



A family is leaving after collecting a sack of free rice provided by Abdur Rahman Bodi in Teknaf. A former Awami League lawmaker, Bodi spends roughly Tk 19 crore on distributing rice among the poor every year. The photo was taken in December.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Yaba, charity hand in glove?

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leaders. "Every person on the list was issued a card and a cardholder gets 10kg white [atap] rice every month. Bodi has been doing this over the last three years," Mohammad Alam Bahadur, general secretary of Teknaf municipality AL, told The Daily Star.

Bahadur, also a coordinator of the rice distribution, said there are 7,000 cardholders in Teknaf sadar union, 13,000 in Whykong, 11,000 in Hnila, 9,000 in Baharchhara, 11,000 in Sabrang and 5,000 more in Shah Porir Island.

The card, on one side, bears the area name and the slogan "Take Salam from Bodi Bhai, Vote for Boat", and his photo on the other.

Zafar Alam Chowdhury, adviser of Cox's Bazar AL, confirmed to this newspaper that about 56,000 people have been getting rice every month over the last three years.

HK Anwar, chairman of Hnila Union Parishad, said they make an announcement a day before the rice distribution. The cardholders gather at the union parishad office accordingly. Same is the practice in other unions.

Rehana Akter, 52, an inhabitant of Pankhali village, said she goes to the union parishad office following the announcement and collects rice showing her card.

Rahima Khatun, 42, of Sabrang union, has been receiving rice for the last three years. "For this favour, the MP never asked us to do anything for him," she said.

Talking to this newspaper, several recipients of rice said this is very good quality atap. In the local market, it is priced between Tk 28 and 30 per kg.

According to an estimate, Bodi distributes 5,60,000kg rice every month and the cost would be at least Tk 1.56 crore. That means he spends around Tk 19 crore every year only on rice distribution.

Besides, whenever he goes to a local market or attends any public programme, he distributes Tk 100 to Tk 1,000 notes among people, said locals.

To many in his locality, he is now more of a generous benefactor than a former lawmaker or politician.

"Leave the place. You have no right to comment on Bodi Bhai. No one has ever done anything in the last 50 years like what he did for us."

This was how a 55-year-old woman responded when this correspondent was making some queries about Bodi on January 25. She was having tea at a stall near Shamlapur High School in Teknaf.

Five to six others came up with almost the same reaction. No one goes back empty handed from Bodi's door, according to rickshaw puller Md Shamsul.

"Bhai is helping us by providing rice every month and he never asks for any return," said Nurul Amin, who was taking tea sitting beside Shamsul.

Bodi has established a college, a

high school and a madrasa in Teknaf, according to the biography book of the Jatiya Sangsad, which mentions charity as his hobby.

His father Mohammad Ezahar Mia Company was also popular in the locality. A supporter of any party that came to power, he established Teknaf Ezahar Girls' High School, now a government institution.

HIS 'INCOME'

"All credit goes to my people for whom I am here today. So I donate 70 percent of my business income to the people of my locality," Bodi said last month when asked about the rice distribution.

He, however, won't give any idea about his business or its volume and the donations he makes.

Through an independent probe, The Daily Star learnt that Bodi has been controlling the entire cost and freight (C&F) business in Teknaf since he was first elected lawmaker in 2008.

He has four agencies for export and import. M/S A Rahman Agency is registered in his name; M/S Samia Enterprise in his daughter's name, M/S Shawon Enterprise in his son's and M/S Shaheen and Sons in his wife's name.

During a visit, this correspondent found that a small tin-shed office in Chowdhurypara area of Teknaf houses all the four agencies. On the signboard, the proprietor's name is Abdur Rahman Bodi.

Sources said Bodi imports fish, pickle, wood, ginger, and exports dry fish -- to and from Myanmar -- through these agencies. His family has ages-old relation with Myanmar as his grandfather Sultan Ahmed was its resident.

He is the "biggest importer" of Burma teak from Myanmar and earns crores from this business, at least three local traders claimed. This is one of his major sources of income, they added.

The former MP also has a number of shops in different markets and a residential hotel in Teknaf.

The four-storey Naf Hotel was turned into living quarters for families a couple of years back. Its two or three rooms are rented out together at Tk 4,000 to Tk 5,000 per month.

Sources in Cox's Bazar Registration Office said there is land in the names of Bodi, his wife, sisters and brothers in Teknaf, Ukhia, Inani, Baharchhara and St Martin's Island.

