

12,148 New cases in 24hrs



10,83,922 Total cases



17,465 Deaths



9,14,343 Recoveries



4,086,635 Deaths



189,957,453 Total cases



Giving a new life on remote island

Govt distributing income generating items among Rohingyas at Bhasan Char to make them self-dependent

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA, from Bhasan Char

Rahima Khatun was beaming next to the new sewing machine that she had been given. Her husband had gotten a fishing net, and together they were weaving dreams of how they would spend their earnings.

They had been on the island for four months.

"We were getting frustrated as we had nothing to do here. Now, we can do something and earn," Rahima, 40, said.

Her husband, Noor Alam, could barely contain his delight at the prospect of becoming his own man because now he could catch fish and provide for this family.

Having to rely on alms gradually chips away at one's dignity, which is perhaps why the 19,000 Rohingyas in Bhasan Char are eager for work.

Acting on a previous assessment, the government distributed income-generating items to 2,500 Rohingyas in Bhasan Char so that they could take care of their families.

The residents of Bhasan Char, an island on the Bay of Bengal in Noakhali's Hatia upazila repurposed for Rohingya resettlement, earlier said they had good accommodation but no employment opportunities.

They had long been demanding employment because they did not have cash. At the same time, they also reiterated that they want to return to Myanmar.

In light of this, the Bangladesh government yesterday distributed livelihood items among adult Rohingya men and women.

"The government and various NGOs are giving accommodation and food support to Rohingyas but their demand for livelihood is equally important," Commodore Rashed Sattar, project director of Ashrayan-3 Project, popularly known as the Bhasan Char project, told The Daily Star.

He said a need assessment was done prior to giving them the livelihood items.

For example, fishing nets were given to those who have fishing experience, cobbling tools were given to cobblers, etc.

"We also gave livelihood items to Rohingya women, with which they can do something," he said.

Since the morning yesterday, Rohingyas gathered in front of the Bhasan Char warehouse. They were standing in different queues to collect the livelihood items.

Taslima Begum was walking out from the warehouse with a goat. "If this goat was part of a pair, it would have been better," she said, adding that nothing but this brings joy of Eid to her.

Abdul Halim was in Kutupalong camp for three years, and had worked as a barber there.

"I wanted to do the same job here but I didn't have the equipment. Now that I have got the equipment, I will open a shop here within a day or two. My dream has come true," he said.

A total of 800 fishing nets, 50 rickshaw-vans, 5,000 ducks, 5,000 chickens, 45 grooming items for barbers, 28 sets of cobbler tools, 100 sewing machines, 25 rickshaw-van repair sets and other livelihood items were distributed among the residents of Bhasan Char.

More than one lakh minnows were released in the ponds of the island and fish feed was also distributed.

"Rohingyas will look after the fish. They can eat and sell the fish. This will meet their nutrition demands and also pave the way to earn money," the project director said.

He said more than 2,500 Rohingyas were brought under the livelihood project and a total of 5,000 will come under the scheme gradually.

Apart from this, many Rohingyas were working in the project area on a daily basis.

Rohingya people said they want to stay here till their return to Myanmar becomes possible.

"We are very grateful to the Bangladesh government. But we want to return to our country. We don't want to live in Bangladesh," Abdul Hamid, a Rohingya leader, said.

Sixty-year-old Hanufa Begum had a spring in her steps as she walked her goat back to the living quarter.

She recalled that she had 10 such goats back home.

"But in Kutupalong I did not have any goats. I got a goat today. I am happy," she said, her wrinkles stretching into a smile as she thought of her life in back in Myanmar.



Rohingya men stand next to their brand new rickshaw vans in front of the warehouse at Bhasan Char. The government yesterday distributed income-generating items to the residents of the island.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Support for Bangladesh to continue

Says Chinese FM

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said China will continue to support Bangladesh in safeguarding national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

He also said China will uphold international fairness and justice and the basic norm of non-interference in internal affairs in international relations of Bangladesh, says a statement of the Chinese foreign ministry.

Yi made the statements when he and Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen held a bilateral meeting in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent on the sidelines of a conference on Central and South Asia Connectivity Challenges and Opportunities hosted by the Uzbek government on Thursday.

This is significant as China is going ahead with its Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks aimed at improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth. Bangladesh has already joined the initiative.

On the other hand, the US also wants Bangladesh to join US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), which seeks to ensure free and open Indo-Pacific and international rules upheld in maritime affairs.

Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming in May this year had said Bangladesh should not join "Quad".

Bangladesh's relations with China will "substantially get damaged" if it joins it. He had termed Quad, of which US, Japan, Australia and India are members, a military alliance aiming against China's resurgence and its relationship with neighbouring countries.

Bangladesh always maintained that it will not join any military alliance, but is willing to join any initiative beneficial for national or regional socio-economic development.

