

BANGLADESH UPDATE



8,301
New cases in 24hrs



9,21,559
Total cases



14,646
Deaths



8,20,913
Recoveries



GLOBAL UPDATE



3,965,643
Deaths



183,160,095
Total cases

DIARRHOEA OUTBREAK ON BHASAN CHAR

Poor hygiene practices of refugees key reason

Say officials, claim situation improving; IEDCR team visits island to investigate

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Some Rohingyas maintain personal hygiene poorly and lack proper healthcare awareness, said officials concerned about the recent outbreak of diarrhoea in Bhasan Char.

The situation has improved significantly as the number of patient is decreasing, they said, adding that five people died from the disease.

A team of Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) visited the island in Noakhali's Hatiya to find the cause of the outbreak.

"In our primary observation, we found that their [Rohingyas] hygienic practice is very poor. We have collected water samples from different points and now we are analysing whether there is any problem in the water," Major Zinnatun Nabi, team leader of IEDCR, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He, however, declined to go into details as the investigation was going on.

"The government provides us treatment, but there is a crisis of medicine," said Abdul Hamid, a Rohingya in the island.

He added that polluted water probably got mixed with the drinking water.

Officials, however, said the number of patients in the Bhasan Char 20-bed hospital has decreased, but still new people are infected.

Kamrul Hasan, medical officer of the hospital, said in the last six days, around 200 people were infected with the disease. "On an average, everyday 35-40 people are getting infected."

Mentioning that around 6,000 people took treatment for diarrhoea, he said most of the patients were children and women.

Masum Iftakhar, civil surgeon of Noakhali, said the situation of the disease in Bhasan Char improved and was under control. "Sufficient medicine and IV saline are in stock. Rohingyas drank dirty water and basically that triggered the outbreak of diarrhoea in the island."

He also said personal cleanliness and health awareness are very poor among the refugees. "They don't wash their hands after defecation and urinate in open spaces. Even they don't know how to drink saline."

The civil surgeon said a massive awareness campaign has been launched in the island to make people aware and water purifying tablets are being distributed among the Rohingyas.

"Cluster-based health education system has been introduced in Bhasan Char to teach the refugees how to prepare saline with water and [the process of] drinking the saline and increase health awareness."

Commodore Rashed Sattar, director of the Bhasan Char project, said Rohingyas were fishing in the drain waters and their cleanliness practice is very poor.

"We are also drinking the same water they are drinking, but no Bangladeshis were suffering from diarrhoea."

Since December 2020, more than 18,000 Rohingyas have been moved to Bhasan Char from Cox's Bazar.

Vaccination gathers steam

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Bangladesh procured 1.5 crore doses of Sinopharm vaccine and was supposed to get it in three months. As part of that procurement, the country will get 11 lakh doses today and the rest is likely to come tomorrow, said officials.

The government has already resumed vaccination in all district hospitals and 40 centres across the capital with 11 lakh doses of the Sinopharm vaccine gifted by the Chinese government.

The Covax facility is a global initiative coordinated by the World Health Organization, the Vaccine Alliance Gavi, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

It is working to ensure that low-and middle-income countries have equitable access to Covid vaccines.

Under the facility, Bangladesh was supposed to get 6.8 crore vaccine doses this year, which would cover around 20 percent of its population. But it has so far received only one consignment of 1.06 lakh doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

On March 2 this year, Covax informed the government that it would provide Bangladesh with 1.09 crore doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine by May, but it did not deliver. The country has so far inoculated less than three percent of its population. Its vaccination campaign, which started on February 7, stumbled due to suspension of vaccine supply by the Serum Institute of India amid a surge in cases and deaths in that country.

Bangladesh and Serum had an agreement that the latter would ship three crore shots of the Oxford vaccine to Bangladesh in phases between January and June.

Serum delivered the first consignment of 50 lakh doses in January, but shipped only 20 lakh the following month. No shipment has been made since. Besides, India sent 3.3 million doses as gift to Bangladesh.

Amid a fast depleting vaccine stock, Bangladesh suspended administering the first dose of the vaccine on April 26. The registration process for vaccination was suspended nine days later.

Bangladesh, China

FROM PAGE 1
and development," she said.

The PM said this in her prerecorded message shared yesterday afternoon at a function marking the 100th founding anniversary of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

Hasina said Bangladesh and China enjoy excellent relations based on mutual respect, shared values and commonalities in core national objectives.

