

I.R. Iran Incident Management Team

Quarterly Report No. 5

January-March 2023



**World Health
Organization**

Islamic Republic of Iran

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full term
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
IMT	Incident Management Team
LTCF	Long-term care facility
MoHME	Ministry of Health and Medical Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran
OCR	Outbreak and Crisis Response
RDT	Rapid diagnostic kit
WHO	World Health Organization

Background

COVID-19 still constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) at the end of the first quarter of 2023. Compared with the last quarter of 2022, the numbers for new cases, new deaths, and new hospital admissions showed an upward trend in this quarter. Although no new variant of the virus was detected in the country during the first quarter of 2023, the increase in the number of cases is attributed to immunity waning because of the hesitancy to receive booster doses. Figures 1 and 2 show the COVID-19 situation in the country from February 2020 to March 2023.

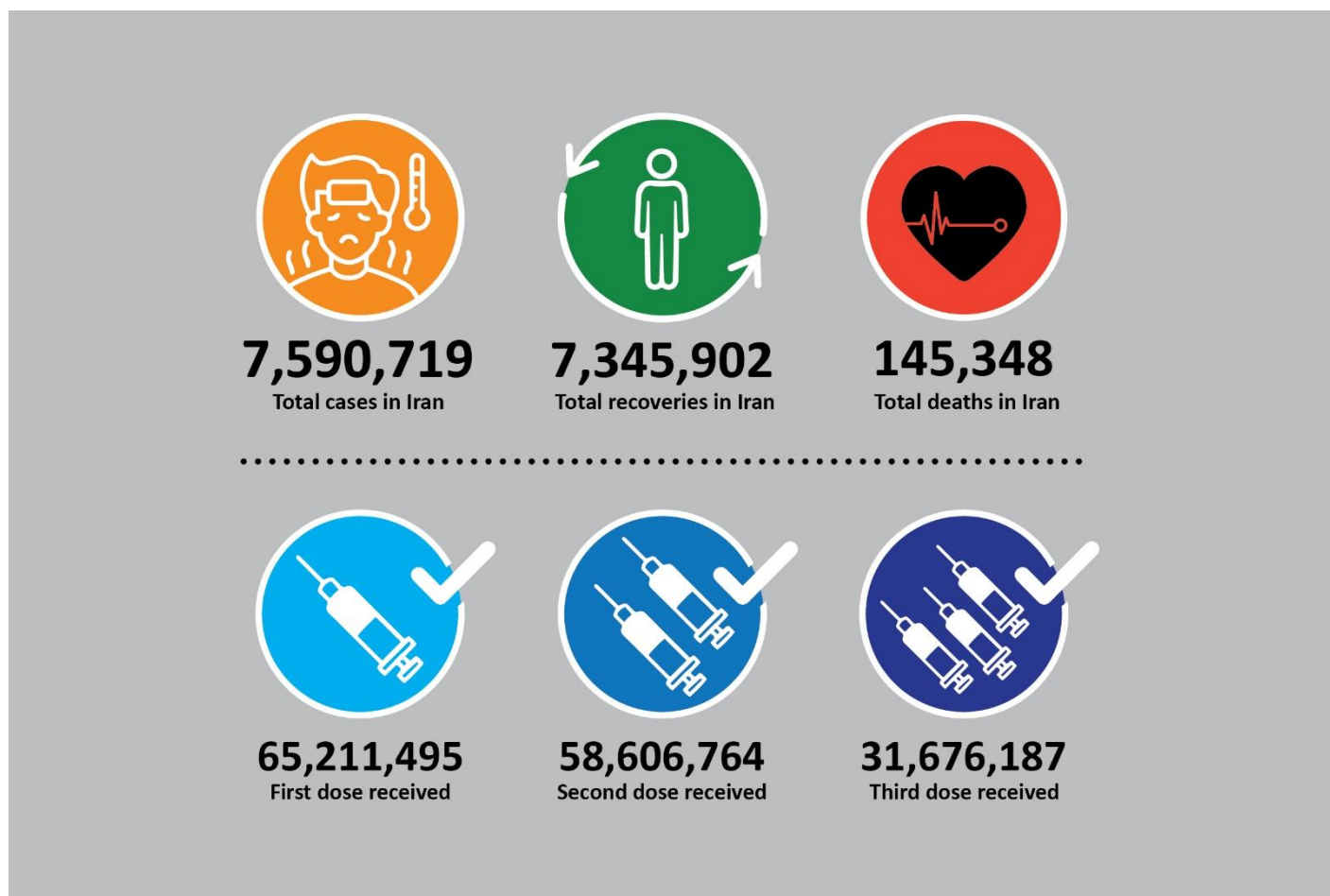


Fig. 1. COVID-19 situation in I.R. Iran from 19 February 2020 to 31 March 2023

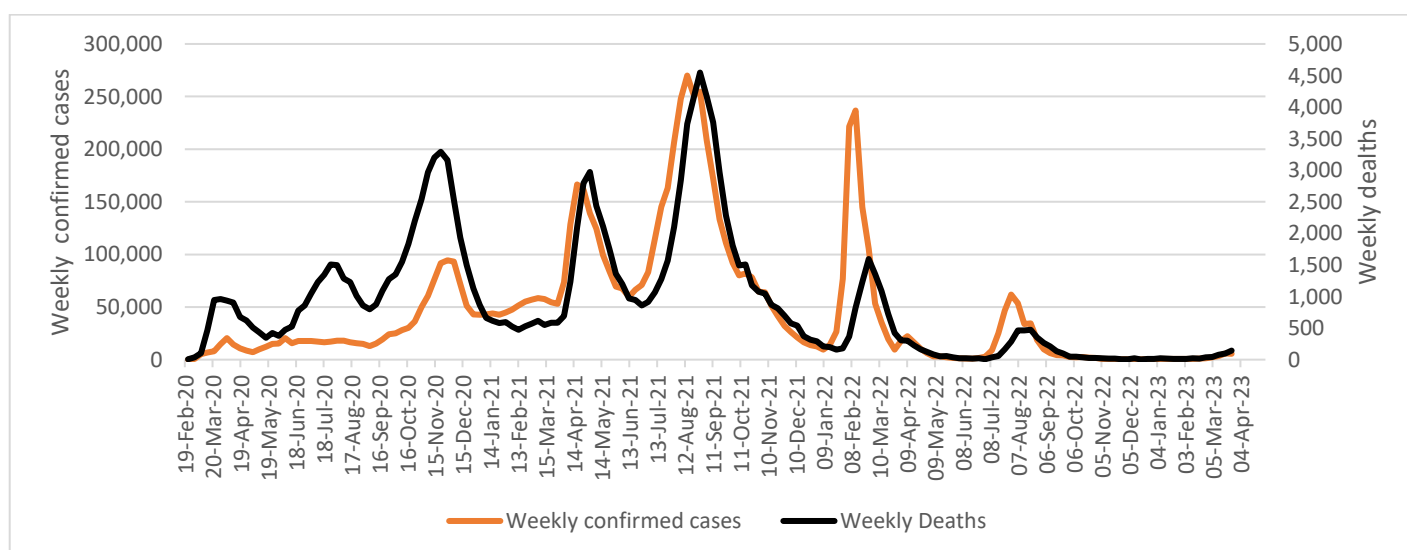


Fig. 2. Weekly trend of COVID-19 laboratory-confirmed cases and deaths, 19 February 2020–25 March 2023

The risk status of COVID-19 at the county level as of 31 Mar 2023 has been illustrated in Figure 3. The color code is based on four risk categories according to the daily number of admitted patients per 100 000 population.

