

Yaba out of control

FROM PAGE 1
The officials unequivocally recommended that yaba has to be contained at entry points by putting up maximum efforts and spending as much money as required.

They underscored the need for highest coordination among government forces at the field level, especially to save the country's hope, the youth, from the curse of yaba.

Over 52 percent of the population falls in the age bracket of 15 to 35 and it is the same prime group that is now getting addicted to the deadly drug, which gives them temporary happiness but in the long run destroys them both psychologically and physically. It causes anxiety and aggression and damages kidney, heart, liver and brain as well.

"It has become a national crisis. Yaba seems to have infected every profession," said Mokhlesur Rahman, additional inspector general of police (admin and operation).

fencing the border."

Bangladesh and Myanmar share a 270km border, much of it is along the Naf River. Every day, some three lakh vessels of different kinds, beginning from small wooden boat to trawlers, ply this waterway.

To stop entry through borders, Captain M Ikram Hossain, director (operations) of Bangladesh Coast Guard, suggested a ban on fishing in the Naf River at night and tourism in St Martin's Island in April-May.

He further recommended mobile tracking of conversation in borders and engaging tax department to probe people who have palace-like houses in Teknaf and Shah Porir Dwip.

About non-cooperation of Myanmar, Additional IGP Mokhlesur echoed the views of Lt Col Mahfuzer.

He said diplomatic and home ministry-level meetings with India worked while containing smuggling of Phensedyl. But the efforts to contain yaba smuggling failed.

Captain Ikram said the Coast Guard is very understaffed. The force has 2,500 staff on deputation from Bangladesh Navy. Only seven to eight staff are posted at each station.

He also said they have no female staff to search female carriers.

DNC Director Md Nuruzzaman Sharif said due to loopholes in the existing law, the accused in drug cases are coming out of jail on bail.

He said the amendment to the Narcotics Control Act 2019 removing the loopholes and increasing punishment is at the final stage.

Mukul Jyoti Chakma, DNC's deputy director (Dhaka Metro), said last year they arrested 11,000 people in narcotics cases, but only five percent of them are now in jail. Most of the listed traders are out on bail.

He said the DNC is understaffed and not adequately equipped with arms, equipment and technology. He demanded the power of mobile tracking.

				
"We should take every possible step to give them [yaba traders] as much trouble as possible."	"As a police officer, I am very worried that even my force members are getting addicted to yaba. It is a huge problem There is no profession that yaba has not infiltrated."	"We are very worried as we cannot make the graph [of yaba seizure] nosedive. In cases of other drugs, the graph sometimes goes up and sometimes down, but for yaba it is always upward."	"A drug trader was accused in 42 cases, yet he could not be confined to jail for more than seven days."	"There are 60 to 70 lakh yaba addicts in the country. With each spending Tk 500 a day, guess how much is spent on addiction daily and annually."
CAPTAIN M IKRAM HOSSAIN, director (operations) of Bangladesh Coast Guard	MOKHLESUR RAHMAN, additional inspector general (admin and operation) of police	MD MAHFUZER RAHMAN, director (operation) of BGB	DNC Director MD NURUZZAMA N SHARIF	MUKUL JYOTI CHAKMA, DNC's deputy director (Dhaka Metro)

"As a police officer, I am very worried that even my force members are getting addicted to yaba. It is a huge problem There is no profession that yaba has not infiltrated."

Stressing the need for containing yaba inflow right at the border, he said the drug crosses over into Bangladesh in small number of consignments and then spreads across the country in lakhs of smaller consignments.

"It gets very difficult to seize yaba once it spreads out. So we have to stop it at the border," suggested the additional IGP.

Lt Col Mahfuzer Rahman, director (operation) of the BGB, showed a photographic documentation which depicted vivid examples of yaba peddling.

It shows the tablets are carried in mobile phones, secret chambers in cars, trucks or motorcycles, fuel tanks of bikes and even inside holy books. Carriers swallow capsules containing the pills and also hide those inside rectum.

Though the additional IGP spoke for checking yaba at border point, the task is not easy due to some major hurdles including non-cooperation of Myanmar, the main source of the mad drug.

