



Preparations have been completed at the Teknaf Pilot High School ground for the surrender of around 100 yaba godfathers and dealers today. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Stage set for surrender today

FROM PAGE 1
people, including 40 from Teknaf, dead and some 25,000 arrested since May last year.

Sources say the godfathers and dealers have been kept at the safe house in Cox's Bazar Police Lines since January 10. They are served food like bread, eggs, beef, chicken, biriyani and seasonal fruits.

The family members of a number of yaba dealers expressed happiness at the ceremony while many locals have mixed reaction.

Mohammad Yunus, father of yaba dealer Nurul Bashar Nowshad, said he is happy as his son will be safe upon surrendering to police.

M Gafur Uddin Chowdhury, chairman of Palongkhali union, has a different view. "A large number of people got involved in the yaba trade after the surrender drama began," he said.

Talking to The Daily Star on Thursday, he said, "The godfathers are supposed to surrender before the court or at the police stations. But police have kept them in the safe house for weeks and now they are going to hold a ceremony.

"This gives a wrong message as the carriers will think that they also will get such an escape route after doing the business."

RISE OF NEW DEALERS

Talking to this newspaper, Md Noor Hossain, chairman of Sabrang union, said that smuggling earlier was limited to certain people but now their associates have begun to indulge in it.

Besides, some rickshaw pullers, thieves, pickpockets, bus supervisors, day labourers and shopkeepers, who used to be carriers, have started yaba business on their own, as the kingpins are either in police custody for surrender or on the run.

Law enforcers said the number of such new dealers would be no less than 500 and they took control of the business after godfathers and dealers went to police for surrender.

HK Anwar, chairman of Hnila union, claimed that they also came to

know about some new faces in the yaba smuggling.

Take the case of Kamal Hossain, 30, a residence of Jaliapara in Teknaf. Just four to five years back, he was widely known as a pickpocket in the locality.

He started working as a carrier for yaba trader Nur Mohammad, who went into hiding after the drives began last year.

Now he is on law enforcers' list of yaba smuggler. He spends most of his time in Chattogram, where he has two houses, said locals.

Kamal could not be reached for comment.

Nurul Amin, 32, a rickshaw puller of Hakimpura village in Teknaf, was living hand to mouth just four years back. Now he has a one-storey building and two dozen CNG-run auto-rickshaws.

Two days ago, police conducted a drive in his house after getting information about a yaba shipment. But he managed to flee with the pills, according to sources in law enforcement agencies.

Talking to this newspaper, Nurul said no one wants to see others happy. "My rival group is spreading misleading information against me."

Jahangir Alam, 32, had nothing to do for a living just three years back. He started working as a carrier for Myanmar citizen Kala Ahmed, who is currently in Maungdaw town of the neighbouring country.

Now a smuggler, Jahangir is the owner of a mini truck, two-microbuses, a truck and a one-story building. He was not available for comment.

Sultan Ahmed, 32, a day labourer of ward-9 of Palongkhali union, is now owner of two tin-shade buildings. Sultan earlier used to go to Myanmar as a carrier, but now he brings the pills for his own business, locals claimed.

Sultan, who is wanted in a case filed with Akbar Shah Police Station in Chattogram, refuted the allegations and said he is not involved in yaba trade.

He asked this correspondent to talk to those yaba dealers who have become

rich. "I am just a poor man," he said.

Md Salman, 30, a resident of ward-7 of Teknaf, was a bus supervisor five years back. But he is now the owner of several shops in Teknaf municipality area and a lavish bungalow in Chowdhurypara of Teknaf.

Two months back, law enforcers seized one lakh yaba pills from a drum hidden in the bungalow, sources added.

Sources say the arrival of big yaba shipments has stopped but the small ones are still coming from Myanmar, thanks to the new smugglers and dealers.

Contacted, ABM Masud Hossain, superintendent of police in Cox's Bazar, said they have got some new names and would go for action, verifying their roles after the surrender ceremony.

About today's surrender, Masud said they have taken all necessary steps. They prepared a list of around 100 but are expecting to include some more at the last moment.

He said they are hopeful that the programme will yield a good result but tough action will be taken if anyone gets involved in the business again.