During the meeting in Tashkent, Chinese Foreign Minister Yi also told Momen that China was willing to work with Bangladesh to maintain the development momentum of the China-Bangladesh strategic partnership of cooperation, says the statement of the Chinese foreign ministry.

He added that China highly appreciates Bangladesh's firm support of China's legitimate stance on issues concerning China's core interests.

The Chinese minister also said China will continue to provide Bangladesh with vaccines to meet its needs, and is ready to discuss vaccine-filling cooperation with Bangladesh to help the country fight against the pandemic.

Under an agreement, Chinese company Sinopharm is supplying vaccines to Bangladesh. Of the 15 million vaccines as contracted, China has already supplied 2 million and is scheduled to supply 5 million vaccine jabs early next month.

As gift, it has provided 1.1 million. Dhaka and Beijing are also working for co-production of vaccines in Bangladesh.

Yi said China stands ready to provide support and assistance to help with Bangladesh's poverty alleviation through the China-South Asian Countries Poverty Alleviation and Cooperative Development Center, which was launched in China on July 8.

Momen told Yi that Bangladesh always insists on the one-China principle and firmly supports China on issues related to China's internal affairs, such as the issues related to Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet.

Bangladesh thanked China for its timely assistance with vaccines at a critical time and opposes making the search for the coronavirus origin a political issue, the statement said.

Bangladesh wishes to launch vaccine-filling cooperation with China, and enhance anti-pandemic cooperation under the framework of the six-nation cooperation mechanism, namely Bangladesh, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Momen said China has set an example of poverty alleviation for the world and hopes to learn from China's experience in lifting the country out of poverty.

He expected China to continue to play a mediating and constructive role in properly resolving the issue of Rohingya crisis, added the statement.

No roadmap, only stopgaps

FROM PAGE 1
it seems that the government is resorting only to responsive activities.

For example, with transmission surging, the government opted to impose movement restrictions from the start of July but an overall targeted plan was absent, he said.

"We are not seeing any specific targets from the government. When and how does it want to bring down transmission? What is the plan for the cities and villages? When will educational institutions re-open? These things are missing.

"Everything is being done on an ad-hoc basis," he said.

He also said government's focus on both life and livelihood will not curb

down to below 10 percent after a large surge in April-May, it started going up again June onwards and the overall positivity rate has now risen to over 14 percent. In some districts it is even at around 25 percent, and at least 50 districts are now high-risk zones.

India too witnessed a massive surge of Covid-19 cases in April-May, when it rose to over 35 lakh per day. But strict lockdown and massive vaccination have recently brought the situation to almost under control, with around 50,000 daily cases over the past week.

In Bangladesh, however, in addition to people continuing to care little about following the health guidelines and government restrictions on movement applying only on paper,

Rowmari yaba route

FROM PAGE 1
Law enforcers suspect drug smuggling syndicates opened the new route in late 2018 to avoid Teknaf in Cox's Bazar -- previously the easiest gateway for yaba pills -- which is always under strict watch.

Law enforcers of late also stepped up vigilance on three other smuggling points -- Zakiganj in Sylhet, Madhyanagar and Tekergat in Sunamganj, and Balla in Habiganj -- through which yaba consignments enter from Myanmar via India's northeast.

An intelligence agency official working in Rowmari said the upazila has become the second largest yaba smuggling route after Teknaf.

"Since Rowmari is a riverine area, 90 percent of yaba pills smuggled through the point are carried by the river route to different destinations in Dhaka and its surrounding areas," he said, requesting anonymity.

THROWN OVER THE BORDER

The crazy pills, as they are also known, first enter Mizoram before being transported through hill roads to Meghalaya and Assam in cars, buses, or motorbikes.

After reaching Ampati district in Meghalaya and Dhubri district in Assam which border Kurigram, the consignments finally cross over into Bangladesh mainly through Rowmari.

Drug traffickers in India threw packets containing yaba pills over the barbed wire fences and their members in Bangladesh then collected these.

As both Indian and Bangladeshi SIMs work in both countries within one kilometre of the border, the traffickers communicated via mobile phones, said the intelligence agency official.

The drug traffickers arrested in Jamalpur also admitted that the pills also change hands during border haats as the border is open at those places, said a police officer.

Law enforcers said the traffickers

send cash through hundi, an informal system for transferring money.

Then, the traffickers either carry the pills via the river route or come to Jamalpur town via Dewanganj and finally to different destinations in the capital.

Such consignments, which originate in Myanmar, take three to four days to reach the border areas along Kurigram. Syndicate members still prefer the route as they find it less risky with "no major checking on the Indian side", said police and intelligence agency officials.

The Rowmari route is more cost-effective, they added, as smugglers have to pay different drug lords at different points to bring in the pills through Teknaf.

A police officer also said some of the drug trafficking syndicate members in Rowmari have close links with an influential Awami League leader from Kurigram.