He has been the highest taxpayer in Cox's Bazar for the last couple of years, according to district tax office sources.

But what sources of income he has beyond all this? Is there any at all?

THE MAGIC LAMP

Sources claim that a big portion of his income comes from yaba smuggling from Myanmar. He hogged the headlines in this connection numerous times in the recent past.

The former MP has been named as a yaba godfather in reports of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) alongside several intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

A DNC report mentions him as a patron of yaba trade in Ukhia-Teknaf,

the gateway of smuggling the crazy drug from Myanmar.

"It would not be an over statement that other top yaba traders would not dare continue the trade going against his will. And local yaba traders or extortionists would not be able to establish supremacy."

According to the report, his willingness can play a vital role in bringing an end to yaba smuggling from Myanmar, which has border with Teknaf.

It also names his brothers Mujibur Rahman and Abdul Shukkur and cousin Mong Mong Sen as yaba godfathers.

Besides, according to an intelligence agency report, there are 120 listed drug traders in Cox's Bazar, and Bodi tops that list as well.

Sources in law enforcement agencies say yaba consumption per year in Bangladesh is guesstimated to be 46 crore pills worth around Tk 11,531 crore. The average price of a pill is Tk 250.

Last year, police, Rab, DNC, BGB and other agencies seized around 3.69 crore pills, according to the Police Headquarters.

Several officials of DNC said law enforcers are only able to recover eight to ten percent of the total yaba pills smuggled into the country.

The home minister and police, however, claimed on several occasions that they did not find "any proof of Bodi's direct involvement" in yaba smuggling.

In the last one week, officials of four law enforcement agencies told this newspaper that they could not go after Bodi for lack of evidence against him.

Denying his involvement in narcotics trade or smuggling, the former lawmaker says, "It's all a conspiracy against me."

'BALANCE SHEET'

Bodi, currently an executive committee member of Cox's Bazar AL, sought nomination from the BNP to contest the JS elections in 1996 but was denied the party ticket "due to his misdeeds".

He won the 2008 election as an AL candidate.

The affidavit he submitted to the Election Commission before the polls says every year he earns Tk 1.76 lakh from renting house, apartment and shop, Tk 91,098 from savings and shares and Tk 33,600 from salt field.

That means his annual income was around Tk 3 lakh back then. The affidavit also mentioned his dependants' annual income as Tk 2.25 lakh.

His affidavit for the 2014 election reads that he earns Tk 4,650 from agriculture, Tk 2.08 crore from renting house and apartment, Tk 5.32 crore from business, Tk 8.05 crore from shares and savings and Tk 91,000 from salt field every year.

This time his annual income stood at around Tk 15.46 crore and dependants' at Tk 3.48 lakh.

The AL leader did not participate in the 2018 election. His wife Shahin Akter contested the polls and her affidavit shows that she earns Tk 18,255 from agriculture, Tk 56,980

from renting house and shop, Tk 3.50 lakh from business and Tk 46,600 from salt field annually.

She didn't mention the income of dependants though it's mandatory.

On November 2, 2016, a Dhaka court sentenced Bodi to three years in prison for "concealing" and "deliberately" providing false wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption Commission in March 2014. He was also fined Tk 10 lakh, in default of which he will have to spend three more months in jail.

The court said Bodi on June 30, 2013 submitted his income tax return to the National Board of Revenue for fiscal 2013-2014, saying his net wealth was Tk 9.19 crore.

In his wealth statement to the Election Commission on December 2, 2013, before the 10th national polls, Bodi declared that he had wealth of Tk 10.98 crore.

On March 20, 2014, he submitted a wealth statement to the ACC, mentioning that he had moveable and immovable assets worth Tk 5.35 crore.

In this way, Bodi concealed his wealth of Tk 5.63 crore and thus the charge of submitting a false wealth statement was found true, said the court.

He landed in jail but came out securing bail from the High Court.

ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star that hearings on two appeals -- one filed by the ACC against the order of acquittal and the other by Bodi against his conviction -- were pending with the court.

They will move the court for the hearings in April.

HIS NEW ROLE

After the 11th parliamentary election on December 30, Bodi started working as one of the major players behind the surrender process of yaba godfathers and dealers, sources said.

The surrender is expected to take place later this month.

Around 63 alleged yaba godfathers and dealers already surrendered to police and they are now in the safe custody of Cox's Bazar Police Lines, sources say.

Bodi's three brothers -- Abdul Amin, Md Shafiq and Faisal Rahman -- also surrendered to police in mid-January and they are now in the safe custody. Sources said they recently returned from Dubai to surrender.

