

Press Release

Bangladesh charts renewed path towards zero leprosy following Joint Monitoring Mission

Dhaka, 29 September 2026 – The Government of Bangladesh has committed to accelerated action towards a leprosy-free Bangladesh, following the conclusion of the 2026 Joint Monitoring Mission (JMM) on Leprosy.

The government-led Mission, held from 21-28 September, brought together national and international experts to take stock of Bangladesh's progress, assess the performance of the National Leprosy Programme and identify the actions needed to accelerate progress towards interruption of leprosy transmission. This aligns the WHO Global Leprosy Strategy and its vision of zero leprosy disease, zero disability and zero discrimination.

The review included consultations with health authorities, partners and people affected by leprosy, as well as field visits to health facilities and communities across areas with different levels of leprosy burden.

“Our target remains absolute: Zero Leprosy by 2030. The Joint Monitoring Mission on Leprosy serves as a rigorous audit that helps us bridge gaps and refine our field interventions. Driven by the national Leprosy Program under the MBDC, DGHS, our health systems are working relentlessly to halt transmission chains throughout the country, especially in high-burden districts. With unified multi-sectoral support, we will eradicate this disease once and for all.”

Bangladesh achieved elimination of leprosy as a public health problem in 1998. However, transmission continues. In 2025, 3558 new cases were reported, including 185 among children, while 208 people were diagnosed with Grade 2 disability. The continued detection of cases among children and people already experiencing disability highlights the need to find and treat people earlier and interrupt transmission.

The recommendations set out immediate priorities for the coming year and medium-term actions through 2030. Immediate priorities include reaffirming political commitment and sustainable financing around an updated national strategy for “Leprosy-free Upazilas”; strengthening the capacity of the National Leprosy Programme and updating national guidelines; strengthening surveillance through case-based reporting; expanding case investigation and contact tracing, including targeted action for vulnerable populations;

strengthening the capacity of health workers; and increasing awareness and community engagement.

Over the medium term, the recommendations call for stronger national leadership and workforce capacity, nationwide expansion of preventive treatment for eligible contacts, stronger diagnostic and referral services, regional Centres of Excellence, improved management of complications and disability, greater involvement of people affected by leprosy in planning and care, and stronger research and laboratory capacity.

“We appreciate the commitment and intention of the Government of Bangladesh to reduce the burden of leprosy,” said Professor Takahiro Nanri, President of the Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) Initiative. “The JMM provides a clear pathway to accelerate action, particularly through early detection, reaching underserved communities, and the meaningful involvement of persons affected by leprosy. Sasakawa Health Foundation remains committed to working alongside the Government of Bangladesh, WHO and other partners to turn these recommendations into action and ensure that no one is left behind.”

The Mission also underscored that ending leprosy requires more than medical treatment. Stigma continues to contribute to people hiding their condition, delaying treatment and travelling away from their communities to seek care. Strengthening social protection and ensuring that people affected by leprosy have a meaningful role in shaping the national response are therefore integral to achieving zero leprosy.

“Ending leprosy is about equity, dignity and inclusion. The Government’s commitment to leave no one behind means finding every case, reaching every community and confronting the stigma that keeps people from care. WHO will continue to provide its full technical support, building on our long-standing partnership with Sasakawa Health Foundation as Bangladesh works towards zero leprosy disease, zero disability and zero discrimination,” said Dr Ahmed Jamsheed Mohamed, WHO Representative to Bangladesh.

The JMM was implemented under the leadership of the National Leprosy Programme of the Directorate General of Health Services, bringing together national counterparts, WHO, Sasakawa Health Foundation, implementing partners and organizations of people affected by leprosy. Teams visited high-, medium- and low-burden settings, as well as areas reporting no cases, to examine programme performance and identify opportunities for acceleration.

The recommendations build on Bangladesh’s National Strategic Plan for Leprosy 2023–2030 and provide a sequenced programme of action towards zero transmission, zero disability and zero discrimination.

The Government will take forward the findings and recommendations as the basis for a strengthened national response through 2030, with clear responsibilities, measurable actions and sustained collaboration across government, partners and communities.

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