She acknowledged with deep appreciation the cooperation and assistance by China during the Covid-19 pandemic, including the recent gifts of vaccine doses and CPC's gifts of medical equipment to Awami League.

"I'm confident that the existing cordial ties between our two countries will be strengthened further in the days to come," she said.

She recalled with profound appreciation the contributions of many CPC leaders in bolstering Bangladesh-China as well as CPC-Awami League relations over the past decades.

"On the auspicious occasion of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Communist Party of China, I, as the president of Bangladesh Awami League and on behalf of the government and the people of Bangladesh, would like to convey to you and through you, to the government, members of the CPC and the friendly people of China, our heartiest felicitations and warmest greetings," she said, referring to Chinese President Xi Jinping, also the CPC general secretary.

The premier said the historic visits of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to China in 1952 and 1957, as a young leader of Awami League, provided further opportunities to exchange views with the then CPC leadership.

Bangabandhu recorded his admiration of the passion, commitment and conviction of the Chinese people to build a prosperous country under the leadership of CPC, in his book "Amar Dekha Noyachin" -- The New China 1952, she mentioned.

Hasina said the CPC, through its judicious policies and visionary leadership, has transformed the country into a modern state to ensure prosperity for all.

In a span of a few decades, China has achieved amazing and inspiring progress in different areas -- from space to nanotechnology, robotics to avionics -- backed by high quality education and resulting in production of world-class goods and services, she said.

The PM said the development dividend has reached the common people even in the remote parts of China.

Similarly, Awami League, once headed by the Father of the Nation, led the War of Independence in 1971, established free and independent Bangladesh and now imbued by his dream of "Sonar Bangla", is resolute to materialise that vision, she said.

"We aspire to bring affluence to all our citizens by 2041. I believe greater cooperation between our two parties would bring about more benefits to our citizens."

Hasina wished Xi Jinping good health and happiness and continued peace, progress and prosperity of the friendly people of China.



A man standing in the front the yard of Holey Artisan Bakery. Flowers have been left there in memory of those killed by the militants at the bakery on July 1, 2016. PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

First day was indeed strict

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In Tejgaon area alone, 316 people were detained or fined.

In Mirpur, a 16-year-old was detained when he went out to film how strict the lockdown was.

In Gulshan-2, members of the Army set up a check point and were seen making announcements on megaphones urging people to stay home.

An executive magistrate, who accompanied the team there, said they fined rule violators and cautioned them about health safety rules.

Yesterday, there were no public transport on city streets. Shops and markets along the thoroughfares were closed.

There were police check points at most intersections, including near Prime Minister's Office, Jahangir Gate, Kakoli, Paltan, Mirpur, Shahbagh, Elephant Road, Dhanmondi, Farmgate, and Gabtoli.

Motijheel and Farmgate, usually very busy, were largely quiet apart from a few rickshaws here and there.

Police and Rab set up separate check points in Shahbagh as the area has some major hospitals.

Many people were seen going to the hospitals on rickshaws and cars. Migrant workers, who have flights in the next few days, were also seen going to

the hospitals for their coronavirus test.

People arriving from abroad faced difficulties getting transport at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport as rental car drivers went on strike after cops fined some vehicles.

They withdrew their strike following assurance from HSHA authorities.

Public transport has been suspended in the country but garment factories have been allowed to stay open, putting its workers in difficulties.

In the morning, hundreds of RMG workers were seen heading to work on foot.

Kitchen markets in the city remained open from 8:00am to 5:00pm.

Although, the streets were almost empty, many alleys of the capital were crowded. Law enforcers were not seen there.

'STRICT IN TOWNS, SLACK IN RURAL AREAS'

Law enforcers were seen on roads and highways in and around cities and towns outside Dhaka yesterday but they were not seen in the suburbs and rural areas.

In many places people hid only when they saw the policemen.

Rab said their 40 mobile courts fined 182 people Tk 1.32 lakh across the country yesterday.

However, our correspondents in Munshiganj, Patuakhali, Bagerhat,

Pabna, reports that many went out without any valid reason despite patrols by the army, police, Rab and mobile courts.

Double Mooring police in Chattogram freed 21 people after they signed an undertaking. They were held after they came out to see the "strict lockdown".

Mobile courts in the district filed 37 cases and fined people Tk 13,700.

There were barricades on streets in Khulna city's Royal Mor, Picture Palace Mor, Moylapota, Nirala, Gallamari, Sonadanga Bus Terminal, Daulatpur, Boyra Bazar and Rupsa areas.

