

Health

COVID cases hit 1mn

Germany prepares virus vaccine drive

TUTTLINGEN, Germany, Nov 28, (AP): Hauling gray boxes are rolling off the production line at a factory in the southern town of Tuttlingen, ready to be shipped to the front in the next phase of Germany's battle against the coronavirus as it became the latest country to hit the milestone of 1 million confirmed cases Friday.

Man-sized freezers such as those manufactured by family-owned firm Binder GmbH could become a key part of the vast immunization program the German government is preparing to roll out when the first vaccines become available next month.

That's because one of the front-runners in the race for a vaccine is BioNTech, a German company that together with US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer has developed a shot it says is up to 96% effective in trials but comes with a small hitch: it needs to be cooled to minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit) for shipping and storage.

Ensuring such temperatures, colder even than an Antarctic winter, is just one of the many challenges that countries face in trying to get their populations immunized.

The effort has been compared to a military operation. Indeed some countries, including Germany, are relying on military and civilian expertise to ensure the precious doses are safely transported from manufacturing plants to secret storage facilities, before being distributed.

Germany has benefited from the market power that comes with being a member of the European Union. The 27-nation bloc's executive Commission - led by former German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen - has spearheaded negotiations with vaccine makers, ordering more than a billion doses so far.

German officials have said the country hopes to secure up to 300 million doses from the EU orders and bilateral deals with three manufacturers in Germany, including BioNTech and CureVac, a company based in Tuebingen that says its vaccine can be stored at regular refrigerator temperatures for up to three months. Its trials are not as far along, however, as Pfizer/BioNTech and others.

The figure of 300 million is contingent on all vaccines being developed making it to market. That would be more than enough to immunize Germany's population of 83 million, even if two shots are required, as seems likely.

Delivered

How exactly the vaccine is delivered to patients differs from country to country. In Germany, the federal government has delegated the task to its 16 states, which are now working to build large vaccination centers.

The city-state of Berlin has drafted in Albrecht Broemme, a veteran of disaster management. The former Berlin fire chief later led Germany's federal civil protection organization THW, where he helped organize disaster relief operations for floods, storms and quakes around the world.

The 67-year-old is now coordinating the setting-up of six vaccine hubs in Berlin in a convention center, two former airports, an ice skating rink, a concert hall and an indoor cycle race track.

Authorities want them ready by mid-December to begin vaccinating more than 3,000 people per day at each location. With just a few minutes to deliver each shot and mindful of keeping the number of people in each center at a minimum, Broemme and his colleagues are devising a one-way flow system similar to that found in large stores like furniture company Ikea.

Each site will be run by a medical aid group, such as the Red Cross, with volunteers to help register and guide people through the venue.

Like elsewhere, the first phase of vaccination in Berlin will likely focus on immunizing health care workers and vulnerable groups such as the elderly and those with chronic illnesses. About 20,000 people will be vaccinated each day, returning after three weeks for a booster shot.

Demand is likely to outstrip supply at first, but that will change as more vaccines come onto the market.

"We're hopeful that approvals in the field of vaccination will be issued very quickly," German Chancellor Angela Merkel told parliament on Thursday. "That won't solve the problem immediately, but there's a light at the end of the tunnel."

Broemme has said he expects four-fifths of the vaccines initially available to need ultra-low cooling. That means every center will need a pharmacy that handles both the storage and thawing of vaccines.

At the other end of the country in Tuttlingen, Binder GmbH, one of hundreds of medical device manufacturers in the town, some with a history dating back to the 19th century, is seeing demand for its freezers surge.

Priced at 13,000-15,000 euros (\$15,500-17,900), each device can keep tens of thousands of vials of vaccine at optimum temperature, says Peter Wimmer, the company's head of innovation.

"It's plug and play," he told the AP. "All you need is an electrical socket, switch it on and the device is ready to go."

Having the whole vaccination system ready to go at the touch of a button is a different matter, though.

Immunization

It is still unclear who will actually administer the vaccines in Berlin. Unlike Britain, which has a centralized National Health Service organizing the immunization drive, Germany is relying on doctors associations to provide the necessary medical staff.

Doerthe Arnold, a spokeswoman for the Berlin branch of Germany's Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians, said they are still waiting for the state government to provide details on what will be required of doctors.

"Despite the positive feedback from doctors practices that they're willing to help out even more, providing medical personnel for the six vaccination centers will be a challenge," she said.