Asked about smuggling of yaba through the Rowmari border, Commanding Officer of 22 BGB Battalion Lt Col Muntasir Mamoon, however, said no such incident of smuggling had come to their notice.

In March last year, during a regular meeting of the Jamalpur deputy commissioner and superintendent of police with their counterparts in Meghalaya, the Bangladesh side raised their concerns.

"We requested our Indian counterparts to take steps against yaba smugglers in India," said Delwar Hossain.

Besides, the district police also informed Police Headquarters so that high-ups share these concerns with the Indian authorities.

Inspector General of Police Benazir Ahmed, during a visit to India in 2020, handed over a list of 18 yaba smugglers from the neighbouring country for action.

Health safety rules

FROM PAGE 1
The situation at the railway stations was comparatively good. Trains left the capital's Kamalapur station with half of their seats vacant.

Visiting the city's Gabtali bus terminal yesterday morning, The Daily Star correspondents saw crowds in front of the ticket counters. Physical distancing went for a toss there. A large number of them were without any face masks.

Failing to get tickets, many passengers desperately moved from one counter to another.

Bus operators said some of them stopped selling tickets as they were struggling to maintain their schedule due to the traffic gridlocks on highways.

"We can't sell tickets as buses are failing to reach the terminals on time," Nurul Islam, a staffer of Hanif Paribahan, told this newspaper at Gabtali bus terminal.

A Meherpur-bound passenger, Saiful Islam, said, "My bus was scheduled to start at 9:00am. It's already 10:30pm and there is no sign of the vehicle. I have been told that I may have to wait for two more hours."

Failing to get bus tickets, many passengers rented minibuses and started for their destinations sharing the ride, ignoring physical distancing.

Huge crowds were also seen at the ferry terminals on Shimulia-Banglabazar and Patuaria-Daulatdia routes. People go to 21 southern districts from Dhaka through those.

Whenever a ferry reached Shimulia ferry terminal in Munshiganj, passengers jostled for boarding the vessel as the authorities apparently turned a blind eye to ensuring physical distancing.

Asked, Solaiman, inspector of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) at the terminal,

said, "We're raising awareness among people so that they follow the Covid-19 health rules. We will continue our efforts in this regard."

The situation was almost similar at Patuaria terminal in Manikganj.

A launch named "Tajmahal" left the terminal around 2:00pm with around 150 passengers on board. It had the capacity to carry 127 passengers and as per the government instructions, it was supposed to carry a maximum of 65 passengers.

"Launch operators are charging extra, saying they have to keep half the seats vacant. At the same time, they are taking additional passengers on board. They are taking all types of advantage," said Sadeque Hossain, a Rajbari-bound passenger.

There was a huge pressure of passengers at Patuaria terminal while Daulatdia terminal had to deal with shipments of a large number of sacrificial animals being brought to the capital.

On the Dhaka-Tangail highway, vehicles got stuck in a 20-kilometre-long gridlock from Nabinagar to Chandra area. A similar situation was seen from Baipail to Abdullahpur.

"It took over two hours to reach Savar's Nabinagar intersection from Gabtali bus terminal. Usually, it takes around half an hour," said Abu Sadique, a Dinjpur-bound passenger.

Throughout the day, vehicles had to move very slowly from Cumilla's Daudkandi to Chaudagram due to heavy traffic on Dhaka-Chattogram highway.

Several thousand home-goers thronged the capital's Sadarghat terminal yesterday evening to board launches. Physical distancing was largely ignored there as well.

[Our correspondents in Munshiganj, Manikganj and Cumilla contributed to this report]



transmission, but rather delay the path to returning to normalcy.

Prof Nazrul Islam, a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19, said till date no targeted intervention to contain the transmission of Covid-19 has been seen.

"We have given a number of recommendations at different times but these were rarely executed. We cannot set any target, rather the government has to set it and we can only give our opinion on that," he said.

Nazrul, also a former vice-chancellor at BSMMU, said the government made decisions on seeing the situation. "But in the case of a pandemic, action should be taken before the situation arises."

Last month, a report of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) last month found evidence of community transmission of the Delta variant in the country. Although the positivity rate came

the vaccination campaign is stumbling due to a shortage of vaccines.

Only 4,298,332 people have received both doses of the vaccine, as of Wednesday, according to DGHS data.

NTAC chief Prof Mohammad Shahidullah, however, said there are some targeted plans such as imposing movement restrictions, closure of educational institutions, shopping malls, and others.

"But it is true that there is no timeline for containing transmission," he said.

"It is globally observed that countries acted on seeing the situation. We took measures at different times observing the situation. Yes, sometimes those worked, and sometimes didn't work due to wrong strategy, poor coordination, or error in execution."

Shahidullah added that they had a targeted plan for vaccination but it was hampered due to vaccine supply shortages.