

2007 predicted to be warmest year

REUTERS, London

This year is set to be the hottest on record worldwide due to global warming and the El Nino weather phenomenon, Britain's Meteorological Office said yesterday.

The Met Office said the combination of factors would likely push average temperatures this year above the record set in 1998. 2006 is set to be the sixth warmest on record globally.

"This new information represents another warning that climate change is happening around the world," said Met Office scientist Katie Hopkins.

The world's 10 warmest years have all occurred since 1994 in a temperature record dating back a century and a half, according to the United Nations' weather agency.

Britain's Met Office makes a global forecast every January with the University of East Anglia, and said it expected the world's average temperature to be 0.54 degrees Celsius above the 1961-1990 long-term average of 14.0 degrees.

There is a 60 percent probability that 2007 will be as warm or warmer than the current warmest year, 1998, which itself was 0.52 degrees above the long-term average it said in a statement.

Most scientists agree that temperatures will rise by between two and six degrees Celsius this century due mainly to carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels for power and transport.

24 more die as cold

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doubled as the demand is high, correspondents report.

The poor visibility due to thick fog disrupted movement of vehicles and river vessels across the country. The vehicles were seen to ply with their fog lights on.

The day labourers, especially in the northern region, are passing days amid great anxiety as most of them could not go out for work in the fields due to the heavy fog and cold spell.

Zahedul of Tajhat under the Sadar upazila, who remained jobless for the last two days as his master did not engage him in the field due to the foul weather, told our Rangpur correspondent that his family members will have to starve if the weather condition does not improve very soon.

Akter of Mominpur under the Sadar upazila of Rangpur said he went out in the town in search of work but no one showed interested to engage him in work in such weather.

Yesterday's lowest temperature, 7.2 degree Celsius, was recorded in Jessore and Chuadanga while the highest 25 degree Celsius in Cox's Bazar. The capital experienced lowest 10.5 degree and highest 18.1-degree Celsius temperature.

Polls sans grand

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Ruhul said, "No one has the right to violate the constitution," adding, "If required, the constitution will be amended after consulting with the major parties."

"Political parties are responsible for the current political crisis. So they will have to find out a solution through mutual understanding," the adviser added.

When asked whether the advisers will resign given the current situation, Ruhul said, "Relinquishing duties means ignoring. I am not that kind of person."

The adviser warned that the government would confront efforts to resist the election saying, "The army will be on patrol during the grand alliance's blockade programmes on January 7 and 8. Stern action will be taken as per law against people trying to obstruct traffic."

Adviser Shobeb Ahmed reiterated his view that the nation has been plunged into a crisis, but denied the impression that the caretaker government is inert.

"It is not true that we are not doing anything. We will have to approach both parties to settle the issue," Shobeb said.

However, he did not specify how they would approach the parties. "We will have to decide on the approach at the advisers' council meeting," he said.

"You will see the action required for a solution in due time. You will have to wait a little while," Shobeb added.

Adviser Fazlul Haque said he did not agree with the view of a legal expert, who said the constitutional provision to hold the elections within 90 days is 'directory,' not 'mandatory.'

Iran makes more feedstock for nuke fuel

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran's top nuclear official said on Thursday U.N. sanctions would not limit the country's atomic work and said Iran had more than doubled its stockpile of the feedstock to enrich uranium, an Iranian news agency reported.

The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously on December 23 to impose sanctions on Iran's trade in sensitive nuclear materials and technology in an attempt to stop uranium enrichment work that could produce material that could be used in bombs.

"They (the West) should accept that this (nuclear work) is our national right and is irreversible," Gholamreza Aghazadeh, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, was quoted by the students news agency ISNA as saying.

"This technology is home-made and can not be limited by sanctions."

Some analysts say that to achieve its goal of "industrial-scale" enrichment, Iran would still need foreign suppliers for equipment and would utilise black-market networks.

Independent

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The gang pressurised him to withdraw his nomination paper and threatened to kill him if he did not comply, Rafiqul told The Daily Star.

"As I was abducted and taken to the deputy commissioner's (DC) office, I ran and entered the DC's office and begged for the security of myself and my family members," Rafiqul burst into tears while describing his gruesome experience to this correspondent.

"As eight out of ten candidates withdrew their nominations, I was the only obstacle for Mosharraf Hossain to be elected unopposed. His gang offered me a handsome amount of money. But when I refused to take any money and withdraw my nomination, they threatened to kill me and my family members," he added.

Later, following a written complaint, DC Shamsul Alam placed Rafiqul under safe custody at Kotwali Police Station. "I was literally a captive there as Mosharraf's thugs were roaming around just outside the police station. At around 11:30pm, I came out of the police station with police assistance and spent the night in a guesthouse without any security," alleged Rafiqul.

