

Moderna to be used as booster dose: DGHS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to use the Covid-19 vaccine of Moderna as a booster dose instead of Pfizer jabs.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) yesterday issued a notice in this regard, asking everyone involved with the government's vaccination drive to comply with the directive.

Doses of Pfizer vaccine will be reserved for students, aged 12-17 years, and others who have received the Pfizer vaccine as the first dose, reads the notice.

The government introduced the booster dose for the frontline workers and senior citizens on December 28 in Dhaka, which was expanded countywide gradually.

Since the beginning, Covid-19 shots of Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca were being used as the booster dose.

Send Khaleda abroad using 'moral authority'

Kalyan Party urges president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The president should use his "moral authority" to send ailing BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia abroad for better treatment and take measures to enact a law in line with the constitution on the next Election Commission's formation, Bangladesh Kalyan Party proposed while holding dialogue yesterday.

Two other parties -- Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) and Zaker Party -- also held separate talks with the president at the Bangabhaban yesterday.

An eight-member delegation of Kalyan Party, led by Chairman Syed Muhammad Ibrahim, also proposed taking steps to form a neutral caretaker government to hold the national election.

Led by Andaleev Rahman Partha, a seven-member delegation of BJP, recommended that the president take measures to enact a law on formation of the EC.

In a written statement to the president, a six-member team of Zaker Party, led by Chairman Mostafa Amir Faisal, placed a four-point proposal.

The dialogue, which started on December 20, is likely to conclude on January 17 with the participation of ruling Awami League.

The president will later form a search committee that will propose names to the president for appointing the chief election commissioner and election commissioners.

Tenure of the present EC will expire on February 14.



A man signing a paper while others wait in line to do the same after they were fined by a mobile court in Shahbagh area for not wearing masks and violating other health rules. Dhaka Metropolitan Police launched the daylong drive as there has been a surge in Covid-19 cases.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

PROFESSIONAL DRIVING LICENCE

Dope test now a must

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Negative dope test reports from government-affiliated hospitals or laboratories would be mandatory to get or renew professional driving licences from January 30 this year.

A person with a positive dope test report or negative comments would not be entitled to get a professional driving licence from Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

However, the dope test would not be required for a non-professional licence.

A professional driving licence is a must for operating commercial vehicles or rental cars or doing government jobs as a driver.

BRTA going to introduce the system more than one year after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave directives to bring public transport workers under a dope testing system.

The drug addiction of bus and truck drivers is considered to be one of the major reasons behind road accidents.

BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder on Wednesday sent a circular in this regard to all divisional and circle offices to implement the decision.

The dope test can be done at all district-level government hospitals, six hospitals in Dhaka city and all laboratories approved by the Department of Narcotics Control, reads the circular.

The six hospitals in Dhaka city are Dhaka Medical College Hospital; National Institute of Mental Health and Hospital; National Institute of Laboratory Medicine and Referral Centre; National Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital; National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation, also known as Pongu Hospital; and Kurmitool General Hospital.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Health Services on Tuesday wrote all government hospitals to take necessary steps for carrying out a dope test on the licence seekers, reads the circular.

Delivering her speech on October 22, 2020, to mark National Road Safety Day, Hasina directed the authorities to bring drivers under a dope testing system.

"We need to know whether those who are driving [vehicles] use drugs. They need to undergo dope testing. This test is essential for each driver.

You must do it," she had said.

Later, BRTA formed a committee that gave several other recommendations including carrying out an on-spot test to check whether a driver drank.

"We will have implemented other recommendations on phases," BRTA Spokesperson Mahbub-E-Rabbani said yesterday.

Earlier, transport leaders had announced to start dope tests on the drivers from December 2019.

Announcing the programme on September 18, 2019, Khondaker Enayet Ullah, general secretary of Dhaka Road Transport Owners' Association, had said that almost half of the public vehicle drivers in the capital are believed to be addicted to various drugs.

He said addiction has become the first and main reason for accidents in the capital. But the move did not see light at that time.

Experts said a driver can feel drowsy after taking drugs and they may lose control over the steering, causing accidents. In many cases, a driver may feel overconfident and try to dangerously overtake other vehicles after taking drugs, they said.

Army to be built as world-class force Says chief after winter training exercise

UNB, MYMENSINGH

The efforts to build the Bangladesh Army as a world-class force through realistic and up-to-date training will continue, said Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed yesterday.

"Apart from the training, Bangladesh Army stands by the people in all possible sectors," he told reporters after witnessing the army's winter exercise in Mymensingh.

