

Govt spent Tk 40,000cr on Covid shots

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has spent Tk 40,000cr for purchasing Covid-19 vaccines and implementing nationwide inoculation campaigns, said Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday.

“We have administered around 22 crore doses so far... No irregularity or fault was seen in such a huge campaign,” he said.

He made the statement while addressing a discussion marking World Kidney Day 2022 at the National Institute of Kidney Disease and Urology in Dhaka.

Of all jabs administered, 12.5cr were first doses, 8.5 crore second doses and 50 lakh booster doses. More than 1 lakh people worked for this, the minister said.

He also said Bloomberg ranked Bangladesh in the eighth position among all countries “for administering 22 crore vaccine jabs” within a short time.

Zahid Maleque also said the government would arrange a special campaign to administer booster doses like the ones for first and second doses. “This will keep the country safer.”

About the kidney disease situation in the country, the minister said that as many as 70-80 people have been dying from kidney disease while around 20-30 thousand people develop kidney disease every day.

“For this reason, we have taken projects to set up 10-bed dialysis centre and 10-bed ICU in each district separately. Besides, there will be cancer and kidney hospital in each of the eight divisions,” he added.

HC issues contempt rule against CEC Awal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a contempt of court rule against Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal for not registering Ganasamhati Andolon as a political party even though the court directed the Election Commission to do so almost three years ago.

The HC asked the CEC to explain in four weeks why contempt of court proceedings should not be launched against him.

The HC bench of Justice Mamnoon Rahman and Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman issued the rule after Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of the Ganasamhati, filed a petition in this regard.

At the hearing, lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua told the court that the HC on April 11, 2019, directed the CEC and the EC to register the Ganasamhati as a political party.

A copy of that order was submitted to the EC, but the commission is yet to register the Ganasamhati, which amounts to contempt of court, he added.

The lawyer said CEC Awal is responsible for implementing the HC directive.



A woman helps her daughter cross a wooden structure placed on a dug-up portion of the Atish Dipankar Road in the capital's Sabujbagh area yesterday. Dhaka South City Corporation dug the road over a month ago to improve the area's drainage. Meanwhile, the locals continue to suffer.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Rights bodies slam draft rules on social media

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights organisations have issued statements expressing alarm that the proposed social media regulation could pave the way to curb freedom of expression.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission released a draft regulation meant to regulate digital and social media and over-the-top (OTT) platforms.

Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB), a coalition of 20 organisations, in a statement yesterday said, “The Forum is worried about the vagueness concerning the regulation's scope and breadth of application and its lack of specificity in defining terminologies.”

Furthermore, the organisation is concerned about the draft regulation not clearly defining the grounds for removing content, and its power to impose restrictions on free speech.

The Forum said the lack of clear definitions in this draft regulation will create confusion and scope for abuse of the law. “For example, terms such as ‘content that hurts religious sentiments, secularism, culture and social values’ must be clearly defined,” said the statement.

HRFB said most provisions in the regulation are in direct conflict with international covenants on human rights, civic and political rights.

The regulation places restrictions on

those who host, publish, send, update information, which is contrary to the principles of free speech and open information.

“The privacy of individual citizens will be affected by the provision in the regulation which states that the BTRC or court can order the identity of the primary sender of an information to be revealed,” said the Forum.

“The end-to-end encryption

the years.

“We have seen thousands of arrests over a period of over one decade for expressions on social media that can be reasonably assessed to be lawful,” said TIB.

They also said powers given to the BTRC to cancel, suspend or revoke registration certificates may deter non-resident service providers from entering the Bangladesh market.

On Tuesday, Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST) had issued a similar statement saying the regulation will “inhibit democratic debate and discourse”.

“There is a risk that entities engaged in constructive but critical commentary on powerful actors, or in asserting rights or demanding justice and accountability in respect to corruption or human rights violations, may find it difficult to secure registration,” said BLAST.

