

Health

Mass cholera vaccinations kick off in Rohingya camps

Bangladesh struggling to cope with mass influx

THANGKHALI: The United Nations launched one of its biggest ever cholera vaccination drives in the vast refugee camps of southeast Bangladesh yesterday amid fears of an outbreak among nearly a million Rohingya now living there. Thousands of Rohingya men and women lined up in intense heat at makeshift health centers, many with young children in their arms, to receive the oral vaccine against the disease.

The UN is working with the Bangladesh government to vaccinate 650,000 people living in the sprawling camps against cholera, which spreads through dirty water and can kill if left untreated. "These people lack most of the basic services-toilets, water sanitation and everything," UNICEF spokesman A M Sakil Faizullah said. "When we have this kind of situation, there's a heavy possibility of a cholera outbreak." Nearly 520,000 Rohingya Muslims have arrived in Bangladesh since late August, fleeing a military crackdown in mainly Buddhist neighboring Myanmar that the UN has said likely amounts to ethnic cleansing.



UN launches one of its biggest ever cholera vaccination

district of Rakhine which lies relatively far from the border. They told AFP the army in Myanmar had prevented them from buying food, making it impossible for them to stay. An AFP photographer at the scene on Monday saw one distraught man arrive carrying the limp body of his infant son who had died as they crossed the Naf river that divides the two countries. Dozens more are feared to have drowned when a boat packed with desperate refugees sank late on Sunday night.

Bangladesh police said yesterday they had found 14 more bodies, taking the number of confirmed dead to 28, with scores more missing. Across the border in Myanmar, hundreds of Rohingya were massed on the riverbank awaiting the opportunity to leave. "We want to go to Bangladesh. It's over for us here. We have to cross quickly but we don't have the money to pay for the boat," one Rohingya father of four told an AFP reporter in Rakhine state. The family had walked for several days from Buthidaung to reach the riverbank, where hundreds more Rohingya were waiting to escape. The majority were children.

'Huge undertaking'

The treatment of the Muslim minority has sparked international condemnation of Myanmar and its de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel peace laureate. Yesterday her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), held a peace rally in Yangon attended by around 40,000 people. NLD lawmaker Win Maung said ahead of the ceremony it would show the world that people of different faiths could live in harmony in Myanmar. "We deeply regret the reaction from international countries based on the news without truth," said the lawmaker.

World Health Organization (WHO) workers and local volunteers will vaccinate 650,000 Rohingya over the coming weeks and then follow up with a second dose of



UKHIA, Bangladesh: Rohingya refugees wait in line during a food distribution at the Thangkhal refugee camp in the Bangladeshi district of Ukhiya yesterday. —AFP

the vaccine for an estimated 250,000 children aged between one and five. It the second biggest such campaign ever, after 800,000 people were immunized against the disease in Haiti in November. The WHO's Bangladesh representative N Paranietharan called it a "huge undertaking" and said he was confident an outbreak would be averted. He said thousands of Bangladeshis living near the refugee camps would also be vaccinated.

Cholera was a major killer in Bangladesh until in the 1970s, but the country has seen major improvements

in sanitation facilities since then. The Rohingya are a stateless Muslim minority who have long faced persecution in Myanmar, which regards them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The UN says more than 600,000 have arrived in the last year, swelling camps that were already home to between 300,000 and 400,000 refugees. Bangladesh has allocated land to accommodate some 800,000 refugees in one massive camp, but the UN has warned that such a large concentration in one area could promote the spread of disease. —AFP

Poor and over-populated Bangladesh has struggled to cope with the mass influx of people, many of whom have to travel for days or even weeks to reach safety and arrive exhausted and malnourished. The influx had slowed in recent weeks, but now appears to have picked up again and an estimated 11,000 new refugees arrived on Monday. The UN refugee agency said yesterday it was working with the Bangladesh authorities to set up a transit centre in preparation for a fresh influx from Myanmar's Rakhine state.

