Government confident India will have over 2 billion vaccine doses by December, minister says

The Indian government is confident that the country will be able to meet an ambitious target of having more than 2 billion coronavirus vaccine doses by the end of the year, Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said.

Last month, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said in a statement that India will have 516 million vaccine doses by July, including shots already administered, and that the number will rise to 2.16 billion doses between August and December.

"We have paid the two existing domestic manufacturers, Serum Institute (of India) and Bharat Biotech, advance money to produce vaccines for the whole of May, June, and July. We are only past May," Puri told CNBC's Tanvir Gill in an interview. He explained that the government is also in advanced stages of talks with other vaccine manufacturers.

The government is "absolutely confident of being able to meet this target by December," Puri added.

In its forecast, the Indian government expects about 750 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine that is being locally produced by the Serum Institute of India and is known as Covishield. Another 550 million doses of Covaxin, which is developed and produced by Indian company Bharat Biotech, are also expected.

Both vaccines are being currently used in India's inoculation campaign where more than 222 million doses have been administered as of Thursday — but a majority of them are first of the two doses required for immunity.

Russia's Sputnik vaccine — the third shot to get approved — will contribute about 156 million to the predicted tally. Reuters reported that six Indian companies have already signed deals to produce around 1 billion doses of the vaccine annually and that Serum Institute is also seeking approval to make it.

In addition, India has also authorized foreign-made vaccines that have been granted emergency approval by the U.S., U.K., European Union, Japan and World Health Organization-listed agencies.

Experts agree that vaccination is the way forward for India — both to bring the economy out of the Covid crisis and to mitigate the effects of a third wave. But vaccine hesitancy, in part due to misinformation being spread about the shots, has been an issue both in India and globally.

Vaccines are also in short supply and that has slowed down domestic inoculation efforts and forced India to halt exports to other countries.

For his part, Puri said that proper dissemination of information and education around vaccination is needed and that the government is doing its part.

India is battling a devastating second wave of outbreak that started in February and accelerated in April and early May, which overwhelmed the country's health-care infrastructure.

cnbc

The state cares about the welfare of every citizen

It should be noted that today in Uzbekistan the foundation is being laid for a new revival - the Third Renaissance. In this sense, a number of practical measures are being taken in Uzbekistan today as a result of the reforms being carried out in all spheres.

Especially mahalla activists are pleased that in recent years, under the leadership of the President, serious attention has been paid to reforming the mahalla system, turning it into a people's structure in which justice and truth are decided.

The creation of the Ministry for the Support of Mahalla and Family on the basis of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated February 18, 2020 "On measures to improve the social and spiritual environment in society, further support of the institution of the mahalla and bring the system of work with family and women to a new level" opened a new historical, literally a new turning point in the activities of makhallas to improve the prospects of the system.

An integrated and effective vertical system for solving problems on the ground has been created through the ministry.

These initiatives are based on only one goal - to satisfy the people living in this country with life, the state, and to ensure happiness for our people.

In particular, a number of measures have been taken to ensure social protection of the population, social protection of citizens in difficult situations.

As an important step in this direction and a new method of work, on the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the "Iron Book" system was created in the regions, which makes it possible to track and help families in need of social protection.

According to this list, in 2020, 417 billion soums were allocated to low-income families, as well as about 426 billion soums in September this year to provide the children of such families and children with disabilities with school uniforms, school supplies, winter clothes and hats.

The number of people receiving social benefits has increased almost 1.5 times.

By the end of 2020, their number increased from the 774 thousand to 1.2 million, for which 12.5 trillion soums were allocated from the state budget.

During the pandemic, from April 2 to May 20, 2020, 413,072 low-income families received food products worth 49 billion 910 million soums through the Sponsorship and Coordination Centers established under the regional branches of the Ministry, and the Coordination and Volunteer Sponsorship Centers that operated from July 13 to On August 14, food products worth 35 billion 24 million soums were provided to 317,282 low-income families and medicines worth 427.3 million soums to 3,965 families.

By the decision of the district (city) Councils of People's Deputies, 479,400 families were provided with material assistance at the expense of the "Sakhovat va Kumak" Foundation.

In order to protect public health during the 2020 pandemic, to provide the necessary medical care to patients with coronavirus, "Recommendations for organizing quarantine at home" were developed and implemented. As a result, the disease was prevented from spreading.

During this period, from quarantined households 84,435 were visited, of which 6,897 were provided with food, 3,051 with medicines and 4,105 with hygienic items.

In May 2020, as a result of the natural man-made situation at the Sardoba reservoir in the Syrdarya region, great material and moral assistance was provided to the victims.

The state, at the most important stage of the event, was able to demonstrate its humanitarian power, give its citizens the necessary motivation to hope for the future, to take a bold step into the future. The government has shown its social concern in the harmony of the qualities of nobility, hospitality and integrity of our people.

The head of state arrived at the scene the same day and instilled in the people strong confidence.

The Sardoba incident showed that our people are in harmony with the qualities of nobility, hospitality and integrity.