The HRFB statement was signed by Golam Monowar Kamal, executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra; Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation; Zakir Hossain, chief executive of Nagorik Udyog; Sara Hossain, executive director of BLAST; Ranjan Karmakar, executive director of Steps Towards Development; Sanjeeb Drong, secretary-general of Bangladesh Adibashi Forum, and Saleh Ahmed, executive director of Bandhu Social Welfare Society.

Terms such as ‘content that hurts religious sentiments, secularism, culture and social values’ must be clearly defined.”

provided by WhatsApp will be rendered illegal by this regulation.”

Certain sections of the regulation are almost identical to some of the most abused sections of the Digital Security Act, observed the Forum.

These include sections pertaining to defamation, affecting the image of the nation and its sovereignty, breaching government secrecy, insulting the spirit of the Liberation War and the Father of Nation.

Transparency International Bangladesh in another statement yesterday said the power given to BTRC to remove content on the grounds mentioned above has been abused over

Decapitated body of girl found in Moulvibazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The decapitated body of an eight-year-old girl was recovered in Keshlututi of Moulvibazar's Kamalganj upazila on Wednesday night, nearly two hours after she had gone missing from near her home in the village.

Family members of the victim, Fatema Jannat Mou, a first grader of a local school, found the body in a hole at the back of their house, Mosharraf Hossain, inspector (investigation) of Kamalganj Shamsheernagar police outpost, said, adding that stab marks were also spotted in the neck and abdomen.

A murder case was filed with Kamalganj Police Station yesterday, and the body was sent to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital for an autopsy.

Teacher held over rape attempt in Natore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Rab yesterday arrested a 58-year-old madrasa teacher in Natore's Lalpur upazila where he had been hiding since March 6 after a case was filed against him for attempting to rape one of his students.

Acting on a tip-off, a Rab team arrested Hazrat Ali, principal of Dasgram Fazil Madrasa in Baraigram upazila, around 3:00am yesterday, said Farhad Hossain, company commander of Rab in Natore.

Farhad said Ali allegedly tried to rape the female student, 13, in a room of the madrasa earlier this month. As she screamed for help, other students along with locals rescued her.

During primary investigation, the accused confessed attempting to rape the girl, he also said.

Teen found dead in Thakurgaon hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Police early yesterday recovered a 14-year-old boy's body which was hanging from a shower head in the toilet of Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

OC Tanvirul Islam of Thakurgaon Police Station said the victim, Devdas, of Ghoshpara area under Thakurgaon municipality, had gone to the hospital late Wednesday night to visit one of his friends Anirban, also 14.

Police suspect it is a case of suicide, he said, adding that an unnatural case was filed in this regard.

3 Covid deaths in 24hrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three people died of Covid-19 and 327 cases were registered in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to a press release from the DGHS.

The positivity rate was 1.91 percent, it said, adding that the caseload reached 19,48,798 and the death toll 29,100.

A total of 17,103 samples were tested across the country in those 24 hours. All the three dead were males, it also said.

BJP soars

FROM PAGE 1

For Congress, the elections results in the five states will bring its position as a glue of an anti-BJP coalition under fresh questioning and critics of the Gandhi clan within the party will be emboldened, analysts say.

AAP's triumph in Punjab gives a big boost to the party and Kejriwal's hopes of becoming a bigger player in India's national politics.

The party also won two seats in Goa with a vote share of 6.77 percent.

On the other hand, TMC chief Mamata Banerjee's national aspirations suffered a blow yesterday as her party put up a flop show in the coastal state of Goa, where it failed to win a single seat in the 40-member legislative assembly. TMC's vote share in Goa is 5.21 percent.

Last year, TMC suffered a virtual wipe-out in Tripura's civic body polls.

On the other hand, AAP secured one seat and led in another in Goa with a higher vote share than TMC.

BJP's win in UP, which sends the maximum number of Lok Sabha members (80)

and where the polls outcome is considered bellwether, and in three other states signals consolidation of its power and ideological hold in Indian politics. The victories will be seen as referendums on Modi's popularity ahead of the 2024 general election.