The four-week long winter exercise of the Bangladesh Army concluded at Chechu Bazar in Muktagachcha upazila of the district.

The 9th Infantry Division of Bangladesh Army conducted the training titled 'Training Nabodiganta' successfully.

General Shafiuddin witnessed the exercise with other army personnel.

The army chief also said technology has advanced in the world and the use of technology in battlefields can be seen. "Artificial intelligence has also been taken under cognisance so that we can enrich the force by adding this technology in our future battle plan."

About the exercise session, he said it increases the capacity of army members to perform their duty efficiently and confidently.

Asked about procuring modern armoured vehicles, General Shafiuddin said, "The prime minister has set a goal to modernise the force, especially the aviation, with the addition of advanced airplanes and choppers."

About the capability of the force in the cyber field, he said there is a plan to enhance cyber capability in the force's goal.

"Note that everything cannot be covered in a single exercise. This exercise focused on logistics capability."

Female members from Bangladesh Army and fighter jets of Bangladesh Air Force alongside the armoured vehicles and MLRS participated in the exercise.

The principal staff officers of Army Headquarters, General Officer Commanding, Army Training and Doctrine Command (GOC ARTDOC) and senior military officers were present there.

On Sunday, Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Ataul Hakim Sarwar Hasan briefed about the details of the exercise to the chief of army staff while Lieutenant General Md Saiful Alam, quarter master general, briefed about the logistics activities.

Members of Defence Journalist Association of Bangladesh and other media personnel were present there.

Later, the army chief also replied to different questions of media about the winter exercise while attending a press briefing held at Army Field Headquarter Media Cell.

Bangladesh Army organised the logistics field training exercise for the first time on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Bangladesh Army.

The arms and ammunition collected recently were used in the exercise, started on December 19, 2021.

35 children hurt as helium

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admitted patients are Riya Moni, 5, Samrat, 9, Nishu, 10, Nasir, 12, Saiful Islam, 12, Shah Alam, 55, Sahamuk Hasan, Anwar, 35, Abdur Rob, 27, Sakib, 15, Rubi, 10, Moriyom, Nayeem, 15, Popi,

10, Basir, 13, Emon, 16, Selina 50, Sabuj, Ummei Habiba, 11, Sabuj, 18 -- all from the upazila's Birioli village.

Anwar's younger sister Farhana said Anwar, his two daughters Asnan and Moriyom, his sister Nasrin,

nephew Nazmul and niece Nusrat were all admitted to CMCH.

Mokara Union Parishad Chairman Md Saifuddin visited the hospital and promised to bear the medical costs.

Bus owners won't go by govt decision

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Asked whether they gave the transport association any verbal confirmation, he didn't give any direct answer.

Like other working days, yesterday -- the first day of the new government restrictions coming into effect -- buses were full to the brim.

A Mirpur-Motijheel bound Bikalpa Paribahan was packed, with at least 10 passengers standing.

"How can we run at half capacity? All offices are open but the number of buses has not increased... How can we leave someone during office hours?" said Moshir, a helper of the bus.

CURBS IGNORED ELSEWHERE

The new government-imposed restrictions on public movement and businesses were grossly ignored yesterday.

While one of the main instructions is to wear masks in all public places, including markets, malls, restaurants, offices and courts, many people were seen in places without masks and ignoring other health rules.

Vendors at Senpara Bazar, Kazipara Bazar, Shewrapara Bazar,

Farmgate Bazar and Karwan Bazar were seen ignoring health guidelines as well.

Suman, a fish trader in Karwan Bazar, said it was difficult for him to breathe or talk to customers with the mask on.

"I keep it [mask] in my pocket so that I can wear it in case of a drive."

Helal Uddin, president of Bangladesh Shop Owners' Association, told The Daily Star that they have decided to hang banners and make loudspeaker announcements from tomorrow, urging customers and sellers to wear masks in all shops and malls.

Day labourers, especially rickshaw-pullers, were rarely seen with masks on. "It is difficult to wear one during such intense physical labour," they said.

A mobile court in Shahbagh conducted drives from 12:00pm and fined those violating the new restrictions.

Sanjib Das, executive magistrate of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told reporters that people who were not wearing masks in open places and on public transports in the area were fined Tk 50 to Tk 200.

"Today [yesterday]

was the first day of the restrictions. We will also conduct mobile court drives at kitchen markets, shopping malls, shops and restaurants from tomorrow to reduce the health rules violations."

While all restaurants were directed not to allow customers without vaccine cards, many did not comply with the rule, while some customers did not even know how to acquire a card.

