chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum and the Vulnerable 20 Group of Ministers of Finance, said her government has launched the "Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan -- Decade 2030" outlining a transformative agenda from climate vulnerability to climate prosperity.

She went on saying, "The upcoming COP-26 Summit in Glasgow provides us with a good opportunity to rally support for such new and inclusive ideas."

Hasina said the pandemic also severely disrupted Bangladesh's education system while Unicef reported that half the world's students were affected by partial or full school closures.

She said success stories in education progress across the globe largely ran dry as millions of students in low-income countries lacked resources and technologies to join remote learning facilities "jeopardising decades of gains in enrollment, literacy rates, etc".

"We need a global plan to prioritise education recovery by investing in digital tools and services, access to internet, and capacity building of teachers," she said.

She said Bangladesh largely managed to be on track for its graduation from the Least Development Countries (LDC) category "despite the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic".

"We look forward to receiving more support from our development partners for an incentive-based graduation structure".

Hasina described migrants' workers as frontline contributors during the pandemic in health and other emergency services and urged the migrant receiving countries to treat them fairly and protect their jobs, health, and well-being.

ROHINGYA ISSUE

Hasina wanted the global community's enhanced focus and active support to find a durable solution to the Rohingya crisis despite the uncertainty created by the recent political developments in Myanmar.

She said the Rohingya crisis was passing its fifth year now but "yet not a single forcibly displaced Myanmar national could be repatriated -- I would

like to reiterate that the crisis was created in Myanmar and its solution lies in Myanmar".

"The international community must work constructively for a permanent solution of the crisis through safe, sustainable, and dignified return of the Rohingyas to their home in the Rakhine State."

She said her government recently relocated some Rohingyas to an offshore island of Bhasan Char "on our part, to ensure their temporary stay in Bangladesh".

The premier said despite vaccine constraints, the Rohingyas were incorporated under Bangladesh's inoculation campaign to stop spread of Covid-19 in their camps.

BANGLADESH COVID-19 ASPECT

Hasina said the Covid-19's impact on Bangladesh was much less than it was feared as it was equipped and strengthened from the grassroots to combat the pandemic.

She said under a multi-pronged and multi-stakeholder approach, Bangladesh took some firm decisions to balance between life and livelihood from the very beginning of the pandemic that included 28 stimulus packages to the tune of \$14.6 billion or 4.44 percent of the GDP to keep our economy afloat.

Hasina said her government also allocated \$1.61 billion for vaccines in the current budget cycle, giving extra attention to the most vulnerable people like the ultra-poor, disabled, elders, returnee migrants and vulnerable women.

"Our well-timed intervention and our people's resilience helped us achieve over five percent economic growth in 2020," Hasina said.

PEACEKEEPING

Bangladesh, she said, "Also takes pride as the leading peacekeeping nation and our contribution to global peace and despite the pandemic, our peacekeepers are serving in some of the most difficult circumstances across the globe with utmost dedication and professionalism."

"The international community must do everything possible to ensure their [peacekeepers] safety and security," she said.

BANGLADESH SUCCESS

the need to acquire 395 acres more.

If the revised proposal, which is now pending with the Planning Commission, is approved, the project cost would be Tk 7,982 crore (105 percent more) and deadline would be June 2023.

RHD sources said Development Project Proposal (DPP) of the land clearing project was prepared based on a feasibility study and detailed design in 2015.

As per the design, the width of the road designated for slow vehicles was 3.6 metres. But after review of the design, ADB agreed to make it 4.2 metres. However, the prime minister later directed to make width 5.5 metres.

Moreover, around 22km of the road alignment was changed and 37 more U-turns were prescribed to ensure better road safety. Two rest areas for drivers and an weighbridge centre were added.

"Cost of the land project mainly rose due to all these factors," a RHD official, who is aware about project, told The Daily Star seeking anonymity.

Project Director Tushar Kanti Shaha could not be reached for comments.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE DELAY

The authorities of Sylhet-Tamabil highway expansion project have already started the process for floating tenders to hire contractors and hope to complete this process in next two to three months.

"After completing all the process, we hoped to start the work on the ground within the next eight to 10 months," Project Director Abu Sayeed Md Nazmul Huda told The Daily Star on September 18.

But, he said, as per the condition of the financier, they would not be able to start the work until the land clearing

project is done.

"We don't agree with the financier's condition and are continuing our negotiation," he said, adding, "But, if it [financier] sticks to the condition, it would push us into a long delay."

"We have no problem except the land," he added.