For Congress, the loss in Punjab, one of the major states where it had power, means its pan-India footprints have shrunk further. It is now left in power in just two heartland states – Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh – adding to its continued nightmare.

In Uttar Pradesh, Congress was set to end up in fourth place.

Wracked by infighting, Congress has itself to blame for the debacle in Punjab, as it replaced its Chief Minister Amarinder Singh just four months before assembly polls.

Saffron-robed Adityanath, who many consider to be Modi's heir, is set to become the first Chief Minister of UP to return to power with a decisive mandate after serving a full five-year term.

magistrates have started conducting drives in the market to stop those who make extra profit through SO trade of various consumer goods.”

Akhter added that the administration will look into the fact that the prices are not mentioned in the SOs.

The government fixed the retail price of loose palm oil at Tk 135 a kg, and soyabean oil at Tk 180. They were sold at Taka 140 and 180 in the retail markets of Chattagram yesterday.

FDA approves Eskayef facility

FROM PAGE 1

Pregabalin is an anti-epileptic drug, which is also used to control neuropathic pain. Eskayef, the third drug manufacturer from Bangladesh to get the US FDA approval, will launch the product in the US shortly.

Eskayef's manufacturing sites have earlier received approvals from other global regulatory authorities.

These are United Kingdom Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (UK MHRA), European Union (EU) Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) of UK, Brazil Agencia Nacional de Vigilancia Sanitaria (Brazil ANVISA) and Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) of Australia.

“Unwavering commitment to quality has always been at the forefront of Eskayef's drive to serving humanity, and receiving this accreditation from the US FDA has solidified our hold as the epitome of quality products for the people of Bangladesh and the world,” said Simeen Rahman, group CEO of Transcom Limited and managing director and CEO of Eskayef Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

“It is a moment of great pride and a significant move towards our long-term strategy of stepping into the US market. In this journey, we have the aspiration to focus on technology-driven molecules and complex products in the pipeline to address unmet patient needs, where I believe the

talented individuals at Eskayef will differentiate us from others,” she said. During the ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic, Eskayef launched the world's first generic Remdesivir brand Remivir, first generic Molnupiravir brand

ESKAYEF'S INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION	
INT'L REGULATORY AUTHORITY	APPROVAL YEAR
UK MHRA	2008
EU GMP	2009
UK VMD	2011
Australia TGA	2011
South Africa SHAPRA	2020
Brazil ANVISA	2021
US FDA	2022

Monuvir and first generic version of Nirmatrelvir tablets co-packaged with Ritonavir tablets with the brand name Paxovir, it said. **SIGNIFICANCE OF US FDA APPROVAL** Of nearly 200 pharmaceuticals companies operating in Bangladesh, Eskayef has won the US FDA approval after Square and Beximco Pharma.

The approval from one of the toughest regulators will enable Eskayef to export drugs to the US market as it depicts a high quality.

The US FDA issues export certificates for approved or licenced drugs and for unapproved drugs that meet certain legal

requirements.

The approval of FDA is important, because it validates the need for research on how drugs work on patients. In order to receive FDA approval for a drug or a medical device, the manufacturer must prove to the FDA that the item is “safe and effective”.

Officials said Eskayef got the approval following more than five years of efforts.

The recognition will play a big role in further accelerating export of drugs made in Bangladesh, the country which posted export earnings of \$169 million from pharmaceuticals shipment in the 2020-21 fiscal year, more than twice the overall receipts of \$83 million five years ago.

During the current fiscal year, drug exports have been buoyant. Manufacturers, including Eskayef, logged 21 percent higher year-on-year export receipts to \$130 million in the July-February period of the current fiscal year.

“This is really a matter of great pride. This shows that some of our manufacturers are making drugs maintaining international quality. Such recognition is also testament to the fact that we have very efficient human resources like pharmacists to make world-class drugs,” said Professor ABM Faroque, former dean of Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Dhaka.

