



SILK WEAVERS IN TROUBLE
Their livelihoods are in jeopardy as sales drop because of pandemic
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Tricked into deathtrap

Rohingya refugees describe how they survived two months drifting in the ocean with scanty food and water while many of their people perished

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

On April 14, a wooden vessel crammed with Rohingyas reached the Teknaf jetty. Those Rohingyas, all of whom were residents of different refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, tried to go to Malaysia in search of livelihood. Failing to reach the Malaysian coast, they drifted in the ocean for two months.

They ran out of food and fresh water. Diseases broke out and about 50 Rohingyas died on the voyage. Finally after two months, when Bangladesh coast guard rescued them, they found 396 severely starved, emaciated and nearly lifeless Rohingyas in the vessel.

The Daily Star learnt this from two of the survivors -- Md Yasin and Md Jubair. The two also gave a shocking description of the perilous journey, which seems something straight out of a movie.

'I was too weak to swim. I hoped I would be drifted ashore or rescued by a fishing boat. Even if I was arrested, at least I would be able to eat and drink something.'

MD JUBAIR, ONE OF THE SURVIVORS

Yasin, 25, and Jubair, 22, are two brothers living in the Kutupalong refugee camp. They came to Cox's Bazar in their early childhood with their parents and other relatives in the early 1990s.

"We are a large family of seven siblings, my parents and other relatives. It is difficult for us to maintain such an extended family just with relief materials. There are thousands of Rohingya youths like us who want to work but do not find any work opportunities in the camps," said Yasin.

For this reason, Md Mohsin, one of their brothers, went to Indonesia by boat from Teknaf several years ago. And, according to them, Mohsin finally managed to go to the USA from Indonesia and he is now living a good life there.

Such a "success" in the family inspired Yasin and Jubair to look for ways to reach

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Amena Begum, a 60-year-old heart patient, leans back in a chair at the Covid-19 unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday. Doctors at Ad-din hospital in Keraniganj had referred her to the DMCH as she was having breathing problems for three days. She had to move again with her son, inset, as DMCH physicians referred her to Mitford Hospital.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BANGLADESH UPDATE

3,243
New cases in 24hrs

1,05,535
Total cases

1,388
Deaths

42,945
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

454,889
Deaths

8,527,672
Total cases

COVID-19 FALLOUT
Global funding for Rohingyas likely to drop

PORIMOL PALMA

The global funding for the Rohingyas may fall short as the non-government organisations' (NGO) activities have drastically decreased amid coronavirus pandemic.

Besides, there might be shortage of funding in the future due to the pandemic-related economic recession.

According to the UN Refugee Agency, a total of \$308.7 million was sought from the international community for the Rohingyas for 2020, but only \$87 million or 27 percent of that has been funded as of May.

Humayun Kabir, former ambassador and vice president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, said funding for the Rohingyas would be more challenging in the coming days as the donor countries would focus on rebuilding their own economy after the pandemic.

"The situation of the Rohingyas is likely

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DMCH struggles to meet rising ICU demand

Only 14 ICU beds for Covid-19 patients or those with symptoms

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

Dhaka Medical College Hospital is struggling with inadequate ICU facility as a large number of critical Covid-19 patients are thronging the country's largest public hospital.

Against the demand for at least a hundred, it has only 14 ICU beds dedicated for Covid-19 patients or those showing the symptoms. The hospital has around 35 other ICU beds for general patients.

DMCH doctors said most of the Covid-19 patients and those suspected to have coronavirus come here in critical condition with severe shortness of breath and low oxygen level. Many of them need ICU supports.

"There are only 14 ICU beds for Covid-19 treatment. There is a long queue for ICU beds," said Alauddin Al-Azad, deputy director of DMCH, adding that they were trying to increase the number of ICU beds but it will take time.

On June 12, a retired government official, Engineer Shafiq Islam, 67, was admitted to DMCH's Covid-19 unit at Ward-602 with shortness of breath.

His nephew Aminul Islam said doctors immediately advised that the patient needs an intensive care unit, but any ICU bed for corona

patients at DMCH could not be found empty.

After frantic efforts, they could finally manage an ICU bed on Sunday evening. Hospital sources said they were lucky to get it in just two days.

DMCH is currently treating around 625 Covid-19 patients with the capacity for 750.