"It's the first day [of restrictions]. The customers may not feel comfortable if we ask for their vaccine certificate. They might not come back to my restaurant," said the manager of a restaurant in Farmgate, adding that he would put up a sticker on the restaurant door soon in this regard.

Among the restrictions, one is that no social, religious or political gathering and rally would be allowed at open places until further notice.

The restrictions were imposed at a time when local body elections are being held in many places. Meanwhile, at least 3,359 new infections were recorded and 12 people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

Coerced by cops

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In its annual report of 2021, the UN WGEID said they had repeatedly asked for information from the government regarding these cases, but to no avail.

Police went to Tulee's house as well.

"A team from Tejgaon Police Station came with a sheaf of case statements against my brother. I did not hear about these cases

all these years as I went from door to door looking for him," she said.

Ayesha Ali, mother of Abdul Quader Bhuiyan Masum, who has been traceless from Nakhhalpara since 2013, said she was visited by Tejgaon police thrice -- on Thursday, on Sunday and yesterday.

"I had to write in my GD that he went missing," said Ayesha.

Apurbo Hasan, officer-

in-charge of Tejgaon Police Station, refused to comment on the matter. The OC of the police station in Sabujbagh could not be reached over phone despite repeated attempts.

Police also visited Rina Alam, wife of another victim Nur Alam, who was picked up from Gazipur in 2015.

She said she had mentioned in a GD that

People suffer as chaos grips Mugda centre

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the centre, the correspondent saw there were only two booths administering vaccines to the huge turnout.

There were several hundred vaccine seekers gathered in front of the venue in the morning. Even as Covid cases surge, they were all crowded together as there seemed to be no separate lines for people seeking the first, second or third doses.

Their presence on the road created a huge traffic jam and there seemed to be no system in place to control the chaos.

Sahera Begum, 32, came to get vaccinated from Dakshingaoon area of Khilgaon with her two daughters -- one six years old and another a six-month old infant.

Neither daughter was wearing a mask. Sahera said she was forced to stand in such a crowd and risk getting infected along with her children because there was no one at home to take

care of them.

"I can't go and stand far away because I don't know when my serial will come," she said.

A volunteer of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society was reading out names serially over a loud speaker. If someone was at the rear of the crowd when called, he or she had to push through the crowd to get jabbed.

"I went to six or seven vaccine centres in Dhaka with my friends or colleagues. None were as bad as this one," said Abdul Alim, a school teacher who had come to the centre around 10:00am and was still waiting to be called around two hours later.

"They told us no first dose would be provided, and so a lot of vaccine seekers left. Now they are saying they have some vaccines for the first dose," he added.

CNG station employee Soheli Rana Shuvo lost his mobile phone while waiting outside the centre and then

missed his serial because he was talking to a member of police and the person he suspected of stealing his phone.

"When they called my serial, I was with the police and the man [suspected of stealing the phone]," Soheli said. "I have to take another day's leave to get the vaccine, which will be tough."

Inside the centre, one of the three attendees was instructing vaccine seekers to keep their sleeves folded, while a nurse was busy filling the syringe with the dose and another was hurrying to jab the recipients.

This correspondent found no space for people to rest after receiving the dose, as is common practice in most centres.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in its guidelines for Covid vaccination said centres should ensure social distancing, mask wearing and other health measures. Zakera Hannan Rubayat,

her husband was picked up by unidentified men in law enforcers' clothes.

"He was picked up by men in uniform but I was not allowed to write that in the GD."

Meanwhile, rights body Ain o Salish Kendra has condemned such acts.

"Police are taking statements from the families saying the victims were hiding somewhere.

This is unlawful and uncalled for," it said in a statement yesterday.

The development came after the US on December 10 slapped sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former officials for human rights violations in Bangladesh. The Biden administration of the US also did not invite Bangladesh to the Democracy Summit on December 9-10.

by this month in order to avoid closing educational institutions.

But the students' vaccination drive was also in a mess, according to guardians.

A guardian who went to the BIAM School and College at Eskaton with his son, said his child entered a centre around 11:15am and was vaccinated around 4:00pm.

"There was a huge gathering inside the school campus as well as at the gate," he said.

"We went there to be safe from coronavirus, but the gathering is putting us in danger," he added.

Get jabbed

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gets vaccinated," she said.

The PM was addressing a programme marking the inauguration of the National Science and Technology Complex (NSTC) in the capital's Agargaon. She joined the event virtually from the Gono Bhaban.