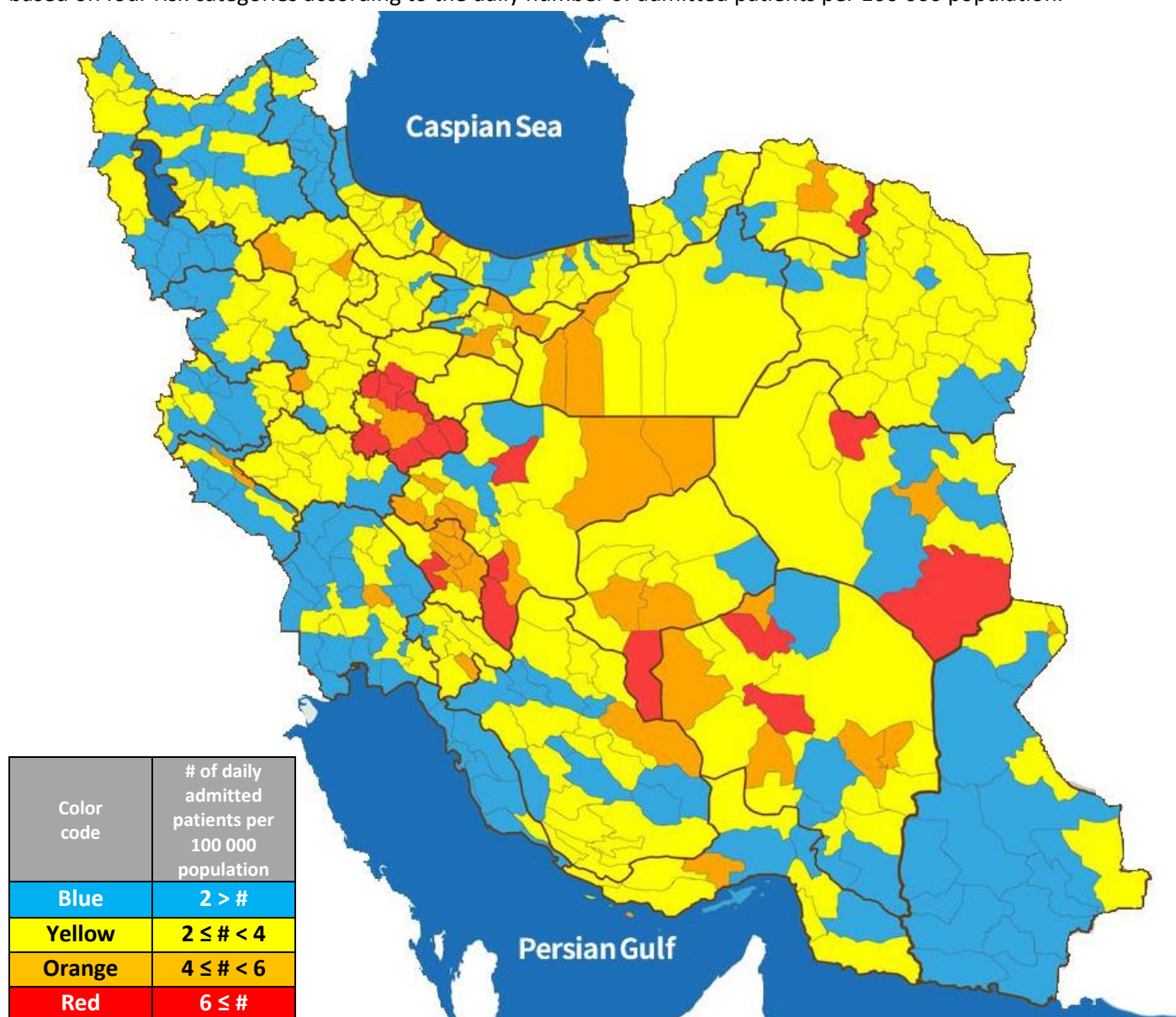


Fig. 3. I.R. Iran COVID-19 provincial risk status map as of 31 Mar 2023

Table 1 provides a comparison of the numbers for new cases, deaths, hospital admissions, and the cumulative total vaccine doses administered between these two quarters.

