

Every child under 'immediate threat'

Says UN report on climate change, poor diet

AFP, Paris

The world is failing to protect children from the health dangers posed by climate change and poor diet, a landmark UN report said yesterday, warning that every child is under "immediate threat".

According to more than 40 of the world's pre-eminent child and adolescent health experts, not one country on Earth is adequately protecting the next generation from the impacts of carbon emissions, the destruction of nature and high-calorie and processed foods.

They said that excessive carbon emissions, produced overwhelmingly by wealthier nations, "threaten the future of all children" and will burden them with additional health dangers, from deadly heatwaves to the increased spread of tropical diseases.

The report, commissioned by the World Health Organization and UNICEF, also highlights the threat children face from harmful marketing of fat- and sugar-laden foods, alcohol and tobacco.

"The big message is that no single

country is protecting children's health today and for their future," said Anthony Costello, professor of International Child Health and Director of the Institute for Global Health at University College London.

"When you look at the damage being done to children's lungs by air pollution, we've got a very limited time to sort this out," he told AFP.

"We have the solutions, what we don't have is the political leadership and will to make it happen."

The report, published in The Lancet medical journal, ranks the performance of 180 countries when it comes to child survival, education and nutrition rates.

Under these criteria, less-developed nations such as Central African Republic and Chad perform particularly poorly compared to rich countries such as Norway and the Netherlands.

However the rankings are largely reversed when the impacts of air pollution from per capita carbon emissions were assessed.

"The world's decision makers are failing today's children and youth:

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Nepalese Foreign Minister Pradip Kumar Gyawali shaking hands at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday. Hasina offered Bangladesh's airport and seaport facilities to Nepal in an effort to boost regional connectivity.

PHOTO: PID

Death toll tops 2,000 in China

FROM PAGE 1

The latest figures bring the total number of cases in China to more than 74,000 and the death toll to 2,004, three-quarters of which have occurred in Wuhan, Hubei's provincial capital.

Hundreds more cases have been reported in two dozen countries, including 15 in South Korea -- a 50-percent rise -- with a cluster of at least 11 around the southern city of Daegu.

Hong Kong also reported its second death from the virus, which has proved extremely infectious. Beyond mainland China, six people have died from the disease, including the latest death in Hong Kong.

For the 500 passengers disembarking the Diamond Princess after testing negative, a difficult 14-day quarantine period has come to an end after their dream cruise turned into a nightmare of fear and boredom confined in many cases to small windowless cabins.

"Our last deep gratitude to the crew and captain for such an amazing care... during the epic crisis... we can't wait to see you again soon on board again," tweeted passenger Yardley Wong, who left after 14 days cooped in a small cabin with her six-year-old son.

Many were left onboard with an anxious wait for test results that would allow them to disembark.

Asked how he felt seeing others disembark while remaining on the ship, American lawyer Matt Smith told AFP: "I need an emoji for envy."

Michael Ryan, head of WHO's health emergencies programme, said the outbreak was "very serious" and could grow, but stressed that outside China's Hubei, it was "affecting a very, very tiny, tiny proportion of people."

But in Japan, some have raised concerns about allowing people from the cruise ship to board flights home or spread out into the notoriously busy Japanese capital.

Kentaro Iwata, a professor at the infectious diseases division of Kobe University, blasted the on-ship quarantine as a "major failure, a mistake".

"It is highly likely secondary infections occurred," Iwata told AFP, saying scepticism from abroad of the quarantine was "only natural".

He later said in a video published online that he was self-quarantining after a brief visit to the ship where he raised major concerns about the

procedures on board.

"It was completely chaotic," he said.

Elated passengers also began disembarking from a second cruise ship that has been at the centre of coronavirus fear, the Westerdam, which made shore in Sihanoukville in Cambodia.

Hundreds were departing after receiving a clean bill of health, as Prime Minister Hun Sen greeted the first passengers with hugs and flowers.

American Christina Kirby, fretted about the stigma some Westerdam passengers could face once they return home. "I want people to remember that... there's a human behind each of these stories and those who are ill deserve compassion," she told AFP.

Several countries appear to have lost patience with the quarantine on board the Diamond Princess and chartered planes to repatriate citizens.

In the first such evacuation Monday, more than 300 Americans flew home even though 14 had tested positive.

Britain, Hong Kong and Australia are among other countries that have vowed to repatriate people from the ship but will insist on a further 14-day quarantine on home soil.

Promises yet to be kept

FROM PAGE 1

On December 18 that year, a board meeting of the Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation decided to raise the compensation money to Tk 2 lakh. The ministry made a list of 27 deceased workers it would be helping out using the foundation's funds.

Earlier in April, 40 private banks deposited cheques worth Tk 30 crore in the government's national relief fund in assistance for all the victims, according to a report The Daily Star ran on April 4.

A few days before that, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) Mayor Sayeed Khokon, at a public hearing at the capital's Girdap, promised city corporation jobs to the families of the deceased.

All those promises, however, remain caught up in bureaucratic tangles.

The Daily Star correspondents spoke to the families of 40 of the 71 killed in the devastating fire in Chawkbazar's Churihata. They did not get a single Taka from the authorities mentioned above, in the last one year.

The only compensation they received was Tk 20,000 given to each of the families along with body bags at the DMC morgue. The money was to meet burial expenses.

That's it. Since then, zilch. Asked, the ministry and the DSCC authorities said they were working to fulfil the promises, adding that the promised money and the jobs would be given "soon".

The apparent noncommittal "soon" does not help the young bride of 29-year-old Mahbubur Rahman Raju Miah, who used to work at a mobile phone servicing shop at Chawkbazar. They were married just 26 days before the fire killed Raju.

When Raju died, she had not even completed her high school and all of a sudden, she realised she was pregnant. Still, she gathered courage and sat for her HSC exams and passed. She gave birth to a baby boy later in November.

Raju's brother Meraj said he visited the ministry in late August last year, a day after he got a phone call from there. "The date was August 30. They took our documents and said we need to wait for the head of the state to hand us our cheques, and so we left," he said.

"It has been more than five months since then, with no phone call and no news from the ministry."

The family members of paanwalah Mohammad Ibrahim went to the ministry's office on October 29 last year after getting a phone call from an official. Once there, they were told they wouldn't be getting anything.

"I went to the Secretariat building and then dialed the number I had received the call from. Someone on the other side asked me to wait. A person then came with a list and asked me whether Ibrahim's name was on it. It wasn't, and so we were not let in," said Ibrahim's brother-in-law Nurnabi.

Nurnabi could not name the official who called him over the phone. "We feel like we were being harassed," he said.

The Daily Star collected a list of the deceased workers, who are supposed to receive the compensation from the ministry. Ibrahim is the first name on the list.

In the meantime, his wife's hope of getting the compensation is fading every day.

After Ibrahim's death, Bibi Hajera went back to their hometown in Feni and now makes shital pati (bamboo mats) to run her family with two daughters, aged three and seven.

There is another victim with a similar name, Mohammed Ibrahim, a rickshaw puller from Kamrangirchar. But the ministry's list does not include the name.

The Daily Star spoke to his sister-in-law Shireen, with whom Ibrahim's wife Rokhsana and her 10-year-old daughter currently live.

"My husband is also a rickshaw puller. He is the only earning member of the family. He only earns Tk 200-300 every day and its really tough to manage a family of seven with that money," Shireen told The Daily Star.

Ruma Begum's husband Mohammad Billal, another victim, left behind an empty pantry the day he died. "We had no rice at home, no vegetables, literally nothing. I was waiting for him to come home with groceries so that we could eat," said Ruma.

Billal used to stitch curtains for a decorator shop. Ruma is supposed to get Tk 2 lakh from the ministry, but has not received a single penny yet.

Just days before the tragedy, a drug store employee Anwar Hossain Monzu, another victim, went on a picnic, along with his family, at Wonderela Green Park in Dhaka's Nawabganj. He posted photos of that day on social media on February 15 last year.

A year later, his son no longer goes to his school in Dhaka as his mother Nahida Rahman cannot afford the expenses. They now live in Noakhali's Begumganj with her brother. She struggles to run her family with a little money he earns from giving tuition to children in the area.

"I've failed to bear the expenses even at a village school. His uncles are saying they will bear the costs if my son is admitted to a madrasa."

"Everyone makes promises, but nobody actually helps," she said, adding that she moved to her brother's home as she could not pay the monthly rent of Tk 9,000 in Dhaka.

Asked why the money promised had not been handed yet, Md Rezaul Haque, director general of Bangladesh Workers' Welfare Foundation, said the process of verifying the victims' identity was a lengthy one.

"We have to cross-check information at the field-level through the DC office and the Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishments ... we are waiting to finish verifying the details of all the deceased before disbursing the money," he said.

Families of four more deceased workers said they did not even receive a phone call from the ministry.

The ministry had, however, given an emergency help of Tk 50,000 to each of 10 injured on February 24 last year.

Contacted, Mayor Khokon's Protocol Officer Habibul Islam Sumon said they were working to provide jobs to the victims' family members.

"We will meet them at the anniversary of the fire, and give them cash, shops, and jobs," he told The Daily Star. Those will be financed completely from the mayor's discretionary funds," he said.

Asked why it took so long, he said, "It was very difficult for us to find the victims of the fire, and we have managed to get the contacts of only 31 people over last one year."

The Daily Star correspondents got the details of the 71 deceased and their family members in a day, from Churihata Ekota Sangha, a social welfare organisation established by the locals in Churihata after the fire incident.

Meanwhile, the DMC authorities have prepared the post-mortem report on 67 victims and would submit them to police soon, said Sohel Mahmud, associate professor and chief of forensic medicine department at the college.

"Of the 67, 45 have already been identified while the 22 others were identified through DNA tests," he told this daily.

MUJIB BORSHO CELEBRATIONS

Indian PM likely to visit Bangladesh March 16 or 17

UNB, Dhaka

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Bangladesh on March 16 or 17 to attend the birth centenary celebrations of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The Indian PM will also have bilateral talks with his Bangladeshi counterpart, and discussions at official-level are being held to finalise the date.

Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen yesterday said PM Hasina will be able to receive her Indian counterpart at the airport if he arrives on March 16.

Hasina will be visiting Tungipara on March 17 to pay homage to the Father of the Nation, said the foreign minister, adding that it will be good for the hosts if Modi comes on March 16.

The foreign minister said there will be a bilateral meeting.

Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla will also visit Bangladesh in the first week of March before the visit of Modi, Dr Momen said.

Earlier, PM Hasina announced that March 2020 to March 2021 would be observed as the Mujib Borsho (Mujib Year) across the country to mark the birth centenary of Bangabandhu while a mega event will be held on March 17.

Two 'robbers' killed in 'gunfight'

STAR REPORT

Two suspected robbers were killed in a "gunfight" between two dacoit groups in Sadar upazila of Magura early yesterday, said police.

The dead are Lablu Mondol, 38, of Faridpur, and Daul Hossain, 35, of Magura, said the law enforcers.

Saiful Islam, officer-in-charge of Magura Sadar Police Station, claimed two groups of armed robbers locked into a "gunfight" around 1:30am following feud over establishing supremacy in the area.

Hearing gunshots, a patrol team of police rushed to the spot and found two bodies lying on the ground. They recovered the bodies and sent those to Magura Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies. Rest of the "robbers" managed to flee the scene, he added.

According to the OC, both the dead were accused in several cases filed with different police stations in Magura, Narail, Jashore, Rajbari and Faridpur districts.

The Daily Star, however, could not independently verify the police claims.

Meanwhile, Lablu's uncle Gulzar Mondol said they heard of Lablu's arrest.

He said, "We heard he was taken to Baliakandi Police Station. Hearing the news, we went there on Tuesday morning, but the on-duty police officers told us that nobody named Lablu was in their custody."

"We then returned home and kept trying to find Lablu. This morning we came to know that he was killed in gunfight" he added.

Contacted, AKM Azmol Huda, officer-in-charge of Baliakandi Police Station, denied the allegation.

He, however, said the wives of two dead robbers were arrested in Dhaka over a robbery case that was filed on January 24.

Police found robbed materials from them, he added.

Mucha Mollah, elder brother of Daud, told The Daily Star, "He [Daud] left our house three years ago. Suddenly, we came to know through villagers that he was killed in a gunfight this morning. I went to Magura and received his body."

Our Jhenaidah and Faridpur correspondents contributed to the report.

TRAWLER CAPSIZE

3 bodies recovered from the Bay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CIG

Three people, including a child, drowned after a fishing trawler capsized in the Bay of Bengal in Chattogram's Banshkhali upazila yesterday.

The trawler with at least 35 passengers on board started from the upazila's Khankanabad area in the morning. The passengers were going to attend a religious programme (Urs) at Kutubdia Island of Cox's Bazar, said police.

The victims are Abdul Malek, 55, of Khankanabad village, Abdul Jalil, 30, of Gondamara village, and Md Minhaz, 12, of the same village.

Nazmul Haque, sub-inspector of Banshkhali Police Station, told The Daily Star that the trawler capsized near Bodorkhali estuary on its way to Kutubdia Island around 10:00am.

Most of the passengers managed to swim ashore, but four went missing, he said.

Quoting the survivors, the police official said the trawler capsized due to overloading.

As of yesterday evening, police with the help of coast guard members recovered the three bodies from various points of Banshkhali channel in the Bay, he said.

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