Prof Dr Mujibur Rahman, head of medicine department, said the old burn unit started admitting Covid-19 and suspected coronavirus patients on May 2. At present, it has 100 patients of surgery, gynaecology and paediatrics, who are coronavirus positive or have Covid-19 symptoms. Besides, over 500 coronavirus or suspected patients have been admitted at DMCH's new 10-storey building as of Tuesday.

If beds are filled here, the hospital's newly arrived Covid-19 or suspected patients would move to Railway Hospital, which has a 100-bed coronavirus unit, DMCH authorities said.

With the surge in the flow of patients, the number of deaths at DMCH is also apparently on the rise, according to hospital sources.

Over the last two weeks, 12 to 15 Covid-19 patients and those with coronavirus symptoms have died here every day, the sources said, adding that 11 Covid-19 patients died on Monday.

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POSSIBLE DURATION OF PANDEMIC DGHS boss says sorry for comment

His apology comes after huge criticism from govt high-ups; 45 die, 3,243 test positive in a day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid a barrage of criticism, the director general of the health services directorate yesterday apologised for his comments on the possible duration of the coronavirus pandemic.

"A confusion was created over the remarks of Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the Directorate General of Health Services, made yesterday [on Thursday] during the daily bulletin. He is deeply regretful for it," said the DGHS in a statement.

It said the script of the DG's speech, which he was reading from during the online briefing, had been hastily prepared as the time of the briefing was approaching, and he couldn't review its contents carefully before going public.

During the daily briefing on Thursday, Azad said, "According to the experience of different countries of the world and observations of health scientists and public health experts, the coronavirus situation is not going to end in one, two or three months."

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5 more die showing Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT

At least five people died with what appeared to be coronavirus in three districts since Thursday night.

Three of them lived in different neighbourhoods of Madaripur town, officials said.

A 58-year-old man in Thantoli area died at his home around 7:00am yesterday with fever and breathing problems.

Another 65-year-old man died at his home around the same time in Horikumariya area with cold, persistent coughing and breathing difficulties.

The other deceased was a 50-year-old man of Rasti area. He died around 8:00pm on Thursday night while being treated at Madaripur Sadar Hospital with Covid-19 symptoms.

In Faridpur town, a 48-year-old school teacher of Durgaboldi area died

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MANPOWER BUSINESS MP Shahid earned 2m dinars a year

Kuwaiti newspaper reports quoting investigators

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Laxmipur lawmaker Mohammad Shahid Islam used to earn around two million dinars a year from his manpower business in Kuwait, investigators found.

The prosecution came up with the findings after interrogating a number of victims and associates of Shahid alias Kazi Papul, leading Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Rai reported yesterday.

The prosecution listened to the statements of three employees -- two are directors of Shahid's manpower company and the other is an officer at the rank of colonel in the interior ministry.

"Investigations revealed that the annual net profits of the Bangladeshi MP are estimated at about two million dinars, after deducting all the money spent on others from bribes, sums and gifts in

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Workers who were repairing a part of the capital's Manik Mia Avenue take shelter under a polythene sheet amid sudden rain. Light rain in parts of the city caused sufferings to day labourers yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Approve rapid test kits swiftly

Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder urges drug administration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gonoshasthaya Kendra yesterday urged the drug administration to approve its rapid antibody test kit which proved to be effective in testing antibodies in people who recovered from Covid-19.

"We are grateful to the technical committee at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University for recommending the antibody kit developed by Gonoshasthaya RNA Biotech Ltd. We hope the drug administration will implement the recommendation, register and approve its distribution at the earliest, considering the emergency," Gonoshasthaya Kendra Founder Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury said in a statement yesterday.

Gonoshasthaya received the performance trial report from the BSMMU on Thursday.

Trialing the antibody kit on 509 samples, the BSMMU on June 17 concluded that the GR Covid-19 Rapid Dot Blot Immunoassay Kit works correctly 70 percent of the time.

Zafrullah said this year was the birth centenary of Banbabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who named Gonoshasthaya and approved its land acquisition. The BSMMU, which is named after Banbabandhu, found the kit effective.

BSMMU and Gonoshasthaya have jointly brought the good news for the nation during such a critical period of time. "Everyone should be congratulated for this. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made special arrangements for this kit with high hopes."

Zafrullah read in the news that drug administration

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