Table 1. COVID-19 situation in I.R. Iran, comparison of the fourth quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023

Quarterly Period	New cases	New admissions to hospitals	New deaths	Total Vaccination
2022, 4th Quarter Oct–Dec 2022	12 492	3 881	259	155 121 377
2023, 1st Quarter Jan–Mar 2023	29 579	14 953	663	155 494 446
% change	136% ↑	285% ↑	155% ↑	0.2% ↑

Legend: ↑ and ↑ denote an increase

The Incident Management Team's strategic support

In the past quarter, the Incident Management Team (IMT) closely monitored the trend of COVID-19 cases while ensuring the availability of technical and logistics support as needed by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MoHME). In addition, WHO Country Office in the Islamic Republic of Iran (herein after WCO) maintained the IMT as a platform to explore possible support for any emergency in the country. The IMT biweekly meetings have provided a structured forum for technical discussions to keep track of emergencies, resource mobilization, and grant management and to guide the smooth implementation of the projects.

Considering the downward trend of COVID-19 incidence in the country in 2023 compared with the previous years, the IMT expects that in the near future more attention could be paid to other serious public health issues in vulnerable provinces of the country, particularly with respect to the continuous Afghan refugee influx. The IMT is focusing on supporting geographical areas of the country where the available capacities do not suffice to provide health services to both refugees and host communities.

Quarterly highlights and achievements

Major activities

Progress of activities on improving access to inclusive health care in long-term rehabilitation centres (LTCFs) and enhancing the quality of life and dignity of most vulnerable population in Iran throughout the COVID -19 pandemic

As part of the co-funded partnership among the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), WHO, the Government of Canada, and the Government of I.R. Iran, 948 people with disabilities were provided with basic assistive technologies. Through an end-to-end assistance, WHO facilitated a multi-partner dialogue among the MoHME, the State Welfare Organization, and several nongovernmental organizations assisting the target group. As a result of this participatory process, the involved team could locate and prioritize the end recipients, based on unanimously adopted criteria focusing on severe disabilities, low income, and equitable demographics of disabilities (gender, age, and location). The distributed items included 400 regular wheelchairs, 350 anti decubitus mattresses, and 250 commode wheelchairs (1000 items in total).



Fig. 4. Dr Syed Jaffar Hussein, WHO Representative and Head of Mission to I.R. Iran, meets with local beneficiaries with disabilities and their families. © WCO Iran



Fig. 5. A refugee with disability due to a spinal cord injury is being assisted by the project team with the wheelchair donated at the Association for the Protection of People with Spinal Cord Disabilities. © WCO Iran

Provision of cholera rapid diagnostic tests

In February 2023 and in response to a request from the MoMHE for provision of cholera rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) to enhance the preparedness for the cholera outbreak season in the country and the gross movement of people from the borders, WCO procured and donated 5000 cholera RDTs to the MoMHE. The RDTs were immediately shipped from WHO' Dubai Hub to Tehran and delivered to the Centre for Communicable Diseases Control of the MoMHE.

Provision of six MRI machines

One of the WCO's major projects for strengthening the capacity of health system in Iran is the provision of six magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines to six hospitals in different provinces of the country. This project started in October 2021 with a financial contribution of the Government of Japan. As of this quarterly report, the international procurement process of the MRI machines has been finalized, and hospitals are being prepared for delivery and installation of devices in June 2023.

This project will effectively strengthen case management capacities in COVID-19 referral hospitals and, with a broad spectrum of clinical applications in detection and diagnosis of various conditions, will also increase the capacity of the national health system for diagnosis of other diseases.