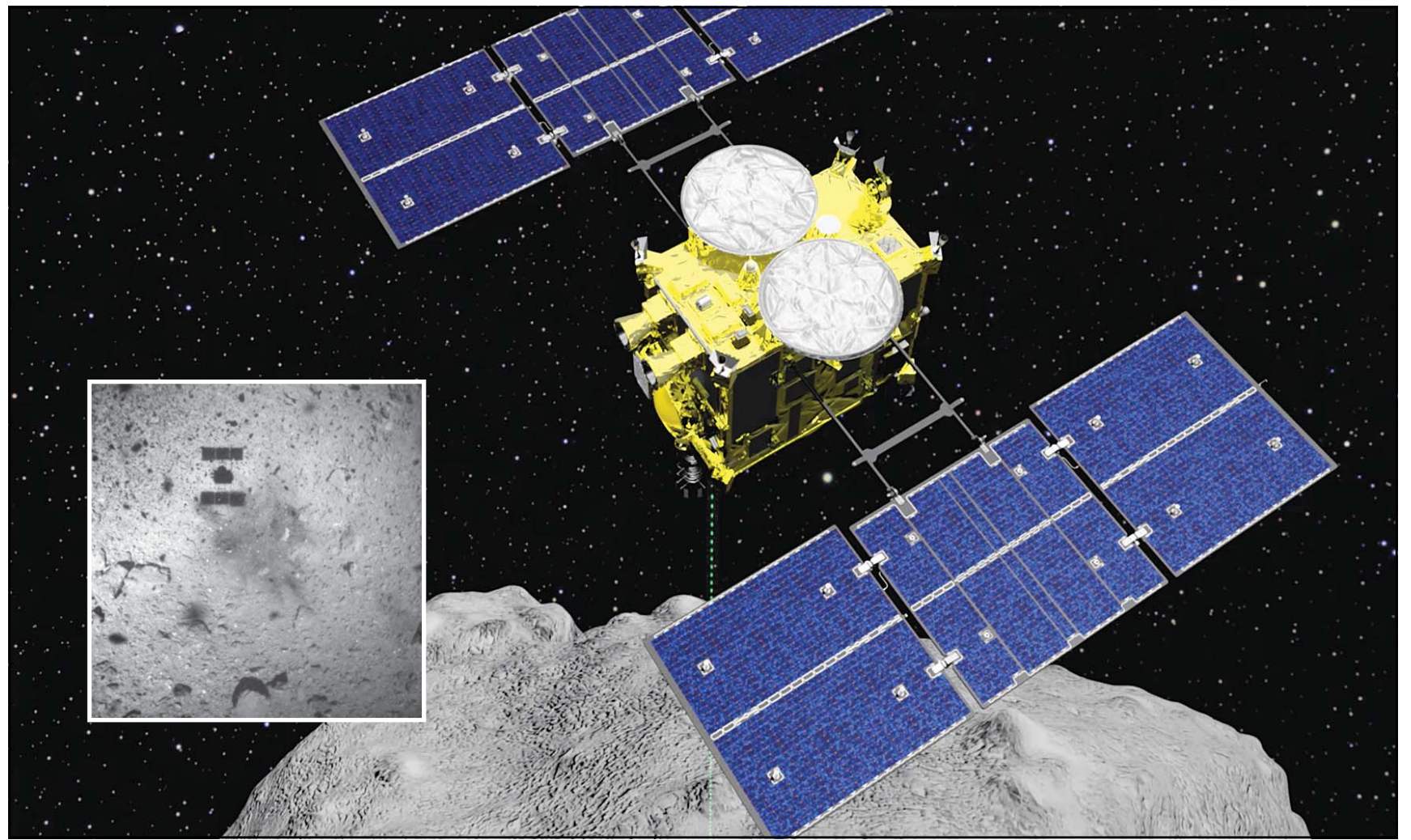
The limits of medical logistics were tested in spring, when huge worldwide demand for ventilators, therapeutic drugs, face masks and other protective equipment prompted bidding wars, bottlenecks and reports of faulty products.

Global logistics company DHL estimates that to provide worldwide coverage of vaccines over the coming two years may require 15,000 flights.

"The challenge is the sheer number of doses and the fact that it's not clear which vaccine needs to go where," Sabine Hartmann, a DHL spokeswoman, told The AP. "It's not something a single company can do on its own. All logistics companies have to work together on this."



Ursula



This computer graphics image released by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) shows the Hayabusa2 spacecraft above the asteroid Ryugu. Inset: This Feb 22, 2019 file image JAXA shows the shadow, (center above), of the Hayabusa2 spacecraft after its successful touchdown on the asteroid Ryugu. (AP)

Europe signs \$102m deal to bring space trash home

Japan spacecraft with asteroid soil nears Earth

TOKYO, Nov 28, (AP): A Japanese spacecraft is nearing Earth after a yearlong journey home from a distant asteroid with soil samples and data that could provide clues to the origins of the solar system, a space agency official said Friday.

The Hayabusa2 spacecraft left the asteroid Ryugu, about 300 million kilometers (180 million miles) from Earth, a year ago and is expected to reach Earth and drop a capsule containing the precious samples in southern Australia on Dec. 6.

Scientists at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency believe the samples, especially those taken from under the asteroid's surface, contain valuable data unaffected by space radiation and other environmental factors.

Makoto Yoshikawa, a Hayabusa2 project mission manager, said scientists are especially interested in analyzing organic materials in the Ryugu soil samples.

"Organic materials are origins of life on Earth, but we still don't know where they came from," Yoshikawa said. "We are hoping to find clues to the origin of life on Earth by analyzing details of the organic materials brought back by Hayabusa2."