The BGB cannot interact with its Myanmar counterpart very well as the latter responds to one in 10 calls. The Myanmar side cannot be reached at all in some bordering areas where the country's army is deployed, said Lt Col Mahfuzer.

There is no fencing in the border with Myanmar and it is very difficult to patrol 10km of it by a team consisting of only six members. Smugglers can pass yaba in between movements of the force members from one place to other, he added.

"We are very worried as we cannot make the graph [of yaba seizure] nosedive. In cases of other drugs, the graph sometimes goes up and sometimes down, but for yaba it is always upward. It is really alarming that it is going out of control."

He mentioned that incidents of smuggling through Indian border went down following fencing of 70 percent of the boundary. "There is no alternative to

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Destroying the supply chain putting in maximum coordinated efforts at the entry points
- Ensuring strict punishment for involvement of officials in yaba trade
- Engaging intelligence agencies under direct supervision of the PMO (there's suspicion that below the PM, hardly anyone is trusted because so much money is involved)
- Tracking mobile conversations in borders by NTMC to find out secret deals
- Engaging tax department to probe mysterious wealth amassing by people in Teknaf and Shah Porir Dwip
- Holding accountable the political leaders and public representative of yaba-infested locality
- Strengthening intelligence gathering at the entry points
- Dope test before job recruitment
- Fencing off the porous border with Myanmar
- Defaming yaba traders socially
- Reformation of laws removing loopholes
- Strengthening forces working in border areas
- Special surveillance on colleges, universities by intelligence agencies; applying latest technology for strict watch in borders
- Rewards for anti-yaba drive heroes
- Creating awareness through the media, TV channels in particular

"Bangladesh shares information with Myanmar but they hardly take any action. Even, the Myanmar military which control the border are even involved in yaba smuggling."

Yaba is a source of easy money, the official said, and bad guys are in all sectors including police force. That's why the police force has carried out dope tests in its last three recruitments, he added.

Mokhlesur also said policemen found with yaba or even suspected of being involved in yaba trade are facing stern action.

Captain M Ikram Hossain said they have punished three Coast Guard members for involvement in yaba trade.

He stressed the need for breaking away from regular legal procedure, at least for an interim period, to tackle a crime of this nature. "Like the Philippines, we may introduce a model of very tough and instant punishment."

In the discussion, the Rohingya issue also came up.

The BGB director said the refugee camps in Teknaf have turned into a drug zone where clashes are on the rise over money, narcotic and illicit relations.

He said apart from the Myanmar, some consignments of yaba pills are being smuggled into the country through Indian border. The BGB seized around 1,800 pieces in the border with India in 2013 while the number was 1.1 lakh in 2015 and 67,000 in first four months of this year.

The participants said they have a list of yaba godfathers, but they cannot take any legal action as they have to go through legal procedure. They suggested the media should do investigative reporting to unmask the godfathers.

The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam moderated the discussion.

Two 'yaba dealers' killed in 'shootouts'

STAR REPORT

Two alleged drug dealers were killed in "shootouts" between Rapid Action Battalion and suspects in Kushtia and Narayanganj early yesterday.

In Kushtia, alleged criminal Hamidul Islam, 47, was killed in a "gunfight" with Rab in Milpara area of town, Mohaiminur Rashid, commander of Rab-12, told our Kushtia

Correspondent.

He was the top leader of Hamidul-Rashid Bahini and wanted by Kushtia police, Rab said.

Mohaiminur said a Rab team raided the Milpara area around 4:00am on information that a group of drug dealers were holding a meeting there. Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the criminals opened fire forcing

Rab finds yaba pills in car's fuel tank

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion seized 65,000 yaba tablets from the fuel tank of a car in the capital's Adabar and arrested two people in this connection on Monday night.

Acting on a tip-off that some drug dealers were waiting with a big consignment of yaba pills to deliver, a



Polling officials and agents of mayor and councillor candidates sit back as there are no voters at a polling booth at Khulna Zila School during the city polls around 9:30am yesterday. Inset, Md Shafiqul Islam cannot cast his vote at Rupsha Bahumukhi High School polling centre as his vote had already been cast by someone else.

