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Homeless people, many of them with disabilities, in a queue to get inoculated against coronavirus in the capital's Kamalapur yesterday evening. The government's Expanded Programme on Immunisation vaccinated over 200 individuals during the drive.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Vaccination awaits MILESTONE

Govt set to complete giving at least 1 dose to 10cr people, starts inoculating homeless

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Bangladesh is closing in on the milestone of vaccinating 10 crore people with the first Covid-19 dose despite facing many a challenge.

The number of people inoculated with the first dose rose to 9.89 crore as of Saturday. The government is also administering around seven lakh second doses and around 68,500 booster doses along with around three lakh first doses daily.

The first dose has so far been given to 82 percent of the targeted 12 crore people – around 58 percent of total population, according to the Director General of Health and Services (DGHS).

Besides, around 6.5 crore or 53 percent of the targeted population have received second jabs as of yesterday.

"We may need a couple of more days to reach the 10-crore milestone. Despite all odds, we have reached this stage. Obviously, it is a matter of joy for all of us," Dr Shamsul Haque, member secretary of DGHS's National Vaccine Deployment Taskforce, told The Daily Star.

He said, "Now our focus is to fulfil the target of inoculating 70 percent of the population as early as possible. We have enough vaccine supply for that."

The mass inoculation campaign began on February 7 last year.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday started vaccinating Madrasa students and floating people.

As part of the special campaign, on the sidelines of the regulation vaccination drive, 700 students of Jamia Siddiquia Noorani Women's Madrasa in the capital's Mirpur got their first dose, while street dwellers near Kamalapur Railway station were jabbed with Johnson and Johnson's single dose vaccine, according to the DGHS officials.

From November 1 last year, the health directorate started a campaign to vaccinate schoolchildren aged 12 and above.

The government started the mass campaign with Covishield over a week after the trial run on January 27 last year, but suffered a huge setback when the Serum Institute of India suspended the supply of the purchased three crore vaccines, after sending only 70 lakh doses in two consignments following the Indian government's embargo on export in April 2021.

According to a tri-patriate agreement, Serum was supposed to supply the purchased vaccine within six months. Besides, there were commitments of 6.8 crore doses from Covax, a global initiative, by 2021.

Covax's pledge to supply vaccines to low-income countries also suffered a blow as the rich countries secured a majority share of the vaccines produced by global companies for their own population.

Due to dearth of supply, the government was forced to suspend the vaccination campaign from April 26, which was resumed on June 19 on a limited scale with around 11 lakh Sinopharm jabs in hand.

"The suspension of the vaccine campaign was a reflection of incompetency and incapacity of the officials concerned in the government. Despite those, the 10-crore first dose milestone makes us hopeful. We must thank the government for this," Prof Nazrul Islam, member of the National technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on

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NEW ELECTION COMMISSION FORMATION

Search panel asks parties for names

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The search committee, tasked with recommending people for appointments to the upcoming Election Commission, has sought names from political parties.

The panel will also hold separate talks with civil society members, media personalities and election experts next week before finalising the names it will send to the president.

In a circular last night, the Cabinet Division said each of the registered political parties can propose maximum 10 names for the posts of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and other commissioners.

People interested in the EC job can recommend their own names as well.

The names must be submitted either to the Cabinet Division or gfp_sec@cabinet.gov.bd by 5:00pm on Thursday, the circular said.

Earlier in the day, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said the six-member search committee, formed by President Abdul Hamid in line with a new law, will submit the names by February 24, the day the tenure of the panel expires.

The president will then appoint the CEC and other commissioners based on the panel's recommendations, according to the law.

"The names will be given before the stipulated time," Anwarul told reporters after the panel's first meeting yesterday. The meeting held at the Supreme

Court Judges Lounge continued for more than two hours.

Asked whether the committee will be able to complete the task before the expiry of the current Election Commission's tenure on February 14, Anwarul said, "We're also considering it. If there is any such obligation, the names will be submitted by that day."