I requested the police administration to escort me to Muktagachha or Dhaka but they did not take necessary steps, he said alleging that the local administration still favours the former state minister.

He also complained that the election rules and the state security did not ensure his rights. "As a citizen of the country, I sought proper steps, but my rights were blatantly violated."

Mosharraf played this dirty game to be elected unopposed, said Rafiqul adding that the local administration would be responsible if any untoward incidents take place.

"I did not withdraw my candidature and I will contest the upcoming general election with the 'Helicopter' symbol," he told The Daily Star.

Khaleda

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and it has caused 'more loss than benefit' for the Awami League, Khaleda jokingly said.

About the cancellation of Jatiya Party Chairman Ershad's candidature, the BNP chairperson said Ershad was jailed in corruption cases in the past and is again sentenced for two years in another corruption case. "Jail is the right place for the corrupt, ...(he) must face punishment for corruption."

Calling Ershad corrupt and a thief, Khaleda said although the court convicted him for corruption, the grand alliance boycotted the election only because Ershad was barred from contesting the election.

Khaleda criticised the AL-led grand alliance's blockade programme on January 7-8 and alleged that they (AL) are engaged in ruining the economy of the country and turning it into a satellite state of another country.

While seeking votes for BNP candidate Delwar Hossain Khan at a rally on the Circuit House ground, Khaleda said the January 22 election is a test for democracy and constitutional rule in Bangladesh. She alerted all saying, "Conspiracy is going on to foil the election, democracy and constitution. So cast your votes on January 22 to thwart their evil designs."

"All of their (AL-led alliance) demands were already met by the caretaker government but the grand alliance suddenly quit the election race even after filing nomination papers," because they were having problems within the party after forming the grand alliance and were only looking for an excuse to get out of the race, Khaleda explained.

"Awami League and its allies are trying to create a constitutional crisis because they do not believe in democracy," she said adding that the people have isolated those who stay away from elections.

Cackle of the jungle

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that the number of some indicator birds, like red jungle fowls and puffed throated babbler, has increased compared to the previous years.

"We found that the number of those birds have increased by 20 percent this year. It proves that the health of the ground forest and the midlevel forest has improved," Dr Monir, who led the census team in 2005 and 2006, told The Daily Star. "Now we want to monitor the conditions of other indicator bird species like red headed trogon, hornbill and hill myna," he added.

The last two censuses found the number of other indicator species almost the same, Dr Monir said adding that they will start the survey in next February again.

The experts see the improving forest health as a positive indication for the hoobook gibbons, the key species of the forest, as well. Petra Osterberg, a researcher from the Oxford University, recently conducted a census on this species and found that there are 59 gibbons in 16 families at Lauachhara and its adjoining forest.

According to experts, the rich biodiversity of Lauachhara includes 20 species of mammals, of which six are of non-human primates, 246 species of birds, four species of amphibians, six speeches of reptiles, 17 species of insects and 167 species of plants. In addition, hoobook gibbons and other species like slow lorises, barking deers, capped langurs, hooded pittas and kalij pheasant and different kinds of orchid are the main attractions of this forest.

The hoobook gibbons are treated as the world's most critical 25 mammals in 2006-2008 by the International Union of Conservation for Nature (IUCN).

Found in four countries of this region -- Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and India -- the total number of this endangered species stands at only 700. Of them, around 300 are in Bangladesh, Prof Anwarul Islam, prominent biodiversity expert of the country, said.

"We have been conducting surveys at all habitat forests of the hoobooks, including the Lauachhara. We are also planting fruit trees for them and trying to mark their fruit and sleeping trees, so that those are not felled," Dr Anwar, also the chief of the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh, added.

Since hoobooks are the "umbrella" species of Lauachhara, if they can be saved, the forest will be

saved as well, he observed.

Good news is that the number of this key species of the Lauachhara forest is growing gradually. The local tour guides and wildlife experts from the department of forest said that they have sighted a new family of hoobook gibbons at the Chautali, the adjoining forest of Lauachhara.

"The number of barking deer has also been increased recently," Shymal Devbarma, an indigenous youth working as a tour guide at the Lauachhara, said. "I can estimate their increased number by their barks and their dung," he added.

Six jute silos

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units of fire service and the Navy. Fire service sources said the fire might have started in the warehouse belonging to Eastern Jute Traders, while the reason of the fire is still under investigation.

The blaze then leaped up to other neighbouring warehouses owned by Golden Jute Supply, Uttara Jute Corporation and Reza Jute Traders.

Oriental Bank

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the ACC filed 27 cases with Motijheel Police Station on December 29 in this connection.

The ACC also found similar irregularities with the bank's Bangshal branch, from where the accused misappropriated about Tk 4.18 crore through a fake organisation, Bionic International. A case was filed with Kotwali Police Station in this connection on December 29.