5.5 lakh yaba pills

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Acting on a tip-off, a patrol team raided Fultoli area around 12:30am and recovered the tablets, said Lt Col Md Asaduzzaman, commander of BGB Battalion-11.

No one could be arrested as those carrying the contraband items had already fled sensing the presence of BGB members, he added.

This is the first time such a huge consignment of yaba pills were recovered in the area, the official said.

UNB adds: BGB members also recovered around 20,000 yaba pills from Hnila Kharangkhal in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila.

In another incident, Rab members seized 1 lakh tablets from a fishing boat at Cox's Bazar channel of the Bay of Bengal and detained four people in this connection, said Maj Mehedi Hasan, Rab-15 company commander.

Crunch time as Nigeria goes to the polls

AFP, Lagos

Nigeria made final preparations yesterday on the eve of presidential elections, with candidates pitting continuity against reform in a battle between incumbent Muhammadu Buhari and his main rival Atiku Abubakar.

Buhari, the 76-year-old leader of Africa's most populous nation was elected in 2015 on a wave of hope he could defeat Boko Haram Islamists, tackle rampant corruption and boost the economy.

But he faces a stiff challenge from former vice-president Abubakar, 72, amid fears about widening insecurity, claims of creeping authoritarianism, and economic incompetence.

A total of 73 candidates are on the ballot for today -- the sixth election in 20 years since Nigeria returned to democracy after decades of military rule.

Buhari, from the All Progressives Congress (APC), and Abubakar, of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), are considered the main contenders.

Campaigning ended Thursday with final rallies in Buhari's home state of Katsina, in the northwest, and Abubakar's native Adamawa, in the northeast.

A record 84,004,084 people are registered to vote.

Also up for grabs are 360 seats in the lower House of Representatives and 109 in the Senate.

Nearly 120,000 polling units are set to open at 0700 GMT and close at 1600 GMT.

Al Mahmud

FROM PAGE 1
Al Mahmud emerged in the realm of Bangla literature in 1950s. He won over the hearts of hundreds with his masterpiece poetries "Lok Lokantor" and "Sonali Kabin".

His other literary creations include Mayabi Porda Dule Otho, Arobbo Rojonir Rajhash, Bokhtiyarer Ghora, Dinjapan, Ditiya Bhangon, Pankourir Rokto, Nodir Bhitore Nodi, Prem Prokritir Droho Ar Prarthonar Kobita and Upomohadesh.

With more than 50 books in his six-decade long career, he is considered as one of the finest novelists, short story writers and essayists in the country.

Political and economic issues and nature are some of the major hall-marks of his writings that are full of metaphors, images and striking themes.

Al Mahmud received the Bangla Academy Award in 1968.

The frequent uses of colloquial dialects and his outspoken approach fetched him international acclaim.

He regularly wrote about for Chatushkon, Chaturanga, Mayukh and Krittibash.

In Dhaka, he started writing regularly for Sikandar Abu Zafar's Shamokal, a magazine published between 1959 and 1970.

After independence, Mahmud joined The Daily Ganakantha as an assistant editor. In 1975, he joined Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy as assistant director and retired from the academy as director in 1993.

He also edited and ran a number of journals, magazines and dailies.

Al Mahmud's last publication was his autobiography titled "Jiban Jakhan Bak Ghore". It was published in 2018 Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela.

Born in Brahmanbaria on July 11, 1936, Al Mahmud was honoured with many awards including Ekushey Padak, Kabi Jasim Uddin Award, Joy Bangla Award, Humayun Kabir Memorial Award and Jibonananda Memorial Award in recognition of his contribution to Bangla literature.

Italian city

FROM PAGE 16
It's part of mayor Antonio Decaro's push to double the number of cyclists in the southern Italian city in 2019.

"By cycling, you'll earn; it won't only benefit your health," Decaro said when he unveiled the concept last month.

Funding has also been set aside to help Bari residents buy bikes. They can apply for €100 towards the cost of buying a second-hand bike, €150 for a new bike, or €250 for an ebike.

Commuters aren't the only ones to benefit – parents can also apply for the funding to buy bikes for one child per family, and OAPs are eligible.