Khaleque wins

FROM PAGE 1
Soon after the voting ended, Monju alleged of "huge rigging" at 101 centres and demanded re-election there.

He made the call when Returning Officer Yunus Ali was announcing the unofficial results from the control room at Divisional Women's Sport Complex in the city's Sonadanga area.

Khaleque thanked the prime minister for his victory. "I will work for the development of the city people and resume the unfinished jobs on a priority basis."

SHOWDOWN, BALLOT STUFFING, INTIMIDATION

No incident of major violence took place during the voting that lacked festivity because of an intimidating atmosphere created by the AL men soon after voting began at 8:00am.

Law enforcers were present in large numbers, but they mostly played the role of silent observers, as AL men in some stations violated election rules at will.

The day started high on hopes of a fair election. But before long, the optimism faded.

Four correspondents of The Daily Star visited at least 60 polling centres and saw how AL men exercised their power to influence voting in many of them.

Wearing badges of boat, the election symbol of Khaleque, the AL men took position outside, at the entrance and inside many polling stations. They barred voters from entering centres and openly asked them to vote for Khaleque.

At some stations, they snatched ballot papers from the voters and were seen casting votes on those. In some cases, presiding officers and assistant presiding officers helped them.

For example, at Platinum Secondary School centres in ward-11, a large number of people forcefully entered two voting booths around 12:45pm, and cast votes.

SM Morshed Ul Morshed, presiding officer of one of the voting centres, said, "We are trying to oust them. We informed the police about the matter."

One reporter of The Daily Star was present at Maulana Bhashani Bidyapith centre in Khalishpur Residential Area under ward-10 for more than one hour from 11:30am. Voter presence was very thin at the time.

But the presiding officer said 60 percent of the 1,508 voters had already cast their votes by noon.

Around 3:00pm, a large number of AL supporters were chanting slogans at Mollapara Government Primary School centre.

Some of the slogans were: "Vote only for boat"; "voters of BNP go back home"; and "there will be no existence of sheaf of paddy" (electoral symbol of Monju).

At the entrance to the centre, one youth was heard saying: "We will bring an end to Monju's politics in Khulna."

Pioneer Higher Secondary School centre in ward-25 was teeming with AL men inside and outside, which is a violation of the electoral code of con-

duct. Two reporters of this newspaper saw seven to eight youths enter one booth and put seal on ballot papers.

Presiding Officer Aatur Rahman said he was outside the centre at the time. "Let me look into the matter."

Shamim Mahmud, presiding officer of another centre in the same school, was indifferent to the presence of AL men in large numbers. No agents of the BNP candidate were in sight.

Similarly, a huge number of AL supporters were present at Panchtala Bayashka Madrasa centre. But no BNP agent could be seen. Even the presiding officer was not found during a visit to this centre around 11:00am.

At Siddikia Kamil Madrasa vote centre premises, Mahmuda Rahman, aged over 60, lamented that she could not vote.

"Some people wearing badges of boat snatched away my ballot paper and cast my vote," she said.

At Darul Quran Siddikia Kamil Madrasa polling centre in ward-25, Presiding Officer Shayamoli Bepari herself cast ballots, voters alleged.

Asked, Shayamoli said, "It was nothing like that. Voters were having difficulties casting ballots and I just helped them."

Law enforcers were seen gesturing the ruling party men to move away in silence when journalists were visiting the centre. There was only one agent of the BNP candidate.

At Nurani Multipurpose Madrasa, also in ward-25, an election official caught one AL supporter putting seals on the ballot paper, said Presiding Officer Mizanur Rahman.

At Khulna Newsprint High School (girls section) polling station, male voters were seen taking female voters with them to female polling booths "to help them cast their votes" at 12:30pm.

Suresh Chandra Gain, presiding officer, said they requested the male voters to leave the polling station.

"But they didn't leave the polling centre. Instead, they harassed us."

Voting at Rupsha Bahumukhi High School centre stopped around 11:00am as the presiding officer said they ran out of ballot papers.