Police set up 26 checkpoints in the district.

The "strict lockdown" was largely ignored in rural areas of some districts, reports our correspondents.

During a visit to several villages in Tangail Sadar, including the outskirts of the town, it was found that a large number of people were in the markets without masks and not following health safety directives.

No law enforcers were seen there.

In Narayanganj and Gazipur, the movement of vehicles and people were less than normal since the morning. Only rickshaws were seen on the streets.

The strict lockdown will be enforced until July 7 midnight to curb the spread of coronavirus.

Dhaka treads on razor edge

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atrocities crimes.

"However, the resolution that was adopted fails to recognise, in its operative part, the urgent need for creating conditions for the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of the displaced minorities of Myanmar, particularly the Rohingyas."

The resolution calls for the swift implementation of the five-point consensus reached at the Leaders' Meeting of the ASEAN in Jakarta held in April.

"This, however, does not address the repatriation issue," she said.

Moreover, the recent comments of the Myanmar military leader, in public media, rules out the possibilities of any policy reforms that are fundamental for the safe and sustainable return of the Rohingyas.

"The failure of the international community in addressing the crisis creates a sense of impunity in Myanmar," she said of Myanmar's genocidal acts against the Rohingyas, who have been fleeing to Bangladesh since the 1980s following persecution.

Is this explanation satisfactory? Could Bangladesh have handled the resolution differently?

Some international relations analysts say Bangladesh took the right decision because the world has done little for creating conditions for the Rohingya return, which is so crucial for Bangladesh that has been immensely suffering for the last four decades for actions by Myanmar.

The others, however, say the abstention of voting at the UNGA resolution, which will remain a momentous document for the history of Myanmar, has not reflected Bangladesh's moral stand.

Touhid Hossain, former foreign secretary, however, supported Bangladesh's position.

The UN resolution cannot be complete without including the Rohingya genocide, citizenship and repatriation from Bangladesh, he said.

"Myanmar military has committed a far grave crime by mass killing, raping and driving out the Rohingya than the human rights violation in Myanmar now. It is surprising that the Western world has ignored it in the resolution."

Bangladesh had tried to include the Rohingya issue in the resolution but was ignored.

Also, the resolution did not speak of a comprehensive arms embargo and was not unanimously adopted.

"Therefore, Bangladesh's abstention means making a strong point on the Rohingyas," Hossain added.

Countries like China, Russia and India as well as a number of ASEAN nations that can help address the Rohingya crisis have abstained from voting and Bangladesh has no point in voting for it, said Imtiaz Ahmed, a professor of the Dhaka University's International Relations department.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been supported by the West all along, actually supported the Rohingya genocide and defended the military junta at the International Court of Justice while in power.

The UNGA resolution, despite having political significance, has no capacity in terms of taking any concrete actions against the Myanmar junta, Ahmed said.

Myanmar has been ruled by the military for decades, and sanctions against the junta by the Western powers have not worked.

"Therefore, it is better for Bangladesh not to interfere with Myanmar's internal affairs."

Also, most of the countries that worked for the resolution continued to trade with Myanmar and still maintain diplomatic relations.

"This means that they are not sincere about what they are speaking."

Bangladesh does not have any dispute with Myanmar; the problem is between Myanmar and Rohingyas.

However, Bangladesh is vocal about the accountability of the Rohingyas, but the UN resolution has not spoken

about it.

"So, what Bangladesh did is right," Ahmed added.

M Humayun Kabir, a former ambassador of Bangladesh, begs to differ.

"It would have been better if we voted for the resolution because abstaining from the vote carries a wrong message. If we look at our diplomacy in the last 50 years, it was based on principle. We had a moral stand for democracy, peoples' rights."

The Western countries that have been providing Bangladesh with humanitarian as well as diplomatic assistance have been surprised by Bangladesh's abstention.

"It is a question of how they look at it in the future," said Kabir, president of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

Asked about abstention of other countries, he said: "We need to consider the principle we have and not what others do."

Bangladesh could have voted and then explained its grievances and demands.

"That would have been recorded and have made our moral position clear."

Most of the world voted for the resolution.

"Had we voted for it, Myanmar would have not liked it. In fact, Myanmar is already not very happy about us. So, why should we compromise our principle?"

Bangladesh's abstention has created diplomatic confusion with the world as well as with Myanmar, said Kabir, also a former secretary to the foreign ministry.