The discount is a gift rather than a loan, and citizens can get it by buying a bike from a council-authorised shop in the city.

The project is supported by a €545,000 grant from Italy's Ministry for the Environment, and aims to fund the purchase of 3,000 bikes in Bari.

The French cycle-to-work reimbursement scheme, first introduced in 2015, inspired the project.

The French model sees cyclists benefit from a kickback of 29 cents per kilometre cycled from their employer, which is in turn incentivised to offer the scheme to employees.

A rude wake-up

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There were around 1,200 patients, including 10 at the Intensive Care Unit, when the fire started at the hospital. And understandably, they were way more vulnerable than, let's say, 1,200 shoppers at Bashundhara mall, who can easily run to safety in case of a fire.

Anyone who has been to a government hospital would agree that it was a matter of luck that the casualty of Thursday's fire was just one.

The fire broke out at the store room on the ground floor. It spread to the first floor where the operation theatres and the post-operative sections are located. The blaze then raged to the second floor where C-section patients and newborns are treated.

A sick person is vulnerable, but one doesn't need to be a doctor to understand that C-section patients, newborns and surgery patients are most vulnerable because most of them cannot move on their own if there is an accident or disaster.

And in case of Thursday's fire, all the ingredients were there for a major catastrophe.

There was a fire alarm system, but it didn't work -- quite expectedly. The patients and their attendants started screaming as they saw smoke.

Fire fighters could rush to the scene in no time because there was a fire station close to the hospital. But they couldn't start working in full throttle right away as there wasn't enough water. There was a reservoir at the hospital for an emergency situation, but there wasn't any water in it.

According to a study by the government's fire department in 2017, more than 40 percent of the hospitals and healthcare centres in the capital have no fire-fighting capabilities. And nearly 60 percent have nominal arrangements while, alarmingly, just 2.5 percent are relatively compliant.

The study, conducted on 433 hospitals and healthcare centres in the capital, pointed out that most hospitals lack evacuation ramps, fire exit plans, fire detection and alarm systems, hose reels, safe refuge assembly spaces, trained in-house fire-fighting teams, fire escape routes, fire lifts, access roads and water reservoirs.

Aid agencies

FROM PAGE 16
return of Rohingya refugees," Grandi said in Geneva, according to a joint statement of the UNHCR and International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

With the generosity and support of the Bangladeshi authorities and local communities, who were the first to respond to the emergency, critical needs were met and many lives were saved. Last year, international donors contributed \$655 million which was 69 percent of the \$950 million requested under the JRP.

IOM Director General António Vitorino said, "Moving forward, we reiterate our commitment to meeting the dire needs of this population and urge the international community to support these efforts."

The 2019 JRP sets out a comprehensive humanitarian effort shaped around three strategic objectives.

By bringing together 132 partners -- UN agencies, international and national NGOs and government bodies in a collective effort -- the Plan aims to deliver protection to refugee women, men, girls and boys, provide life-saving assistance and foster social cohesion.

Critical aid and services such as food, water, sanitation and shelter represent more than half of the funding needs this year. Other key sectors of the appeal include health, site management, protection activities including child protection and addressing sexual and gender-based violence,

After Thursday's fire at Suhrawardy hospital, fire fighters appeared helpless, like on so many occasions in the past, for lack of disaster preparedness.

"All hospitals should be fire-safety compliant. Otherwise, there could be heavy casualties. We have written so many times to the authorities of different hospitals, but no one seems to care," Brig Gen Ali Ahmed Khan, director general of the Fire Service and Civil Defence, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Just think what would happen if there is a fire at Dhaka Medical College Hospital or Mitford Hospital," he mentioned.

Now let's have a look at what happens if a fire breaks out at a hospital with efficient and effective fire-fighting system.

On Wednesday, a fire broke out at the Aultman Hospital in Ohio's Canton, the USA. The following day, the hospital issued a statement saying: "Around 11:00pm, the fire alarm system was activated by a fire in a first floor Bedford building office area. The sprinkler system activated, extinguishing the fire, and the Canton Fire Department quickly arrived at the scene. No patient or staff was injured, and no services were affected."

The statement is pretty much self-explanatory.