Fig. 6 and 7. MRI site under preparation. Imam Ali hospital, Andimeshk, Khuzestan province. © WCO Iran

Complete list of activities

The IMT has been overseeing the implementation of several activities under different Outbreak and Crisis Response (OCR) pillars during the first quarter of 2023. Table 2 represents both in-progress and completed activities during January–March 2023. The activities were funded using contributions of the European Union, Central Emergency Response Fund, and the Governments of Japan, Germany, and France.

Table 2. Progress report on IMT's complete list of activities under Outbreak and Crisis Response (OCR) pillars, as of 31 March 2023.

OCR Pillar	Subject	Main Objective	Area of Intervention	Activity Description	Progress (As of 31 March)
1	Management meetings	Coordinating among pillars	Functional country office IMT core group meetings		Meetings: 6 Total: 49 Reports: 1 Total: 5
5	Communicable disease detection	Enhancing the diagnostic capacity of the laboratory network	Provision of diagnostic kits	Procurement of cholera culture reagents	75%
5	Communicable disease detection	Enhancing the diagnostic capacity of the laboratory network	Provision of rapid diagnostic kits (RDTs)	Procurement of 5000 cholera RDTs	100%
7	COVID-19	Improving access to inclusive health care for the elderly and people living with disabilities during the COVI-19 pandemic in Iran	Improving the national capacity to provide quality care and improved COVID-19 risk reduction in long-term care facilities (LTCFs) for the elderly and people living with disabilities	Distribution of 1000 assistive technologies among 961 persons, prioritizing low-income households and people with severe disabilities, including refugees with no access to rehabilitation services, across 15 provinces. Strengthening the infrastructural capacity of 30 LTCFs through procurement, distribution, and installation of equipment.	100%

OCR Pillar	Subject	Main Objective	Area of Intervention	Activity Description	Progress (As of 31 March)
9	COVID-19	Strengthening the diagnostic capacities in the country	Support to development of national medical imaging capacity	International procurement, delivery, and installation of 6 MRI machines in Kerman, Semnan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Khuzestan, and Fars provinces.	50%
	COVID-19	Ensuring the continuity and quality of essential health services during and in response to COVID-19	Assessment of strengths and maintenance of essential health services, systems, and capacities to prevent, address and response to COVID-19 and other health threats	Conducting rounds 3 and 4—in continuation of rounds 1 and 2 in 2023—of facility and community surveys in 600 PHC ¹ centers (209 designated COVID-19 and 393 non-COVID-19) and 200 hospitals, while interviewing 150 subjects on community perception.	100%
	COVID-19	Strengthening health system resilience at PHC level	Developing an intervention package for PHC resilience	PHC resilience intervention package was designed through a multi-stakeholder engagement process. SOPs and instruction manuals were developed. Also, a consultative workshop and a pitch event was organized to gather feedback and innovative proposals to be included in the designed package.	100%
	COVID-19	Increasing the availability of remote mental health counseling and rehabilitation services	Strengthening the health system in vulnerable provinces in terms of mental health	Revising training material(s), protocols, and SOPs for counselors, therapists, and client service providers in line with expansion of working hours of the helpline, establishment of tele-rehab and mental health counseling, and piloting them, along with the development of a hotline to provide support for people with autism	100%
	COVID-19	Strengthening the capacity of health workforce for providing dementia-related services in vulnerable provinces	Empowering family members and caregivers of those with dementia	Developing training materials for facilitators who would in turn educate family members and caregivers of people with dementia in vulnerable provinces	100%
	COVID-19	Addressing the needs of those suffering from disabilities and their families and caregivers	Supporting development of self-care educational packages for people with disabilities	Providing training and capacity building support to people suffering from disabilities and their families and caregivers	50%
	COVID-19/Afghan refugee influx	Providing timely access to life-saving essential health services in vulnerable provinces hosting refugees	Increase access to public health facilities for essential health services for life-threatening emergencies in Sistan & Baluchistan province	Procurement of 4 type B ambulances	75%
	Afghan refugee influx	Enhancing pre-hospital emergency services in vulnerable provinces	Provision of medical equipment/vehicles	Procurement of 3 Hardtop ambulances	75%