The country should have voted for the resolution because it has an international weight that can facilitate democratic restoration, said another former foreign secretary asking to remain unnamed.

"We could have explained our position even after voting. Now, our position as far as Myanmar's democracy could be questioned even if we want democracy."

Hassles outweigh

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found the report. This meaning a worker or a worker's family has to wait several years before they get their dues.

All this for paltry sums that range from Tk 2 lakh (for injury) to Tk 2.50 lakh (for death).

For cases filed before 2016, when the labour law was amended, this sum was between Tk 1 lakh and Tk 1.25 lakh.

Twenty-eight-year-old Jewel, for example, had to wait four years to get a positive verdict. Even then, he has not been able to get his employer to pay his dues.

In December 2013, the construction worker slipped off a flimsy ladder while carrying 60kg of sand. He had been working on the moulding of the rooftop of a house in Badda.

The fall left him permanently paralysed from the waist down. The doctors told him that he would be unable to walk or do any manual labour for the rest of his life -- a form of death sentence for a young construction worker.

Jewel had been working for the house's owner Hazi Liaakat Ali when the accident happened. Jewel sued him for compensation in June 2014, seeking Tk 215,000 in damages.

After a drawn-out four-year legal battle, Jewel was handed a verdict in his favour -- but to no avail. The court had ordered Ali to deposit Tk 2 lakh within two months, but as of 2021, Jewel has still not received a single taka from his former employer.

BLAST then initiated a criminal case against Jewel's employer to recover the money, but the case is still pending in court.

"The Bangladesh Labour Act relies too heavily on the willingness (rather than ability) of employers to pay compensation to claimants. Repeated refusal to pay compensation, including when ordered by courts, appears to be commonplace -- with little to no practical consequences for such non-compliance," stated the report, authored by BLAST's Taqbir Huda.

Major reasons behind courts taking so long to pass verdicts include an inadequate number of judges, backlog of cases, difficulty obtaining documentary evidence and crucially, large distances between the workers and the courts.

"The average distance between the claimant's upazilla [subdistrict] and the Labour Court, in which the compensation claim had to be filed, was 201km," found the report.

"In 50 of the 80 cases, the court and the claimant's residence were located in different divisions... Claimants are required to travel hundreds of kilometres, incurring huge transport costs and travel time."

The time and the distance force workers and their families to settle out of court, it added.

Fifteen-year-old Md Rubel was working in the Three Star Fan Factory situated in Mirhajirbagh of Jatrabari in 2007, when a fire broke out, killing the boy.

Rubel's mother filed a case the next year.

During the trial, the employer did not even bother to submit a written statement to contest the case, while Rubel's mother told the court that all the company had paid was Tk 10,000 as compensation.

After two long years, the Second Labour Court Dhaka pronounced a judgment on January 12, 2011, ruling that a remaining Tk 90,000 had to be paid to Rubel's mother within 30 days.

The employer ignored the court order, forcing BLAST to initiate a criminal case.

This prompted the factory to offer Rubel's parents an out-of-court settlement of Tk 60,000.

They could accept this now or the company could continue prolonging the legal battle and keep them penniless. Rubel's parents took the money and withdrew legal action against the employer.

At a virtual launching ceremony of the report, Honorary Executive Director of BLAST Sara Hossain stated, "The findings of the report show that when victims of injustice, such as those of workplace deaths and injuries, seek justice in labour courts, they are subjected to another set of injustices, whereby continuing the court case becomes an extremely costly endeavour.

"This is precisely why an employment injury insurance scheme is the need of the hour, so victims have a speedy recourse to compensation."

BLAST Chairman Dr Kamal Hossain said, "The Labour Act was thus enacted to ensure workers' rights. However, after all these years, we still see that recovering compensation is not easy. Employers mostly disregard the compensation orders of courts.

"The pendency and delay of cases in courts disappoint the victims in getting justice. We need to amend our existing law by removing the fixed compensation amount, and increasing [the number of] courts and judges."

AKM Nasim, deputy country director of the Solidarity Center Bangladesh, said, "The findings of the report, while harrowing, confirm something we have known for years -- that the compensation framework is miserably failing workers. The labour law requires immediate reform." Wajedul Islam Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Trade Union Centre and joint secretary general of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, said, "The duty to compensate should also extend to those who benefit from the profit derived from the workers' labour, alongside the employer."