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From: PIO, PID, Dhaka  
Fax: 9540553/9540026  
E-mail: [piddhaka@gmail.com](mailto:piddhaka@gmail.com)  
Web: [www.pressinform.gov.bd](http://www.pressinform.gov.bd)

### News Brief

The ECNEC yesterday approved a total of six projects, involving an overall estimated cost of Taka 9,569.23 crore including the 1st revision of the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Pandemic Preparedness Project with an additional cost of Taka 5,659.07 crore in a bid to mainly procure, preserve and distribute COVID-19 vaccines to rein in the spread of this deadly virus. Chaired by the ECNEC Chairperson and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina virtually from Ganabhaban, the meeting also approved a project titled "Procurement of equipment for conducting search, rescue operations and establishing emergency communication during earthquake and other disasters (3rd phase)" with an estimated cost of Taka 2,275.99 crore to bolster the ongoing disaster management operations. The other projects approved in the meeting are-Construction of modern Tottho (information) complex, 1st phase, with Taka 1,103.66 crore, the Sundarbans Protection Project with Taka 157.88 crore, Upgrading district highways into due standard and width, 1st revised with an additional cost of Taka 122.82 crore and Chattogram City Outer Ring Road, 3rd revised, project with an additional cost of Taka 249.81 crore.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader called upon the private universities along with the public universities to lay more emphasis on research work as he was virtually addressing the silver jubilee of Asian University of Bangladesh yesterday. Noting that the coronavirus pandemic has put adverse impacts on educational insulations, he said the government will soon take a decision in this regard after considering the aspects of new coronavirus strain and receiving opinions from experts.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan virtually joining a seminar titled "Strengthening of Jute Fiber for Composite Application" yesterday said, polythene and petroleum products are dangerous for environment adding that there is no option of biodegradable jute. The government has taken various initiatives to ensure diversified use of jute, he said.

Law Minister Anisul Huq said, the e-procurement system is very much important in reducing corruption in the government's procurement issues and to purchase accurate items at a reasonable price. People's participation will be increased and transparency will be ensured if the e-procurement system is properly implemented in all sectors including the judiciary, he said as he was addressing an online training course on e-procurement for judicial officers yesterday.

Dhaka has sought "effective and proactive" support from the international community to deal with the climate change issues noting that nearly 25 to 30 million people of Bangladesh will be uprooted from their homes if there is a one-meter rise in sea level. Foreign Minister Dr. A K Abdul Momen made the call as he was addressing the 'Virtual Pre-GFMD 2020 National Consultation' organized by Parliamentary Caucus on Migration and Development yesterday. By drawing global community's attention to Rohingya crisis, he added, the Global Forum on Migration and Development-GFMD should take more right-based approach and include protection measures in the migration policies aiming to ensure effective international governance of migration.

The Foreign Minister said, the government will form a virtual platform involving 78 foreign missions and other officials concerned to help attract more foreign direct investment-FDI, as he was addressing the first day of the virtual international business conclave yesterday, organized by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority-BEZA received investment proposals amounting to around US\$4.080 billion in 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic, officials said.

The general point-to-point inflation rate eased in December, last year as it came down by 0.23 percentage to 5.29 percentage point, Planning Minister M A Mannan informed after the ECNEC meeting.

Amid concerns over whether the Oxford vaccine's arrival in Bangladesh would be delayed after the remarks made by the chief of Serum Institute of India -SII regarding the bar of export of vaccine on Sunday, Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram Doraiswami yesterday tweeted that the country's "cherished partner Bangladesh" has no cause for alarm over receiving the Covid-19 vaccine on time because India always prioritises its neighbors. To clear all confusions, SII CEO Adar Poonawalla also tweeted yesterday that exports of COVID vaccines are permitted to all countries. Meanwhile, India's Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan has said, the two coronavirus vaccines—"Covishield" and "Covaxin" manufactured by SII and Bharat Biotech Ltd respectively will be ready for rollout in 10 days from the "emergency use" authorization approvals. In this connection, the SII and Bharat Biotech issued a joint statement yesterday saying that they had pledged to ensure a smooth roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines to India and the world. Meanwhile, report quoting top officials of the Health ministry and Beximco Pharmaceuticals Limited said, Bangladesh will get the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from the SII at the price the Indian government will pay for it.

The number of deaths from Covid-19 in Bangladesh rose to 7670 with the death of 20 more people yesterday. At the same time recovery count rose to 4,62,459, Directorate General of Health Services-DGHS disclosed this information in a press release yesterday. With the detection of 991 new cases, the total number of Covid-19 cases rose to 5,17,920.

Bangladesh requested revision of India's Line of Credit-LOC agreement for enhancing use of local materials as the first High Level Project Monitoring Committee Meeting comprising the high officials of Bangladesh and India was held virtually on Sunday led by Bangladesh's Economic Relations Division Secretary and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, to review progress of LOC projects.

State Minister for Information Dr. Md. Murad Hassan addressing a discussion program at National Press Club yesterday, marking the 2nd death anniversary of Syed Ashraful Islam said, the contribution of Syed Ashraful Islam towards bringing Awami League to its current position from the disastrous time during the caretaker government is unforgettable. He was well known as a selfless personality in Bangladesh's politics, he said.

Kistrech Theatre International in collaboration with Kenyan state-run educational institute, Kisii University will perform a play on Bangladesh's Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on university campus, at theatre and on buses in Nairobi and Kisii city in October 2021, marking the birth centenary of Bangabandhu, a press release said yesterday.

Bangladesh Awami League in a statement yesterday greeted the countrymen on the completion of 12 years at a stretch under the leadership of Bangabandhu's daughter Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Bangladesh in the Global Cyber Security Index lifted to 65th position from the previous 73rd and the country will be developed as the world's cyber security service providing hub in future, State Minister for ICT Division Zunaid Ahmed Palak stated this as he was addressing a prize distribution ceremony of a competition on the occasion of "Digital Bangladesh Day-2020" at ICT Tower in Agargaon yesterday.

The government so far approved 29 applications from rice millers and traders to import 330,000 tons of rice to curb spiraling prices in the domestic market.

Bangladesh Police requested Interpol to issue a red notice on Proshanta Kumar Halder, who is facing a graft case for illegally amassing wealth and money laundering. In another development, the High Court yesterday issued a travel ban against 25 accomplices of PK Halder, including his mother Lilaboti Halder, so that the Anti Corruption Commission can question them about money laundering allegations. A court also set January 19 yesterday to hold a hearing on charge framing in Niko graft case against BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia and others.



Surath Kumar Sarker  
Principal Information Officer  
Phone- 9546091