Asked why and how so, he could not give a satisfactory answer.

Shariful Islam, a voter of the centre, said he went to vote in the morning but he was told that his vote was already cast. "I went there again at noon and they told me the same."

In BK Union Institution polling station at Benibabu road, several people were seen wearing journalists' pass issued by the election commission and taking voters inside the polling booths around 2:00pm.

One of them was Anisur Rahman, who introduced himself as a reporter of Desh Songjog from Dhaka.

Pressed, he got angry and said, "Go outside the polling station, or you will be in trouble."

VOTING SUSPENDED IN 3 CENTRES

Voting was suspended in Iqbal Nagar Secondary Girls School, Lobonchora Govt Primary School (ground floor)

and Lobonchora Govt Primary School (first floor) due to ballot stuffing allegedly by ruling party men, said Returning Officer Yunus Ali.

Khalilur Rahman, presiding officer of Iqbal Nagar Girls School, said some 25 to 30 youths stormed a booth and started stuffing ballots around 10:30am.

"Having failed to stop them, we had to suspend voting," he said.

Asked about the identity of the youths, he said they were wearing badges of boat.

The youths were stuffing ballots without the signature of the assistant presiding officer, he added.

"We have collected all the ballots and reported the incident to the election control room at the Election Commission."

The presiding officer said he did not get any support from police despite seeking help.

Contacted, Sonali Sen, additional deputy commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police, said they would investigate the incident.

Around 12:00noon, people who were wearing badges of boat distributed sweetmeats at this centre following the suspension of voting.

The returning officer said that fresh voting in the three centres was not necessary as there are only 5,831 voters in these centres. "It will not be a decisive factor anymore."

FEW BNP AGENTS
Polling agents of Monju were not seen in many of the 60 polling centres The Daily Star visited.

The BNP alleged their agents were not allowed into the centres. In some cases, they were driven out by AL supporters.

Monju alleged "mass vote rigging" by the ruling party men.

"They [AL men] occupied most of the voting centres and drove out our men. The Election Commission is silent in this regard."

Within the first hour, ruling party men threw out BNP's agents from at least 30 polling centres, he alleged.

He demanded re-election in 101 polling stations.

AL candidate Khaleque claimed voting was held peacefully.

Meanwhile, ruling party men allegedly vandalised several election camps of Monju.

A group of 40-50 AL men vandalised Monju's tent near Sonapota Government Primary School on Shere-Bangla road around 10:30am, Hafez Abul Bashar, special secretary of BNP, Khulna unit, told The Daily Star.

In another incident, an observer of the Election Commission from Dhaka was assaulted by supporters of Khaleque at a polling centre.

The EC official barely managed to come out of the Nurani Bahumukhi Madrasa Biddaloy polling centre after the assault, he told journalists at the spot around 9:50am.

The supporters also tried to vandalise the vehicle of the EC official, who requested anonymity, at the polling centre.

[Dipankar Roy and Partha Chakraborty also contributed to this report]

Martial arts boost brain's cognition

FROM PAGE 16
AST on the other hand is about getting into a specific state of mind that allows a stronger focus. This can be done by using exercise, meditation or yoga, among other things.

It has been suggested that martial arts is a form of AST, and supporting this, recent research has shown a link between practice and improved alertness. Backing this idea up further, another study showed that martial arts practice – specifically karate – is linked with better performance on a divided attention task. This is an assignment in which the

person has to keep two rules in mind and respond to signals based on whether they are auditory or visual.

In a US study, children aged between eight and 11 years old were tasked with traditional martial arts training that focused on respecting other people and defending themselves as part of an anti-bullying programme. The children were also taught how to maintain a level of self-control in heated situations.

The researchers found that the martial arts training reduced the level of aggressive behaviour in boys, and

found that they were more likely to step in and help someone who was being bullied than before they took part in the training.

Significant changes were not found in the girls' behaviour, potentially because they showed much lower levels of physical aggression before the training than the boys did.

Interestingly, this anti-aggression effect is not limited to young children. A different piece of research found reduced physical and verbal aggression, as well as hostility, in adolescents who practised martial arts too.