AK Mohammad Fazlul Karim, project director of Dhaka-Sylhet highway, formally known as SASEC Dhaka-Sylhet Corridor Road Development Project, said the land was supposed to be readied before starting of infrastructure project.

"But, that does not happen in reality," he told this reporter on September 18.

They have already floated tender for two of the six packages and they are expecting to give work order for the first package -- from Kanchpur to Narsingdi -- to a contractor by May next year, Fazlul said.

He said they have to hand over all the land within nine months of awarding the contract. "So, getting land on time is a major challenge now."

Another official of the project said they were working with the land clearing project officials since without the land they would not be able to start physical work.

"We are preparing all necessary documents beforehand so that we can handover those to the deputy commissioners' office for quick start of land acquisition once the revision proposal [of the land clearing project] is approved," he said, wishing not to be named.

"Cooperation and prompt actions from the DCs' offices can help quick acquisition and help us to start physical work fast," he added.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meets United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres at the UN headquarters in New York on Thursday.

PHOTO: PTD

Positivity rate lowest in over six months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has recorded the lowest Covid-19 daily infection rate in the last six and half months -- 4.54 percent -- yesterday.

For the last four consecutive days, the infection rate of Covid-19 remained below five percent. On September 21, the infection rate dropped to 4.69 percent.

On March 8, the DGHS recorded 4.98 percent infection and since then it has continued to rise.

Meanwhile, 31 people died of Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, read a DGHS press release.

The total number of Covid-19 deaths in the country now stands at 27,368 and the death rate stands at 1.77 percent.

A total of 27,141 samples were tested across the country and at least 1,233 new infections were recorded in this period, taking the total number of people infected to 1,549,553, added the release.

The overall positivity rate stands at 16.18 percent.

At least 1,413 Covid-19 patients have recovered during this period. The total number of recoveries now stands at 1,509,202 and the recovery rate is 97.4 percent.

Among the 31 dead, 18 were men and 13 women.

Of them, two aged between 21 and 30 years old, one between 31 and 40, four between 41 and 50, six between 51 and 60, nine between 61 and 70, five between 71 and 80, three between 81 and 90, and one was between 91 and 100 years old, added the release.

The highest death toll was recorded 16 in Dhaka, eight in Chattogram, each two in Rajshahi and Rangpur, each one in Khulna, Sylhet and Mymensingh divisions.

No death was recorded in Barishal.

The country recorded the first Covid-19 cases on March 8 last year. The first death from the virus was recorded on March 18, 2020.

'No indication' Iran wants to return to nuke deal talks: US

AFP, United Nations

The United States said Thursday that Iran has given no hint that it wants to return to stalled talks over reviving the Iranian nuclear deal.

"For now, certainly there's no indication, positive indication that Iran is prepared to come back... and to try to close down the remaining issues," a senior US official said.

Western nations are trying to build momentum at the UN General Assembly in New York this week to kickstart the accord.

Then-president Donald Trump pulled America out of the deal in 2018, reinstating sanctions on Iran that Washington had lifted as part of the agreement.

Pre-departure

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coronavirus at a PCR lab no more than six hours before the flight.

The expatriates have since been demanding the test facilities be set up at international airports.

Many expatriates feared that failure to reach their workplaces on time might cost them their jobs. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on September 6 ordered that PCR labs be set up at the country's three international airports in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet in two to three days.

On September 15, the expatriates' welfare ministry announced that on the basis of the recommendations made by the health directorate, they have given permission to seven healthcare organisations to set up labs at the HSIA, one of the six organisations later withdrew from the initiative.

Minister Imran yesterday said since the labs will be operated simultaneously at the airport, the rush of travellers will be handled well.

If the labs prove to be inadequate, the next course of action will be decided.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque on Thursday reportedly said the six labs will have 12 booths, allowing 3,500 to 4,000 individuals to get tested for Covid-19.

These facilities will be able to conduct both the rapid PCR and the regular test. On Wednesday night, 46 Bangladeshi expatriate workers flew to the UAE after their Covid-19 tests at an RT-PCR lab at the HSIA.

140 awarded

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She said the members of BANFPU-1 have been very active in executing the mission mandate.

Commander (Superintendent of Bangladesh Police) Belal Uddin, in his speech, said that the members of Bangladesh Police have upheld the dignity of the country in the international arena, despite facing various challenges amid the pandemic, by performing their duties with sincerity and dedication.

He also thanked every officer for their contribution and expressed his gratitude to the UN authorities for awarding the Peacekeeping Medal to Bangladesh Police.

Chief of Operations Sharfadin Margis, along with members of the military, police and civil societies from various countries, were present on the occasion.