JAXA, the space agency, plans to drop the capsule containing the samples onto a remote, sparsely populated area in Australia from 220,000 kilometers (136,700 miles) away in space, a big challenge requiring precision control. The capsule, protected by a heat shield, will turn into a fireball during re-entry in the atmosphere at 200 kilometers (125 miles) above ground. At about 10 kilometers (6 miles) above ground, a parachute will open to prepare for landing, and beacon signals will be transmitted to indicate its location.

JAXA staff have set up satellite dishes at several locations in the target area to catch the signals, while also preparing marine radar, drones and helicopters to assist in the search and retrieval mission.

Without those measures, a search for the pan-shaped capsule with a diameter of 40 centimeters (15 inches) "would be an extremely difficult," Yoshikawa told reporters.

For Hayabusa2, it's not the end of the mission it started in 2014. After dropping the capsule, it will return to space

and head to another distant small asteroid called 1998KY26 on a journey slated to take 10 years.

Hayabusa2 touched down on Ryugu twice, despite its extremely rocky surface, and successfully collected data and samples during the 1½ years after it arrived there in June 2018.

In the first touchdown in February 2019, it collected surface dust samples. In July, it collected underground samples from the asteroid for the first time in space history after landing in a crater that it had earlier created by blasting the asteroid's surface.

Scientists said there are traces of carbon and organic matter in the asteroid soil samples. JAXA hopes to find clues to how the materials are distributed in the solar system and are related to life on Earth.

Asteroids, which orbit the sun but are much smaller than planets, are among the oldest objects in the solar system and therefore may help explain how Earth evolved.

It took the spacecraft 3½ years to arrive at Ryugu, but the journey home was much shorter because of the current locations of Ryugu and Earth.

Ryugu in Japanese means "Dragon Palace," the name of a sea-bottom castle in a Japanese folk tale.

Also:

BERLIN: The European Space Agency says it is signing a 86 million-euro (\$102 million) contract with a Swiss start-up company to bring a large piece of orbital trash back to Earth.

The agency said Thursday that the deal with ClearSpace SA will lead to the "first active debris removal mission" in 2025, in which a custom-made spacecraft will capture and bring down part of a rocket once used to deliver a satellite into orbit.

Experts have long warned that hundreds of thousands of pieces of space debris circling the planet - including an astronaut's lost mirror - pose a threat to functioning satellites and even the International Space Station. Several teams are working on ways to tackle the problem.

The object being removed from orbit is a so-called Vespa payload adapter that was used to hold and then release a satellite in 2013. It weighs about 112 kilograms (247 pounds).

Included under the Always ON postpaid plans which are supported by stc's 5G network, the #1 network in Kuwait

NBK Launches "Bill Splitting" on NBK Mobile Banking App



Paid the Bill and Want to Share the Cost With Your Friends?

Al Shoaibi: We communicate with our customers to identify and meet their needs in a convenient and secure way through cutting-edge digital services

We strive to launch advanced digital services that suit the daily lifestyle of our customers from the youth segment

We continue to develop NBK Mobile Banking to enrich our customers' banking experience

users, with the option to choose the way to receive the link, whether by SMS or email, and will be available 24/7.

The service allows receiving money from a number of NBK Customers, or customers of other local banks, in a convenient and secure way through K-Net, as real-time transfers from the bank accounts to the account of NBK Customers using NBK Mobile Banking App.

On this occasion, Hala Al Shoaibi, Head of Digital Service Quality Management, National Bank of Kuwait said: "We communicate with our customers and identify their needs and expectations, and work to meet them by launching cutting-edge digital banking services and upgrading services in NBK Mobile Banking App as part of our efforts to make their daily life easier."

Al Shoaibi pointed out that the youth segment comes at the forefront of customer segments to which NBK pays great attention, and seeks to provide digital services and advanced payment solutions that suit their daily lifestyles and meet their needs, which are unique from other segments, in a quick and easy way. And since this segment tends to spend more time in gatherings, the new service comes as a convenient solution for sharing the costs among them in a very smooth way.

"We are constantly upgrading NBK Mobile Banking to provide advanced digital services to all our customers, in a way that enrich their banking experience and allow them to make payments, transfers and do all their banking transactions quickly and easily anytime and anywhere, without the need to visit the branch," she added.

Additionally, the bank continues to update NBK Mobile Banking App adding many services over the past period, the last of which was NBK Push Notifications through which customers can track transactions made on their accounts, whether they are in Kuwait or abroad.

NBK Mobile Banking enables customers to make their various banking transactions easily and conveniently, with key services including: money transfer (locally and internationally), NBK Quick Pay, e-Payments, adding beneficiaries, increasing monthly transfer limit, viewing account statement and paying credit card dues.

Hala Al Shoaibi

National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is keen to provide the latest digital banking services to its customers to meet their needs and expectations through the various NBK Digital Channels, on top of which comes NBK Mobile Banking App.

NBK continues to upgrade the services provided through NBK Mobile Banking App to meet the daily needs of its customers, especially from the youth segment. In this context, the bank launched the new Bill Splitting service, which allows users to split the amount of their bills between a number of people using NBK Mobile Banking App.

The new service enables customers to send a link to a number of people up to 20