Talking to The Daily Star on January 25, Bodi said he has been requesting all the drug peddlers, including those in his family, to surrender. "The smugglers surrendered to police after I inspired them to do so."

In fact, nobody in the area ever goes beyond his will.

His name surfaced in the media also for allegedly beating up 24 prominent personalities, including government officials, teachers and lawyers. He metes out "punishment" with his own hand if anyone opposes him.

So, nobody really dares disturb the "peace" in his empire.

[Our Cox's Bazar correspondent Mohammad Ali Zinnat contributed to this report]

CONFERENCES ON SECURITY, DEFENCE

PM to visit Germany, UAE this week

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will begin a week-long visit on February 14 to join two conferences on security and defence in Germany and the United Arab Emirates.

She will leave Dhaka for Germany on Thursday to attend the Munich Security Conference (MSC). The PM will then go to the UAE to attend International Defence Exhibition and Conference (Idex) and pay a bilateral visit there.

This will be her first foreign visit after the Awami League formed the government for a third straight term.

Diplomatic sources said the PM would get the opportunity to meet world leaders in the summits and discuss her future plans to alleviate poverty, achieve economic development and eliminate terrorism and extremism.

She will also inform them that Bangladesh has set a goal to establish itself as a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed and prosperous one by 2041. During the meetings, she will also seek support from the friends of Bangladesh for achieving the goals.

The sources said Hasina would participate in the 55th MSC in Germany slated for February 15 to 17

to discuss various contemporary issues, including international security policy.

Apart from delivering speech in the main conference, Hasina is expected to attend different panel discussions and address climate and security issues. She will also hold bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the conference.

Officials confirmed a bilateral meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the sidelines of the MSC. More than 35 heads of state and government, 50 foreign ministers and 30 defense ministers are expected to attend the event.

The MSC is an important international forum which meets annually to discuss current and future security challenges with the participation of numerous high-level political leaders, politicians, decision-makers, academics and international security experts.

Hasina will then depart for the UAE on February 16 night to take part in the Idex and the Naval Defence and Maritime Security Exhibition, which will be held at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre on February 17 to 21.

A Bangladesh Navy ship is in Abu Dhabi to participate in the exhibition, sources said.

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Boys' dropout highest

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workshop to share its findings with different stakeholders at its office yesterday.

The report also showed that girl's dropout rate was higher than that of boys. 40.19 percent of girls discontinued school last year.

Speaking at the programme, Director of Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) Professor Mohammad Shamsul Huda said that the rise in dropout rate was indeed alarming and could prove to a problem for society.

He also blamed the disparity in stipends as a reason for the rise. "Girls getting more stipends than boys could be a reason."

DSHE officials said that 30 percent female students in high schools got stipends while it was given to only 10 percent male students at the same level.

Banbeis statistics specialist Sheikh Mohammed Alamgir, while presenting the study, said the dropout rate among boys was 36.01 percent in 2018 in the secondary level.

The dropout rate was 33.43 percent in 2017, 33.88 percent in 2016, 33.72 percent in 2015, 34.52 percent in 2014, 34.18 percent in 2013, 34.90 percent in 2012 and 46.73 percent in 2011, said Banbeis officials.

Alamgir told The Daily Star that boys from hard to reach and disadvantaged areas would drop out the most as they needed to work in tea gardens, in crop fields and stone quarries to augment their family income.

However, the overall dropout rate at secondary level has gradually been

declining since 2008, when the rate was a staggering 61.38 percent.

The rate came down to 37.62 percent last year from 37.81 percent the previous year.

The draft report also shows that net enrollment to the secondary level came down to 66.19 percent in 2018 from 68.78 percent of 2017.

Senior Secretary of Secondary and Higher Education Division Sohorab Hossain, at the programme, said that they got the data from the study and would try to know the reason for the increase in dropouts.

"We need information to chalk out necessary measures."

Speaking at the programme, Education Minister Dipu Moni emphasised on the necessity of improving quality of education.

"We need skilled and qualified teachers to improve the quality of education."

The Banbeis collected data online from all 41,905 post-primary education institutions across the country from October 1 to October 10 last year to prepare the report.

The total number of students at these institutions is around 1.94 crore, says the report.

It also said the number of institutions from primary to university was 1.76 lakh and total number of students at these educational institutions was about 3.68 crore.

Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury, Technical and Madrasa Education Division Secretary Md Alamgir, and Banbeis Director Md Fashiullah, also

Lead, pesticides in milk

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feed in the country and raising awareness among consumers and stakeholders and suggesting appropriate remedies.

Safety of milk is crucial as it is a major source of nutrients, vitamins and minerals for people of all ages, especially children. About 90 percent of the total milk consumed in the country comes from cow.

FINDINGS

A least 15 percent raw milk and 3 percent packed milk had high lead and aflatoxins (a family of toxins produced by certain fungi) higher than the maximum residue level (MRL) which is legally tolerated in food or feed.

Though lead above MRL was found in one curd sample, 51 percent of positive curd samples had higher levels of bacteria.

"What's alarming is that contamination was found in cow feed samples. Cow feeds could be the major source of milk contamination," said Dr Shahnila.

About 69 percent positive samples of cow feed had higher levels of chromium, 100 percent samples had drug residues, while excessive aflatoxins were found in 19 percent cow feeds.

Pesticide was found exceeding MRL in 100 samples and antibiotic above MRL in 13 percent raw milk, among the positive samples.

About 96 percent raw milk had the presence of higher levels of bacteria.

Bacteria was present in 66-80 percent samples of local and imported packed milk, while around 30 percent packed milk had antibiotic tetracycline above MRL.

"Besides, 60 to 80 percent local packed milk fails to meet the microbial safety parameters," said the NFSL chief.

Despite significant progress in the public health sector, food-borne diseases remain a major health concern in Bangladesh, experts say.

They have suggested continuous quality assessment of milk and milk products, which can easily be contami-

nated, to prevent those diseases.

"Regular consumption of milk contaminated with pesticide residues may cause pancreatic cancer, breast cancer, leukaemia, skin sensitisation, allergic reaction and rash," said Mohidul Samad Khan, associate professor at Buet's chemical engineering department.

He also said excessive use of antibiotics like enrofloxacin and cyprosin in cattle feeds may cause antibiotic resistance, which reduces or eliminates the effectiveness of antibiotics on bacterial infection and diseases.

"Antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest threats to global health, food security and development today. Heavy metals in milk or any edible items may cause a wide range of health effects including cancer."

Dr Md Nurul Islam, dean of animal husbandry faculty at Bangladesh Agricultural University, said contaminated cow feed and excessive use of antibiotics are the main reasons for presence of heavy metals in milk.

Apart from this, unhygienic milking is another reason for the presence of bacteria in milk, he said.

"Milkmen should be trained on scientific and hygienic ways of milking while preservation of milk and cow feeds should be monitored strictly," he said.

The study suggested a close watch to check chemical and microbiological contamination, otherwise it can create serious health problems among the consumers in near future.

It also recommended promotion of good manufacturing practices to prevent microbial contamination.

Asked about finding heavy metals in cow milk and feed, Dr Md Giasuddin, principal scientific officer at Animal Health Research Division of Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute, ruled out any such possibility.

"Our dairy industry is yet to flourish and most of the cattle are reared on a small scale. So there is no scope of finding any heavy metal in milk," he said.

ACC files five cases against Crescent boss

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Crescent Leather and Crescent Tanneries Managing Director Sultana Begum, Director Rezia Begum, Rimex Footwear Chairman Abdul Aziz, Managing Director Litul Jahan Mira, Rupali Composite Leatherware Director Samira Kader Nodi and Lexco Ltd Director Harun-or-Rashid have also been accused, officials said.

The ACC assistant directors Gulshan Anwar Prodhon and Niyamul Ahsan Gazi began an enquiry into the alleged financial irregularities in September 2018.

An ACC official said Crescent Leather Products Ltd misappropriated about Tk 500 crore, Crescent Tanneries about Tk 68.34 crore, Lexco Ltd about Tk 74.38 crore, Rupali Composite

Leatherwear Ltd about Tk 454 crore and Remex Footwear Ltd about Tk 648 crore from Janata Bank's Imamganj Branch between 2015 and 2017.

After examining bank documents, the ACC officials found that the companies took money from the bank by submitting false information. But the bank officials did not properly scrutinise the documents submitted by the companies.

The ACC and CIID began their enquiries after a Bangladesh Bank report revealed last year that the Crescent group "skimmed" at least Tk 765 crore from the Janata Bank (JB) and the Bangladesh Bank (BB) between January 2017 and February 2018.

The total amount of loans taken by the Crescent Group from the JB was Tk 3,443 crore in October last year.