A large amount of practical work has been done to eliminate the consequences of the disaster. 1,830 houses in need of repair were repaired and handed over to the population by officials of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, regions and the city of Tashkent. 4543 flood victims were issued bank cards for 40 million soums, 252 people - bank cards for 20 million soums, and money was transferred. In addition, 15,574 household appliances (refrigerators, televisions, electric stoves, etc.) were distributed to families.

In a short period of time, 86 modern multi-storey houses with 2,640 apartments were built for the local population in Sardoba, Mirzaabad and Akaltin districts of Syrdarya.

These are 37 houses with 1,480 apartments in Sardoba district, 9 houses with 360 apartments and 40 houses with 800 apartments in Mirzaabad district. These houses were distributed to flood-affected families in the prescribed manner.

All children in the country are vaccinated against various diseases free of charge through regional medical clinics, and thus their healthy development is constantly monitored.

In particular, the fact that children from families in need of social protection and citizens with disabilities are admitted to higher education institutions on the basis of certain privileges is also recognized as a major social event among the foreign community.

In the 2020 academic year, an additional 940 state grants were allocated for such girls on the basis of this system for full-time departments of higher education institutions.

The type and amount of social assistance provided to women by the state is also increasing over time.

This year, the Ministry for support of Mahalla and Family has trained 12,186 women in sewing, hairdressing, cooking, psychology, computer literacy and entrepreneurial skills at Women's Entrepreneurship Centers. **12,922 women** were trained in vocational training centers. **17,448 women** were involved in handicrafts and **12,101** in home-based work, **4,873 women** were attached to experienced craftsmen in the mahallas (gold-broiderery, embroidery, carpet weaving, jewelry, weaving).

Within the framework of the programs "Every family is an entrepreneur", "Development of handicrafts", "Youth is our future", 70,145 women were employed and 30,298 women were involved in entrepreneurship. More than 14,000 women with difficult social conditions were involved in permanent employment, 179.9 thousand in paid public works, and 4.4 thousand in entrepreneurship.

To be continued

Uzbekistan launches national "Commit to Quit" campaign for World no Tobacco Day 2021

On 28 May, WHO, alongside the Ministry of Health of Uzbekistan, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Uzbekistan and the Uzbekistan Medical Students' Association (UzMSA – Phenomenon), launched the "Commit to Quit" nationwide campaign online in association with World No Tobacco Day, with the aim of expanding access to services for those looking to quit tobacco.

Tobacco use causes a significant health burden, killing over 8 million people a year around the world. Seven million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use, with a further 1.2 million non-smokers dying from exposure to second-hand smoke.

According to WHO, in 2018, 17% of young people aged 15–24 used tobacco worldwide, and 11.5% of girls and 13.8% of boys aged 13–15 used tobacco in the WHO European Region.

Recent monitoring undertaken by the Ibn Sino Public Fund in Tashkent and Samarkand identified that the sponsorship of tobacco products, along with advertising and promotion near schools and other public places, was attracting more and more young people to engage in tobacco usage.

Within the framework of the "Commit to Quit" campaign, the WHO Country Office in Uzbekistan, together with WHO/Europe, WHO headquarters, United Nations partners, the Ministry of Health and other governmental and nongovernmental entities, will carry out several activities over the next 12 months.

Deputy Minister of Health of Uzbekistan Dr Elmira Basitkhanova highlighted the country's 100-day campaign, which promotes "100 reasons to quit tobacco" through different activities designed to ensure access to resources for those attempting to quit.

Bangladesh goes from basket case to rising star

May 25 was a historic day for the small South Asian country of Bangladesh, when its central bank approved a $200 million currency swap facility for the nearby island economy of Sri Lanka.

Last month, Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves had dropped to $4.5 billion, or about what it owes external lenders, following a year in which the country's economy had been ravaged by a sharp economic downturn caused by COVID-19. Meanwhile, Bangladesh, whose economy has weathered the pandemic surprisingly well, held foreign exchange reserves of about $45 billion.

Bangladesh, which had been famously written off as a "basket case" in 1971 by U.S. President Richard Nixon's national security adviser, Henry Kissinger -- shortly after the country's creation following a bloody war of independence with Pakistan -- has more recently shed that label.

In the 2020-21 fiscal year, Bangladesh for the first time ever overtook its giant neighbor India in terms of per capita income at market prices, although Indian chagrin was assuaged to some extent by the fact that it remained ahead in per capita income measured at purchasing power parity. Nevertheless, that Bangladesh has so rapidly closed the income gap with India, without whose intervention the country would never have come into being, represents a significant shift of economic prowess in the region.

Bangladesh's economic rise has been powered by the ready-made garment industry, which according to a March 2021 report from McKinsey & Co., a management consultancy, accounts for fully 84% of the country's exports after recording a compound annual growth rate of 7% for the last decade.

As the report notes, the phenomenal growth of the industry was born out of tragedy, following several well-publicized factory tragedies in 2012 and 2013 that led to the loss of more than a thousand lives. Facing the prospect of losing important customers, and the loss of tariff preferences in the U.S., the sector was forced to restructure and has since moved from strength to strength.