OCR Pillar	Subject	Main Objective	Area of Intervention	Activity Description	Progress (As of 31 March)
9	Afghan refugee influx	Providing timely access to life-saving essential health services in vulnerable provinces hosting refugees	Increase access to public health facilities for essential health services and life-saving interventions in S&B province	Procurement of mobile clinics, mobile laboratories, and motorcycles. Procurement of childbirth supplies is needed for maternity facilities	25%
	Afghan refugee influx	Providing timely access to life-saving essential health services in vulnerable provinces	Increase access to public health facilities for essential health services and life-saving interventions in S&B province	Support establishment of telemedicine software and telemedicine utilities and IT accessories in health care facilities including mobile clinics and secondary health care settings	25%
	Afghan refugee influx	Enhancing the provision of psychosocial support	Provide psychosocial and rehabilitation support in the S&B province	Procurement of assistive technologies, identified through a needs assessment to support persons living with severe disabilities	25%
	Khoy earthquake	Supporting emergency response	Enhance Khoy college of medicine response capacity to treat trauma victims of the Khoy earthquake	Procurement of TESK ² , 2 AEDs ³ and 2 ventilators	50%
	Detection and control of communicable diseases	Enhancing the diagnostic capacity of the laboratory network	Provision of hepatitis diagnostic kits	Procurement of 30 000 Hepatitis B and 30 000 Hepatitis C kits	50%
	Detection and control of communicable diseases	Enhancing measles outbreak detection	Provision of laboratory equipment for diagnosis of measles and rubella	Procurement of one ELISA ⁴ reader and washer to the National Measles Reference Lab	100%
	Detection and control of communicable diseases	Supporting the malaria elimination program	Provision of screening tests and insecticides to S&B and Hormozgan provinces	Procurement of 800 malaria RDT kits and insecticide	75%

¹ Primary healthcare centre

² Trauma and emergency surgery kits

³ Automated external defibrillator

⁴ Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay



Fig. 8. Posts published on WCO's social media platforms during 1 Jan–31 Mar 2023.

Risk communication and awareness raising

The Communications Unit of WCO, in close collaboration with the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE) and other technical units of the WCO, has designed, created, and published several products aimed at health promotion, risk communication, and public awareness raising on COVID-19, tuberculosis, falsified medicines, polio, and other public health situations in line with the communication strategy and IMT's overall risk communication and community engagement plan. Picture 6 is a collage of the posts published on WCO's media platforms during 1 Jan–31 Mar 2023.

Resource mobilization

During the first quarter of 2023, an earthquake hit the city of Khoy in West Azerbaijan province of Iran. In response to this situation, WCO and several other UN agencies, with the coordination of the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator Office in the country (RCO), applied for Central Emergency Response Fund's (CERF) financial contribution to support the MoHME in restoration of lost medical capacities in the affected area. As a result, a joint emergency fund was mobilized for provision of life-saving medical equipment and supplies in response to the above earthquake. WCO will use the fund to support the health facilities that were accommodating earthquake-affected patients in Khoy.

IMT challenges

The imposed sanctions and embargos against the Islamic Republic of Iran remain a challenge for international procurement of medical equipment and supplies to support the MoHME. To overcome these setbacks, the IMT, on the one hand, is exploring the procurement of the same items at the local markets, and, on the other hand, searches and negotiates for similar or substitute items on international markets. Both initiatives have been effective in the successful implementation of planned activities to provide required medical items to the MoHME.

Another ongoing challenge for the IMT in the planning and implementation of the projects is delays in receiving administrative and technical feedback from the MoHME. Turnovers of MoHME officials, resulting in changing priorities in some areas, are the main reasons for the delays. Nonetheless, the IMT has made efforts to engage the MoHME at headquarters and provincial levels and provided flexibility in the implementation of the ongoing projects, as needed, without affecting the integrity of the projects.



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