At the Suhrawardy hospital on Thursday, all services had to be put on hold soon after the fire broke out around 6:00pm. And the authorities were not able to fully resume services till the filing of this report at 8:00pm.

Talking to reporters, AKM Shakil Newaz, director (operation and maintenance) of the Fire Service and Civil Defence, said, "Some fire-fighting tools were there at the hospital. But there was a lack of preparedness. It's like you have equipment but there is no one to operate it."

Sounding a note of caution, Zahid Maleque, minister for health and family welfare, told reporters, "This is a lesson for us. This is a wakeup call. Many of our hospitals are old. Our fire-fighting systems need modernisation. Electric wires and instruments at the hospitals should be checked."

education and nutrition.

Over the past 12 months, the environmental impact of the influx has been reduced, the prevalence of acute malnutrition, at emergency levels in late 2017, has now dropped from 19 percent to 12 percent, officials said.

Besides, food security has improved, immunisation coverage has grown to 81 per cent, and delivering of babies in health facilities has risen from 22 per cent to 40 per cent. Despite the progress, Rohingyas remain in an extremely precarious situation and need sustained support, the plan said.

"Support must be provided to the Bangladeshi authorities to meet the needs of refugees and the host communities," the UN Refugee Agency said.

For example, the entire refugee population received basic emergency shelter kits to cope with the rainy season in 2018, but safer and more robust shelters are now required.

Around 860,000 refugees regularly receive food assistance, yet only 240,000 are able to diversify their diet beyond the minimum package of rice, lentils and oil. These resources must be expanded to ensure their nutrition and health.

Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision said education and income-generating opportunities must be top priorities for the nearly one million Rohingyas and called on the international community to generously fund the JRP.

Biswa Ijtema begins

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Yesterday, many devotees joined from morning to offer Juma prayers. As the main Ijtema ground already filled, many had to take position on adjacent Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, and roads, halting vehicular movement for a while.

Abdullah Al Mamun, a devotee from Mymensingh's Trishal, said he offered Juma prayers on the ground on several occasions.

"This year, I came here from home, starting my journey at dawn. I hadn't had to face much traffic hassle," he said.

Among others, State Minister for Religious Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah offered Juma prayers at the Ijtema venue.

Halim-uz-Zaman, station master of Tongi Railway Station, said due to Ijtema, all trains would stop at the station on February 16 to 18. Some trains would stop on February 19 for carrying the devotees.

Gazipur Metropolitan Police Commissioner YM Belalur Rahman said watchtowers and closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras were set up at the venue to ensure security.

He added that vehicular movement near the Ijtema ground would be limited till the end of the congregation.

Beside security measures, adequate number of traffic police has been deployed for a hassle-free journey of the devotees, said Ruhul Amin Sarkar, assistant commissioner (media) of GMP.

Meanwhile, some organisations, including Gazipur City Corporation,

Zahirul Islam Medical College Hospital, Bangabandhu Unani Ayurvedic, Hamdard, Ibn Sina, and Jamuna Bank Foundation are providing free medical treatment on the ground.

On February 5, the state minister for religious affairs extended the duration from three days to four days after holding a meeting with the two groups.

Initially, the Ijtema was scheduled to be held in two phases, with the first one from January 11 to 13 and the second one from January 18 to 20.

Meanwhile, two devotees died at the Ijtema venue yesterday.

Shafiqur Rahman, 55, of Feni, Sirajul Islam, 65, of Kushtia, died of cardiac arrest, said a physician at the venue.

With the two, the death toll at the Ijtema venue has risen to four this year.

Emdadul Haque, officer-in-charge of Tongi Police Station, said there was a loud bang from a gas stove around 10:00am, and devotees started running in panic, thinking that a gas cylinder exploded.

At least 20 devotees were injured in the incident at the Ijtema ground, he added.

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According to a BGB statement, acting on a tip-off, one of its patrol team went to the village on Tuesday morning to seize the smuggled cattle.

As they were taking those to Betna camp, the cattle smugglers intercepted them and tried to snatch away the animals.

At one stage, the BGB personnel got into an altercation with the villagers, who encircled them. Having been failed to calm down the villagers, the BGB men opened fire in self-defence, the statement added.