After ready-made garments, remittances from the country's diaspora are Bangladesh's second-largest source of foreign exchange earnings. In the first 10 months of the 2020-21 fiscal year which ends in June, the country raked in more than $20 billion in remittances, according to central bank data, setting a new record.

This helps explain the country's large foreign exchange buffer, which permitted its largesse to Sri Lanka. It should be noted that the spike in remittances in recent years reflects in part a crackdown on hundi, a traditional but informal as well as illegal, remittance mechanism that does not show up in official statistics.

Bangladesh's recent success was far from preordained. The country is subject to frequent devastating cyclones and flooding, and it has had more than its fair share of political instability and internecine warfare between two political dynasties that go back to the country's founding. As a Muslim-majority country, Bangladesh has seen a rise in Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, and politics, as elsewhere in the region, have recently taken an authoritarian turn.

While politics and geography cannot explain the country's rise, the key seems to lie in its extremely strong social and human development indicators, crucially including for women. Infant mortality is 26 deaths in 1,000 live births, lower than the 28 in India. Female literacy is 72%, higher than India's at 66%. The female rate of labor force participation is 36%, compared to 20% for India. Remarkably, while this important statistic has been falling for India, it has been rising for Bangladesh. Indeed, across the board, Bangladesh bests India on a range of human development indicators relating to education, health and women's empowerment.

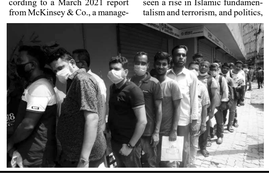
Any comparison between Bangladesh and its gigantic neighbor is always going to be complex. While India is vying to become one of the world's great powers, often billed as a counterweight to China, its small eastern neighbor, which has largely been a footnote in geopolitical discourse about the region, has been quietly flying below the radar and has become in its own way a manufacturing powerhouse for labor-intensive goods, especially garments, something India has never managed to accomplish despite its abundance of unskilled labor and the efforts of successive governments.

This past year has been humbling for India. Just-released statistics show that the economy contracted by a whopping 7.3% in the 2020-21 fiscal year which ends in March, the worst performance in decades.

By contrast, Bangladesh's economy is estimated to have expanded by 5.8% in the same period. Thus, while India was the worst performer among major economies during the year of COVID-19, Bangladesh was among the best.

While COVID cases have begun to come down, India remains in the grip of a deadly second wave of the pandemic.

On May 18, Bangladesh gifted thousands of boxes of essential medicines and medical equipment to India.



Ukrainian captain held in Sri Lanka for six years without a charge

Captain Gennadiy Gavrylov, the former master of the floating armory Avant Garde, has returned home after six years of detention in Sri Lanka, according to the Marine Transport Workers' Trade Union of Ukraine (MTWTU).

The armory vessel Avant Garde was arrested in the port of Galle, Sri Lanka in October 2015. At the time, the vessel operator told local media that it had received permission from the country's defense ministry for the vessel to enter the port; upon arrival, Sri Lankan Navy officials boarded the ship and placed it under government control.

In a search, Sri Lankan authorities found 816 T56 rifles (an AK-47 variant) and 84 other firearms on board the ship, along with about 200,000 rounds of ammunition. The vessel was allegedly licensed to carry no more than 100 arms. Additionally, at least 59 of the guns found allegedly had no discernable serial numbers.

Gavrylov, the Avant Garde's captain, was arrested in June 2016 in connection with the case but was not formally charged with a crime. Still, he was held in Sri Lanka and prevented from leaving, working at sea or contacting his family at will.

After five years of diplomatic appeals by the MTWTU, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka (NUSSL), Gavrylov has finally been permitted to return home. On Friday, he arrived safely in Ukraine and was reunited with his family.

"The return of Captain Gavrylov to his homeland is a true and long-awaited triumph of justice. We sincerely thank everyone who fought shoulder to shoulder with us for Gennadiy's freedom, especially the ITF for their brave struggle and invaluable help and to our brother Union in helped me return home," said Gavrylov in a statement.

COVID is crushing Nepal, from remote villages to Kathmandu to Mt. Everest

Editor's note: One of the photographs in this story, of a crematorium, could be disturbing to some readers.

When health workers finally arrived last month in the remote village of Namanta, up in the forested foothills of Nepal's Himalayas, residents hid in their homes.

They'd been advised not to welcome strangers, who might spread the coronavirus. But it was already too late. Out of 64 households in the village, 30 of them had someone who was ill. Those individuals hadn't been able to get tested though: The nearest coronavirus testing facility was a 3-hour walk away. Nobody who was sick could make it that far. So as residents huddled in their homes, many of them coughing, they were frightened by the surprise arrival of strangers in surgical masks. One villager made a phone call. "They called us and said, 'There are these new people in town. They say they're here to help. What should we do?'" recalls Srijana Karki, the South Asia regional director for World Neighbors, a development charity based in Oklahoma.

Namanta is one of dozens of communities across Nepal – many of them high in rugged mountain terrain — where Karki and her colleagues run workshops teaching villagers how to farm their land sustainably, care for livestock and manage natural resources better.