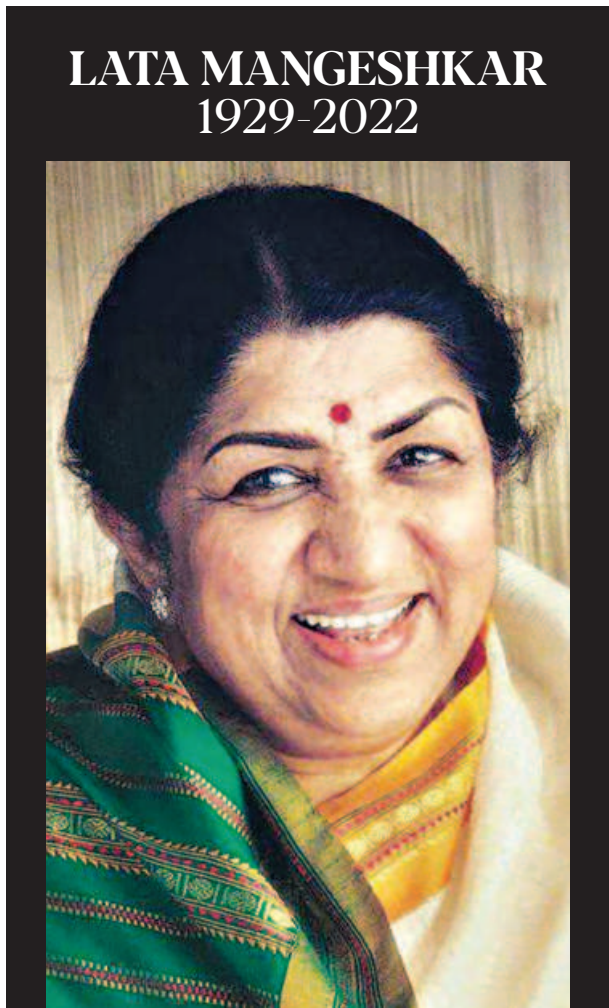
Meeting sources, however, said the committee would submit the names by February 24, not by February 14.

The search committee held the meeting just a day after it was formed by the president. It will suggest two names for each of the posts of the CEC and commissioners. The Cabinet Division is providing it with secretarial support.

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An eatery in the middle of the pavement near New Market in the capital. There are major shopping malls in the area and pedestrians as well as motorists suffer on the road because of such encroachment by hawkers.



The songbird falls silent

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Lata Mangeshkar's voice is immortal.

Yet if there is one song of hers that perfectly captures tributes to one of India's most beloved and revered singers, who passed away in a Mumbai hospital yesterday after a near month-long battle with post-Covid complications, it is "Naam gum jayega" from the 1977 movie "Kinara".

The song has the lyric "Naam gum jayega, chehara ye badal jayega/ Meri awaaz hi pehchan hai, agar yaad rahe" (My name will be lost, my face will change/ My voice is my identity, only if you can remember).

It is impossible to forget one of India's greatest cultural icons, whose songs spoke to the emotions of millions in South Asia, regardless of age or background.

This became clearer than ever as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi led thousands of mourners, many of them in tears, at Mumbai's landmark Shivaji Park where Bharat Ratna Lata Mangeshkar was cremated with full state honours. Representatives of the army, air force and navy joined others from various walks of life, including cricketer Sachin Tendulkar and Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan among the celebrities, in bidding farewell to her.

At 92, Lata breathed her last in Mumbai's Breach Candy Hospital where she was undergoing treatment since January 8 after being diagnosed with Covid and exhibiting mild symptoms. She was also diagnosed with pneumonia.

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Govt worried about high gas prices

Says State Minister Nasrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, said the government is concerned about the customers' dissatisfaction with the new gas pricing.

"Prices must be kept at a tolerable level," he told journalists yesterday while inspecting the zonal office of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company in Dhaka's Tikatuli area.

"The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission [Berc] has been advised to ensure that the hiked prices are at a tolerable level [for consumers]."

He also said the state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation is now incurring a loss of an average of Tk 10 crore by selling diesel every day.

"United efforts will be made to reduce energy wastage and to increase

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN