

Global warming to increase world hunger: UN

REUTERS, Rome

Global warming is likely to significantly diminish food production in many countries and greatly increase the number of hungry people, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation said yesterday.

FAO said in a report that food distribution systems and their infrastructure would be disrupted and that the severest impact would likely be in sub-Saharan African countries.

"There is strong evidence that global climate is changing and that the social and economic costs of slowing down global warming and of responding to its impacts will be considerable," said the report by FAO's Committee on World Food Security.

Many scientists fear rising temperatures, blamed mainly on heat-trapping gases from burning fossil fuels, will melt ice caps, raise sea levels by almost a meter (three feet) by the end of this century and bring more floods, droughts and storms.

Global warming would increase the amount of land classified as being either arid or insufficiently moist in the developing world.

In Africa the amount of this type of harsh land could increase by as much as 90 million hectares by 2008, an area nearly four times the size of Britain.

Changes in temperature, rainfall

as well as an increase in the number of so-called "extreme weather events" such as floods will bring with them potentially devastating effects.

The world suffered 600 floods in the past two and a half years, which claimed the lives of about 19,000 people and caused \$25 billion in damages, excluding December's devastating tsunami in Southeast Asia that killed more than 180,000.

FAO said scientific studies showed that global warming would lead to an 11 percent decrease in rainfed land in developing countries and in turn a serious decline in cereal production.

"Sixty-five developing countries, representing more than half of the developing world's total population in 1995, will lose about 280 million tons of potential cereal production as a result of climate change," FAO said.

The effect of climate change on agriculture could increase the number of people at risk of hunger, particularly in countries already saddled with low economic growth and high malnourishment levels.

"In some 40 poor, developing countries, with a combined population of 2 billion ... production losses due to climate change may drastically increase the number of under-nourished people, severely hindering progress in combating poverty and food insecurity," the report said.

Crawling ADP projects

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APCP on building 61 rehabilitation centres in Rangamati was submitted on December 14, 1997. It was cleared after 1,571 days. Another PCP for constructing an access road from Patenga Road to MA Hannan International Airport in Chittagong was submitted on September 22, 1999. It was approved after 1,393 days.

The Architecture Directorate filed a proposal for constructing its office building on June 27, 2002 but received the green signal after 1,137 days.

In case of the 78 ADP projects studied, the average time overrun for approval was 511 days or 487 percent of the standard 105 days. Of them, 25 projects in the education and social sector took an average of 423 days, 28 in agriculture and rural development sector 534 days and the remaining 25 in industry and power sector 587 days to get the nod.

According to the government guideline, the first phase of processing a project concept -- the pre-EcneC (Executive Committee of National Economic Council) or inter-ministerial meeting level -- should not take more than 30 days. But the study found this phase spent 144 days on an average.

At the second phase, the EcneC or the planning minister is supposed to clear the PCP in 30 days, but in reality took 215 days on average.

At the third phase, the DPEC took an average of 87 days to okay the project proposal (PP) instead of the recommended 30 days.

At the final stage, in which the line ministry is supposed to approve the PP and issue an administrative circular within 15 days, in practice it took 83 days on an average.

The two stages found to have required the highest time to complete are the second, when the project is processed by the EcneC wing under the Planning Commission, and the first, when it lies with the ministry or department concerned.

The study, which maintained that a more detailed survey is required to determine the comparative responsibilities of the factors for the delay, however identified some common causes.

It said the delay at EcneC or PCP approval stage happens because EcneC meetings are not held regularly. A range of causes is there for the procrastination at the final stage, when the project is under consideration of the minister concerned. The factors include files lying indefinitely on desks, change of governments bringing policy changes resulting in alteration of the project area and beneficiaries, and inefficiency and lack of training of the officials concerned.

However, an analysis of the last five years' ADP and the evaluation reports of the completed projects indicate that in case of government agencies related to infrastructure the highest dawdling takes place at the implementation stage.

For instance, preparation of bidding documents and issuance of work order for the drilling part of Petrobangla and Sylhet Gas Field Infrastructure Development Project were delayed by two years and the surface facilities part by three years.

In another instance, the BTBT Computer Centre and Data Communication System Establishment (Revised) project of the telecoms ministry took two additional years to complete.

Another bidder

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Bangladesh."

The Power Cell had pre-selected Summit along with its German partner Siemens, PHP-Essar and Genting Barhad through request for proposals (RFP) five months ago.

Genting withdrew citing the government's eagerness to strike an unsolicited deal for Meghnaghat-3 and another deal with a disqualified company for Meghnaghat-2 projects.

The company also mentioned that the current bid terms for the Sirajganj project has been modified in such a way that the lowest power tariff would be around 4 cents whereas the Meghnaghat-2 and 3 bid terms allow the lowest tariff at 2.78 cents. It argues that the Sirajganj bid is just a farce to justify the unsolicited and corrupt bidding process for Meghnaghat-2 and 3.

Genting told the Power Cell why it should spend thousands of dollars in preparing a proposal and have millions of dollars of bid bonds stuck when it cannot expect a transparent process?

Industry insiders say the confidence of genuine bidders eroded over the years due to the government's questionable handling of power projects. Almost all the bids fell flat because of external influences since the BNP came to power.

They also blamed a section of officials for asking for bribes at all levels of the tender process. Such a trend was absent for private power projects even five years ago, they say.

The tender processes show that instead of picking the lowest qualified bidders, the authorities repeatedly

picked disqualified bidders offering higher prices because they were backed by strong lobbies, industry insiders pointed out.

Summit had won the first tender for the Sirajganj project in mid-2003 and finished financial arrangement with \$70 million loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and \$116 million from the World Bank (WB) before the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) without any logical grounds cancelled it.

Sources said the reason for the cancellation is the chief executive of Summit is the brother of a parliamentarian from the main opposition Awami League.

Industry insiders stress that for the sake of the country's energy security, the government should rise above politics and personal likes or dislikes in selecting competent bidders.

"If a Bangladeshi company is found qualified, the government should be proud of it because this sector should ultimately be run by Bangladeshis," noted a top executive of a power company.

Other than the Sirajganj project, the government now has in its pipeline Meghnaghat-2 and Meghnaghat-3 projects, each with 450mw capacity. The Meghnaghat-2 bid is set to go to the UAE-based investment company Belhassa along with Bangladeshi Orion Power Company. They do not have any experience to match this bid. There has been no tender for Meghnaghat-3, which is secretly being awarded to US-Irish joint venture Cadogan Manning.

SECURITY THREAT US closes embassy, offices in Indonesia

AP, Jakarta

The United States closed its embassy and all other diplomatic offices in Indonesia yesterday, citing a security threat. The decision comes a week after Australia urged its citizens to avoid travelling to Indonesia because of a warning by police in Jakarta about possible suicide bombings, particularly at embassies, international schools, office buildings and shopping malls.

In an e-mailed statement, US officials said the American embassy in Jakarta, the consulate in the city of Surabaya and all other American government facilities would be closed. They also reaffirmed earlier warnings that the threat of terrorism in Indonesia "remains high," but did not elaborate on what led to the closings Thursday.

An embassy spokesman refused to comment further.

"Attacks could occur at any time and could be directed against any location, including those frequented by foreigners and identifiably American and other Western facilities or businesses in Indonesia," the statement said.

The United States and other countries including Britain and Canada have issued a string of travel advisories since the Oct. 12, 2002, Bali bombings that killed 202 people, mostly foreign tourists.

The attack was blamed on the all-Qaeda-linked terror group Jemaah Islamiyah, which also is believed responsible for the Aug. 5, 2003, bombing of the J.W. Marriott hotel in Jakarta which killed 12 and last year's attack at the Australian Embassy in Jakarta which killed 10 people.

Dozens of militants have been convicted in the Bali and Marriott attacks but many top terror suspects remain free and are believed to be somewhere in Indonesia.

Akbar orders seizure of vessels without documents

BSS, Dhaka

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain yesterday asked officials to seize all vessels plying without valid documents and hand them over to the police stations concerned.

He said this while presiding over a high-level meeting of the ministry at its conference room, an official handout said.

The minister asked for forming vigilance teams for different areas of the country with the officials of the ministry, BIWTA, BIWTC and the Department of Shipping to verify the valid documents of the launches and cargoes and other irregularities. The teams, each of which will include one magistrate, will be empowered to take instant action against any irregularities. Activities of the vigilance teams will be carried out across the country concurrently and they will submit reports to the ministry by July 1, 2005.

The meeting directed the Department of Shipping to report whether any of the previously classified D-category launches are being operated and if faultiness in the design of those launches was modified before giving the survey certificate.

The minister instructed the Department of Shipping to complete all preparatory works to make functional the local classification society by July 1, which was entrusted with the duty of giving approval of the design of the vessels and looking into the fitness of the vessels during construction.

Secretary of the ministry M Rafiqul Islam, Chairman of BIWTA Reaz Hasan Khandakar, Chairman of BIWTC Shamsur Rahman Shimul Biswas and Director General of the Department of Shipping Captain AKM Shafikullah attended the meeting.

Reza Kibria

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Expressing dissatisfaction at the government's "failure" to try the real killers of the Awami League leader, Reza Kibria said, "He [Kibria] will never return to us, but the arrest and trial of the killers will definitely bring mental peace for us."

"People should register strong protest against such killings," he observed.

Four sisters of Kibria -- Safia Rahman, Fouzia Shahed, Ashrafi Siddique and Sharifa Mosabbir -- took part in the programme. Earlier, they formed a human chain and brought out a procession, which paraded the Dhanmondi area.

Wearing blue dresses, people from all walks of life including Awami League (AL) leaders Asim Kumar Ukil and Ajoy Kar Khokon joined the programme, expressing their solidarity with the demand for trial of the killers.

Kibria and four AL activists were killed in a grenade attack at a public rally on January 27 at Baiderbazar in Habiganj.

Iraq unveils massive security offensive

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's government will pour tens of thousands of Iraqi troops into Baghdad in an unprecedented operation to seal off the city and hunt insurgents who have launched a fresh wave of violence, ministers said on Thursday.

Defense Minister Sadoun al-Dulaimi said 40,000 Iraqi troops would be deployed in Baghdad for Operation Thunder, the biggest Iraqi military operation since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Backed by the 10,000 U.S. troops in Baghdad, they will set up hundreds of check-points and block roads into the capital.

The dramatic rise in suicide bombings and ambushes by mostly Sunni Arab guerrillas has killed more than 600 Iraqis in the last four weeks and raised fears that Iraq could slide toward civil war if the Shi'ite-led government does not deliver on pledges of stability.

Dulaimi said the crackdown would expand to other parts of Iraq after starting in Baghdad. But he did not say where the extra troops would come from or what their level of training would be. Many Iraqi troops are undertrained and underequipped.

"These operations will aim to turn the government's role from defensive

to offensive," Iraqi Interior Minister Bayan Jabour said at a news conference announcing the offensive.

Despite the announcement, attacks persisted nationwide, with at least 15 people killed in bomb blasts and shootings.

The crackdown is the first major security action undertaken by the new government and comes as U.S. forces conduct a security sweep in rebellious western Iraq.

"We shall not leave any place for terrorists or those who shelter them and incite terrorism in Iraq," Dulaimi said. "We will stand against all those who try to shed Iraqi blood ... We will implement the law with everything we've got."

He said troops would be drawn from interior and defense ministry forces and would begin operating in the capital, with the city divided into sections, a unit responsible for each.

"We will also impose a stringent blockade around Baghdad, like a bracelet around an arm, God willing, and God be with us in our crackdown on the terrorists' infrastructure. No one will be able to penetrate this blockade," Dulaimi said.

"You will witness unprecedented, strict security measures."

Dhaka has to take steps

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The US envoy, however, declined to say what were the recommendations that the US administration has made for Bangladesh's inclusion into the MCA funding.

Asked whether he agrees with the US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca that Bangladesh has to be competitive taking effective measures to combat corruption to be eligible for MCA funding, Harry said, "I cannot disagree with my boss."

Rocca made the comments on May 12 during her visit to Dhaka.

President George W Bush in 2003 started the MCA assistance programme with an initial fund of \$ 500 crore to offer financial aid in addition to usual US aid to the developing countries that rule justly, invest in their people, and encourage economic freedom.

The programme's main objective is to link greater contributions from developed nations to greater responsibility from developing nations.

While launching the MCA funding, the Bush administration promised to increase the US' core development assistance by 50 percent in next three years.

If included in the MCA, the US development aid to Bangladesh is likely to double in a year.

The US Congress has allocated \$ 100 million as regular development assistance for Bangladesh

this year to be channelled through the USAID.

INAUGURATION OF ILC

Rani Bilashmoni Government Boys' High School is one of the six schools where the Relief International, a US based NGO, has established internet learning centres (ILC) with a grant from the US State Department.

There has always been a digital divide between the least developed countries and the prosperous ones, said the US ambassador, adding that such centres will facilitate access to world-wide information on education and other fields, and thereby help narrow the divide.

"I respect schools, I respect Bangladesh and I respect Islam," Harry said while inaugurating the ILC.

He said it is not true that the US does not respect Islam, though some people think otherwise.

Country Director of the Relief International-School Online, Dr Jack Welch said that it has cost \$18,000 to install the ILC, and that the Relief International will bear the maintenance and operational expenses of the centre for the next 18 months.

District Education Officer of Gazipur Md Khabir Uddin and local educationist Nurul Islam among others spoke at the inauguration ceremony chaired by Additional District Commissioner of Gazipur Md Ataur Rahman.

Politics stops DU

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best professors.

But the attempts failed as a group of senior teachers and influential persons in the administration intervened and demanded new guidelines in this regard.

After discussing the matter in detail for more than one year, the Academic Council (AC) had decided to adopt new guidelines. A six-member high-powered committee took another year to submit a report on the new guidelines to then VC Azad.

The committee recommended not awarding the honour to more than seven teachers at a time. It also reset the tenure of the earlier life long title at five years, for which eminent professors also showed reluctance to get the honour.

A syndicate meeting during the tenure of VC Anwarullah Chowdhury discussed the award-giving issues and also the names of Serajul Islam Chowdhury of English, Saduddin of sociology and Aktheruzzaman of botany as best nominees.

But the initiatives had been shelved after the VC was forced to step down following a students movement.

The sources said the issue did not come for consideration after the present administration had taken over.

DU Teachers' Association President Prof. AAMS Siddique said the authorities should identify the best professors by awarding title with the emeritus professor title. "But many of the distinguished teachers have lost their aspiration for it due to politics," he added.

The honour must be given to the eligible professors for the greater interest of the university. DU Treasurer Syed Rashidul Hasan told The Daily Star. "The emeritus professors are the ornaments of the university. If the

authorities take proper initiatives, they can make it soon," he said.

When asked, VC Faiz said, "I sincerely feel the honour should be given. It is on the agenda of the Academic Council. But teachers have expressed apprehension that political affiliation might be considered in awarding the position of honour."

He said he would take initiatives to award the title soon. "We've already received names of the best professors from different departments," he added.

Inefficient judiciary

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Trade Organisation negotiations. He cited the instance of an international consultation on water and said, "I felt ashamed that our experts had no or very little knowledge on the issue. For that reason, we could not make an effective participation, too."

To overcome such shortcomings, he said, "Lawyers will be given special training."

Moudud said two more such consultative meetings would be held with government officials and lawyers and a draft proposal on the government attorney service would be prepared based on their recommendations.

On separation of investigation and law enforcement duties of the police, the law minister said the government has already formed 30 independent investigation units and 270 more will follow. "The police cannot make neutral investigation while carrying out routine work and maintaining protocols for ministers and other high-ups," he remarked.

Canadian High Commissioner David Sproule, solicitor of the ministry SM Harun Osmani and Cida Legal Reforms Project Director Lionel A Leveret also spoke at the session chaired by Law Secretary Alauddin Sarker.

Passengers suffer

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Al Mamun, the chairman of the BIWPCA.

In withdrawing the remark, the minister said, "I had said I don't dare even Mamun's father. Mamun is my nephew. Since the BIWPCA called to withdraw the comment, I am withdrawing it, but at the same time I am calling off the uncle-nephew relationship with Mamun."

Reacting to Akbar's latest statement, Giasuddin Al-Mamun said he does not give importance to the minister's remark as he always talks like this. He, however, said he was never a nephew of the shipping minister.

"I do not take his (minister's) comments into cognisance as he often makes such worthless speeches," he told the private news agency, adding that the other BIWPCA leaders decided to enforce the token boycott of terminals protesting the minister's remark.

Senior Vice-Chairman of the BIWPCA, Mohammad Badiuzzaman Badal also termed the minister's remark unfair and unexpected.

He said the statement withdrawing the remark will not solve the problem, rather it will deepen the crisis as it reflected the ego problem of the minister.

The BIWPCA leader said they will also call fresh action programme in a meeting on May 31.

Witnesses said all the vessels were kept off the pontoons during the terminal boycott programme. Hundreds of passengers had to reach the launches and terminals by hiring boats.

At least six boats capsized while carrying passengers from Sadarghat terminal to the launches anchored in the middle of the Buriganga.

However, no casualty was reported.

JS body

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with India at its April 27 meeting which observed that the relations had plunged into its lowest ebb. It discussed different issues including border tension, river linking project and push-in.

Both the ruling BNP and opposition Awami League members of the committee had expressed almost identical views on the current state of Dhaka-Delhi relations.

After yesterday's meeting, committee member and Awami League lawmaker Syed Ashrafur Islam said parliament has to take initiative to improve relations with India which have deteriorated in the recent times.

The AL lawmaker demanded probe into the Indian allegations that Bangladesh has been harbouring Indian insurgents. "The government should not deny these allegations without any investigation," he told reporters. Committee member and BNP lawmaker Mahbubur Rahman also said, "We should use parliament to improve the relations with India... The diplomatic relations with other countries in South Asia depend on the relations with India."

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan was not present at the meeting.

Satkhira rally

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said as chief guest at the rally.

Former diplomat Mohiuddin Ahmed and Gathok Dalal Nirmul Committee General Secretary Kazi Mukul spoke at the rally as special guests.

Earlier, they visited Jotindranagar in Shyamnagar upazila, 65 km from Satkhira town, where zealots of International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh attacked Ahmadiyyas on April 17, leaving more than 50 people including women and children injured.

Crackdown

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Battalion (Rab) operations, have started regrouping lately. They had already held a number of secret meetings to this end at different shrimp enclosures and hotels.

The new list will also include four ward commissioners of Khulna City Corporation (KCC) and several leaders of BNP, Awami League, and their front organisations, two leaders each from KCC Contractors' Association and Khulna Bazar Shop Owners' Association, the source said.

Waters keep

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On the other hand, the Brahmaputra-Jamuna marked a rise at all points except at Aricha while the Padma recorded fall at downstream points.

Meanwhile, according to FFWC, light to heavy rainfall was recorded at most places over the Meghna basin, and light to moderate rainfall at many places in the Brahmaputra basin during the last 24 hours ending at 9:00am yesterday.

AL to dissolve

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The AL leader said the party high command has already unofficially suspended organisational powers of both Hanif and Maya, and has given eight presidium members the responsibility of coordinating all activities of the party in eight parliamentary constituencies in the capital separately.

The high command also asked the presidium members to complete formation of committees of 22 thanas and 100 wards in the next two weeks, for which conflict between Hanif and Maya reached its peak in the recent days.

The present city unit committee will be dissolved after the thana and ward unit committees are formed. It is yet to be decided whether the city unit will be divided into two wings -- North and South-- instead of one as now, the party high-up said. He did not however want to be named.

Another AL leader, also seeking anonymity said, "Party high-ups are

too annoyed at the activities of the top leaders of the city unit. There is no reason why the party will keep them when they have miserably failed to launch any agitation in the capital on national issues or issues concerning the city dwellers."

In the last three and a half years, the city AL did not take up a single programme even on the city residents' problems like crises of power, gas and water, he mentioned.

On the feud between Hanif and Maya, he said, "It is more a personal conflict than a political one. Both want to prepare as mayoral candidate of Awami League in the next Dhaka City Corporation election."

Meanwhile, Hanif's supporters have started collecting signatures of city unit leaders in a bid to show their majority in the 71-member existing committee. They have already taken signatures of 41 leaders who expressed solidarity with the city unit president, they claimed.

Morshed says

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On the now-retracted Newsweek story on US military interrogators desecrating the Quran, Morshed said the report sparked just a few demonstrations in Bangladesh, not the deadly riots that hit Afghanistan and other Islamic states.

"Certainly, we will condemn any act against the Quran, but on the other hand you can't just go around killing and rioting in response," he said.

He rejected the idea that Islam and democracy are incompatible, saying democracy and elections are 'just a means to the end' of delivering and prosperity and peace to the people.

"I ask what is Muslim democracy, and no dictionary can define it for me," he said, adding, "democracy is democracy."

Morshed had earlier met Secretary of State Condoleezza

Rice, National Security Adviser Stephen J Hadley and senior lawmakers at the Capitol Hill.

On women empowerment and extremism, he said without economic opportunity Bangladesh women become a target for extremists as, he observed, "extremism flourishes in poverty."

The foreign minister said Bangladesh has used a 'silent social revolution' to boost women's rights and avoid the religious extremism that has plagued other Muslim countries.

He said Bangladesh pioneered the use of 'microcredit' loans, many to female entrepreneurs.

The minister said the Geneva-based World Economic Forum last week ranked Bangladesh 39th out of 58 countries surveyed in reducing sex inequality in politics and the workplace.

Malaysia eases rules

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under the latest amnesty caused a shortage of some 200,000 workers in the manufacturing sector, 150,000 in construction, 50,000 in plantations and 20,000 in the services sector, the cabinet has been told.

Shamsuddin noted, however, that the government's latest directive would only solve Malaysia's labour supply problems in the short-term.

"On a longer-term basis we need a more consistent policy on the employment of foreign workers and we should manage them on human resource requirements and not from a security angle," he told AFP, referring to the perception that migrant workers cause crime and other social problems.

Home Minister Azmi Khalid announced late Wednesday that Malaysia would allow foreign workers to enter the country on tourist visas and seek employment provided local authorities have a record of their fingerprints.

The cabinet accepted the procedure as the worker shortage in the country could become more serious if action was delayed, Azmi said.

The surprise move followed the collapse of a plan to bring the expelled workers back legally. The government announced earlier this week that special one-stop centres established in Indonesia to facilitate their return had been closed because of a poor response.

Azmi said he believed bureaucracy, high fees imposed by the Indonesian government and delays in processing documents were keeping the Indonesians away.

Analysts and industry sources welcomed the new directive, saying the government had shown flexibility and willingness to respond to the demands of industry.

But Abdul Razak Baginda, executive director of the Malaysian Strategic Research Centre, urged the government to take a long-term view of the problem.

"The government should be more strategic in its outlook and perspective, rather than being reactive," said

Malaysia is one of the largest importers of foreign labour in Asia.

Tata wants

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Sources said the talks will continue