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

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

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

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.



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

Commerce ministry keeps

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

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

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 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.

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.

commerce ministry 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.

commerce ministry will also try to evade its responsibility, Sarwar said. There is no precedence of paying back the money by those fraudulent

So, it is very simple that the

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. Sayeeda Anzu, professor of law department at Rajshahi University, said the commerce ministry cannot evade responsibility for recovering money from such companies to pay

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

back affected investors, consumers and

complex task. These involve many agencies and individuals and often cause delay to project implementation. Expansion of Dhaka-Sylhet highway

has long been in discussion but complexities over funding halted the plan, RHD officials said. With this in mind, the RHD took up the separate land clearing project along

the Dhaka-Sylhet-Tamabil highway. Usually, land acquisition and moving of utility lines and pipes are done along

with the infrastructure protect. In October 2018, Ecnec approved the Tk 3,885 crore project to acquire 986.47 acres' and moving the utility service

In another development, Ecnec in September 2020 approved Tk 3,586.04 crore for expanding 56.16km of Sylhet-Tamabil highway. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

(AIIB) will provide Tk 2,970.56 crore as soft loan and project's deadline is June This is the first project in Bangladesh's

transport sector which is being funded by the AIIB and it gave the condition that the land must be cleared first. The impasse over the financing of the widening of 210km of Dhaka-Sylhet

Development Bank (ADB) agreed to In February this year, Ecnec approved the Tk 16,918.59 crore project with a December 2026 deadline.

highway ended in 2019 after the Asian

LAND CLEARING PROJECT As of this June, the project was able to make only 25 percent progress, forcing the government to extend the deadline to December.

In the meantime, the authorities submitted a revision proposal adding 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

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

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

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

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 lity," he told this reporter on reality," 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

physical work.

documents beforehand so that we "After completing all the process, we commissioners' office for quick start hoped to start the work on the ground of land acquisition once the revision proposal [of the land clearing project] is approved," he said, wishing not to be named.

from the DCs' offices can help quick acquisition and help us to start physical

Tangles at root of the mess

"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

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

"We are preparing all necessary can handover those to the deputy

"Cooperation and prompt actions work fast," he added.

"In such cases the commerce can be recovered, Sayeeda Anzu said." Make vaccine access 'universal, affordable'

"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 knowhow 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 global 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 like to reiterate that the crisis was 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 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 lowincome 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 She said the Rohingya crisis was passing its fifth year now but "yet not a single forcibly displaced Myanmar

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 national could be repatriated -- I would BANGLADESH SUCCESS

The prime minister said her government has been working hard to fulfill the unfinished dream of our Father of the

"We are now among the five fastest

ranking 41st in terms of GDP. Over the past decade, we have reduced the poverty rate from 31.5 percent to 20.5 percent," she said. She said Bangladesh's per capita income jumped to more than threefold

growing economies in the world,

in just one decade to \$2,227 while its foreign currency reserve has reached all time high to \$48 billion. As for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index Score, the Development Sustainable Report

2021 identified Bangladesh as having progressed the most since 2015. We have achieved the milestone of LDC graduation this year. Our vision is to transform Bangladesh into a knowledge-based developed country by 2041; and a prosperous and resilient

'MIRACLE' Secretary General of the United Nations António Guterres has highly praised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the development in Bangladesh, calling it a "miracle".

Delta by 2100," she added.

UN secretary-general commended Bangladesh for its development in different sectors and humanity... he thanked the prime minister for achieving a development miracle," said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, UNB reported.

He was briefing reporters after a bilateral meeting held between Hasina and Guterres at the UN Secretariat Building in New York on Thursday.

He said both the UN and Bangladesh shared common priorities in different areas, including climate, financing and

"We share common priorities, whether it's climate, financing or SDGs. Those priorities in the UN are also the priorities of Bangladesh," Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN Rabab Fatima, who was at the briefing, quoted Guterres as saying. Hasina urged the secretary-general to

appoint more Bangladeshis to higher posts in the UN since Bangladesh plays a significant role in the UN. "We're

your major tools, but there are a few Bangladeshis in your different higher In reply, the secretary-general said

they would consider it. Momen said, "Bangladesh is a model [case] to the UN as it's a vibrant economy coming out from a poor economy. This is why the UN always

respects Bangladesh.' "Bangladeshi peacekeepers are creating a brand name wherever they work. So, we asked them to appoint Bangladeshis in other areas also, Momen added.

MORE MEETINGS Hasina also had a bilateral meeting with Queen Maxima of the Netherlands.

Queen Maxima, also the UN secretary-general's special advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development, said they were thinking whether an insurance programme can be launched in Bangladesh to bring poor farmers who are affected by flood and storm

under coverage. Hasina also held two separate bilateral meetings with the Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and Vietnamese President Nguy⊠n Xuân Phúc at the UN Headquarters on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

In the meeting with Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Bangladesh asked the Maldives to introduce a commercial shipping service between Chattogram port and Male port to transport goods and food items at cheap rates to boost trade and business between the two

Bangladesh also requested it to regularise undocumented Bangladeshis living in the Maldives, said Momen.

Ibrahim Mohamed Solih invited Hasina to visit his country and she accepted the invitation.

In the meeting with the Vietnamese president, Vietnam was asked to help Bangladesh over the repatriation of forcibly-displaced Rohingyas as it has very good relations with Myanmar.

As Bangladesh has a large negative trade balance with Vietnam, Dhaka asked Hanoi to raise its import from Bangladesh. Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen

were present at the briefing.

and PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim

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 ranian nuclear deal.

"For now, certainly there's no ndication, 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 ouild 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

FROM PAGE 1 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 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.

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

Minister Imran yesterday said since

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

FROM PAGE 1

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.