Congratulating Eskayef, he said, “We want to see them getting approval for more and more drugs from US FDA in the coming days.” Professor Faroque

suggested local drug makers who got FDA approval to be cautious and maintain high standards so that more drugs from Bangladesh get approval from the US FDA, the strictest drug regulator in the world.

Md Mustafizur Rahman, professor of pharmacy discipline of the Life Science School at Khulna University, said the US FDA approval for a company means that its production processes have reached US standards.

“This approval helps companies export its products to the US market and the US importers do not remain uncertain about the quality of the products. Additionally, Regulators of other countries take the approval without any question, which is an honour for any company,” he noted.

Eskayef Pharma is one of the organisations of Transcom group founded by Late Latifur Rahman, who was awarded with Oslo Business for Peace Award in 2012, the highest distinction given to a businessperson for outstanding accomplishments in the area of ethical business.

Eskayef has been producing medicines for 32 years and currently exporting to 67 countries across six continents.

The drug maker, which manufactures and markets a wide range of therapeutic drugs, bulk pellets, and animal health and nutrition products, started its journey in 1990, when Bangladesh's operation of SK&F, USA was acquired by Transcom Group.

Govt decides

FROM PAGE 1

The decisions were made at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase yesterday.

Talking to The Daily Star, finance ministry officials said the authorities have already decided to reduce the VAT on edible oil to 15 percent from 35pc. It will remain in effect till June, they said.

VAT on the other commodities will be also be lowered soon, they said.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the minister mainly blamed the Ukraine-Russia War for the price hike.

“Wars are not in our hands. In such situation, imports face hurdles and prices become dearer. Sometimes, importers also take advantage of this ... That's why we have decided to deploy TCB,” he said.

“We believe we will be able to tackle this situation, like the way we handled the situation after the pandemic.”

Admitting that people were being severely affected by the soaring prices, he said at least one crore families would be benefited if the essentials were delivered properly.

Currently, TCB trucks sell essentials at subsidised prices in metropolitan areas. Sometimes, the truck sale continues at the district level. The government has for the first time decided to take the trucks into unions.

Contacted, Shafiq Zaman, additional secretary of the finance ministry, told The Daily Star that the decision was made after the Prime Minister's Office instructed to help five crore people by providing them with the commodities.

“With the help of deputy commissioners and UNOs,

we have already prepared a list of one crore families. The essentials will be distributed in two phases,” he said.

The phase-1 distribution is expected to begin on March 15 ahead of Ramadan. The second phase will be launched during the Holy month.

According to the decision, the TCB will buy 14,000 metric tonnes of sugar from Meghna Sugar Refined Ltd and City Sugar Industries Ltd; 10,000 metric tonnes of chickpeas from Sena Kalyan Sangstha, M/s Blue Sky Enterprise, and Ruby Food Products Ltd; 19,500 metric tonnes of lentil from Sabnam Vegetable Oil Industries Ltd, East Services Ltd, Porbo International, M/s Roy Traders, Plantagic Incorporation, Bashundhara Food and Beverage Ltd, and Basumati Distribution Ltd; and one crore 71 lakh litres of soyabean oil from Sena Edible Oil Industries Ltd, Super Oil Refined Limited, Meghna Edible Oils Refinery Ltd, City Edible Oil Ltd, Basundhara Multi food Products Ltd, and Shun Shing Edible Oil Ltd.

Global food

FROM PAGE 1

Attempts to send aid and evacuation convoys have failed for six days. Russian aircraft were targeting convoy routes yesterday, Petro Andruschenko, an adviser to Mariupol's mayor, told Reuters by phone.

Russian forces have advanced in the south but have yet to capture a single city in the north or east. Western countries have said they believe that after a planned lightning strike on Kyiv failed in the early days of the war Moscow has turned to tactics involving far more destructive assaults.