Dozens feared drowned

Many of the new arrivals are from the Buthidaung

Cost of capturing CO2 declines, scientists say

MORGANTOWN: Technology now in limited use removes about 90 percent of carbon dioxide from the smokestacks of coal-fired power plants, but energy experts say cost remains the chief obstacle to bringing the "clean coal" touted by President Donald Trump into the mainstream. They cite recent advances in applying the longstanding technology, despite some earlier setbacks, but say the US power sector needs bigger tax credits or other incentives to close the cost gap for using them.

"What we have now is a public policy challenge, or call it a political challenge if you will, in that next phase which is to deploy this technology more widely and bring the cost down, (which) requires a whole new set of policies that go beyond R&D to actual deployment incentives," said Brad Crabtree, vice president for fossil fuels at the Great Plains Institute.

The US has successfully cut other smokestack pollutants,

including sulfur, nitrogen and mercury. But carbon dioxide is a bigger challenge because there is so much of it. Coal- and gas-fired electrical generators produce about 30 percent of CO2 from human activity. Other industries like cement, steel and fertilizer manufacturing add another 20 to 25 percent. Farming and vehicles are also major contributors.

John Thompson of the nonprofit Clean Air Task Force said there would be no way to limit the rise in global temperatures to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels without taming carbon emissions. The world has already warmed about 1.1 degrees Celsius since the Industrial Revolution. Scientists say every fraction of a degree change in average temperatures can lead to noticeable swings in local weather patterns. "If you don't tackle that you really can't constrain warming on the planet to one-and-a-half to two degrees on anybody's likely scenarios," he said.

In Congress, bills that now have 64 bipartisan sponsors would raise carbon-capture tax credits from \$10 or \$20 per metric ton depending on use to \$35 or \$50. Advocates want it added to the current tax overhaul proposal. Sen Shelley Moore Capito, a West Virginia Republican and co-sponsor, said carbon capture would help protect the coal industry and expand oil production as well as reduce emissions. As for chances of passage, she said Thursday that it's "too early in the process to know whether those priorities can advance together or separately." —AP

Kenya's herders torch an invader

KAKUMA, Kenya: Turkana County is one of Kenya's most arid regions, but land near the town of Kakuma sports a dense thicket of thorny trees. That's not good news. The plant is Prosopis juliflora, a fast-growing invasive species that has wreaked havoc by taking over land once used for pasture, choking rivers and overwhelming indigenous trees in this part of northwest Kenya. But a clever plot is now underway to clear the invader - by turning it into charcoal for an energy-starved refugee camp nearby, while providing jobs for local people.

More than 180,000 refugees, many from Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan, live at Kakuma camp, which was established in 1991 on the outskirts of the town of Kakuma. Today they use 23,000 tonnes of charcoal each month, some of it created by felling trees nearby. The loss of trees is a problem for the region, not least because it allows the invasive thorn trees to spread into denuded areas, experts say.

The invader - called "mathenge" - has colonized a huge portion of land used by Turkana pastoralists as grazing for their livestock, said Paul Esekun, an energy and environmental officer at

Lokado, a local community organization. "The Prosopis seed can survive in the ground for 10 years, and once it germinates its roots go very deep into the ground," Esekun said. But now, in an effort backed by Lokado, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, residents that are battling to find grazing for their cattle can now also earn cash hacking down the invasive trees and turning them into charcoal.

Efficient Kilns

Along the Tarach river, which cuts across the refugee camp and meanders west towards the village of Morongole, Peter Palal and 32 members of the Morongole Environmental Group are at work making charcoal. "This area used to have many different trees but now it is only mathenge that is found here," said Palal, the chairman of the group, named for the village where they live. In a small clearing near the river, two cylindrical metal kilns rise about five feet above the ground. One has firewood in it, and Palal paces around, inspecting it. The kilns are two of more than 20 that have been supplied to 10 groups in the Kakuma area by the county government and the FAO. The project got it start after an analysis of natural resources by the county in 2015 recommended using mathenge to make charcoal on a commercial scale to improve employment prospects for young people and boost the local economy. —Reuters

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