Besides, the branch's officials also embezzled Tk 2.12 crore in connivance with one Sanwar Hossain, by letting him use the accounts of Abid Traders, which was unauthorised and illegal, the release said.

Another case was filed with the Kotwali Police Station the same day.

Dhaka regrets

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all, Bangladesh hopes that efforts would be made by all concerned to promote peace, reconciliation and justice, he said.

"At the same time, allowing the people of brotherly country of Iraq to emerge from the present crisis with a renewed commitment to and stake in building up of a strong, democratic and stable Iraq," the spokesman added.

Hasina asks

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(BCL) marking its 59th founding anniversary at her Dhanmondi office in the capital.

Retierating that a free and fair election is not possible under the jurisdiction of President and Chief Adviser (CA) Iajuddin Ahmed, Hasina asked Iajuddin to quit the office of the CA and form a new caretaker government for holding a free and fair election.

"We did not want Justice KM Hasan as the chief adviser and he had to go. We did not want MA Aziz as the chief election commissioner and he had to go too. Now it is Iajuddin's turn and he must quit the office of the chief adviser, or else no election will be held," said the AL president.

Iajuddin wants to hold a blueprint election only to serve BNP-Jamaat's interests but he will not be able to hold such an election, she said, adding that people will never allow any election of vote rigging.

Hasina demanded a flawless voter list with voters' ID cards and photos, and transparent ballot box for holding elections in a free and fair manner.

She called upon Iajuddin to accept the demands of the grand alliance to create a congenial atmosphere for holding a free and fair election. She also called upon the people to be united to resist vote

stealing and continuing movements for a free and fair election.

"Till I am alive, I will not let them [Iajuddin and BNP-Jamaat] play with the fate of the countrymen," Hasina said. She instructed her party leaders to go to every village and ward to make the countrywide blockade programmes for January 7-8 a complete success.

About BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's remark that the AL doesn't want election sensing defeat, Hasina said her party has support from the majority people and wants to establish people's voting rights and for this they want a free and fair election.

Rather, the BNP-led four-party alliance does not want fair election in the country as they fear certain debacle for their widespread corruption and misrule, Hasina said. She said they will decentralise the administration and make the education free up to the honours level if her party-led grand alliance is voted to power. The AL chief directed her party's student leaders to concentrate in studying and work for the welfare of the nation.

AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Quader, BCL President Mahmud Hasan Rapon, General Secretary Mahfuzul Haider Chowdhury Ratan, among others, spoke.

Tannery relocation

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There are at least 194 tanneries at Hazaribagh and they pour thousands of litres of untreated and highly toxic liquid wastes into the Buriganga River every day, posing a serious threat to the human and animal health, industries ministry sources said.

In view of the environmental and health hazards caused by the Hazaribagh tanneries, the government took up a project for the relocation of the tanneries at Savar on the city outskirts in 2003.

Arguing for tannery owners' demand for the compensation, Tipu Sultan said, "Total shifting of the tanneries would require an investment of Tk 5,400 crore. But with the existing set-up at Hazaribagh, we would be able to cover 25 to 40 per cent of the required investment."

"We still fall short of Tk 3,000 crore and to manage the huge investment we would definitely need government support," he said.

The government should make ways for 'easy exit' for the weak factories that are heavily indebted to the banks, and which is why are not viable in the long run. After the

6 Indian cops fired for neglect over child murders

REUTERS, Lucknow

Six Indian policemen have been sacked for apparently failing to act on reports of missing children believed to have been raped and killed following the discovery of their remains, authorities said yesterday.

The skulls and bones of at least 17 people, mostly children, were dug up last week in the backyard of a house in Noida, an industrial town on the outskirts of the capital New Delhi.

The gruesome case has horrified the country and police in Uttar Pradesh state, where Noida is located, have been slammed for not adequately investigating complaints from parents about their missing children over the last two years.

Many children could have been saved if the complaints had been probed earlier, activists say.

"We have dismissed four sub-inspectors and two inspectors," Naveen Bajpai, Uttar Pradesh's top bureaucrat, told Reuters.

"Our probe panel had prima facie found these officials guilty of dereliction of duty and gross negligence in responding to complaints made by parents of missing children," he said.

Police have arrested the businessman who owns the house and his domestic servant in connection with the case. There has been no word from the pair, and it was not immediately known if they had legal representation.

The sackings are part of an investigation by state authorities into the role of police in the incident. Three officers and one junior policeman remain under suspension, Bajpai said.

Earlier this week, anger spilled into the streets of Noida as grieving parents and relatives stoned the house and clashed with police, accusing them of failing to find their children.

In New Delhi, hundreds of people, many of them children, marched silently near Rajghat, the memorial to Indian freedom movement leader Mahatma Gandhi.

The demonstrators, who wore black bandannas, demanded the Central Bureau of Investigation, India's federal police agency, probe the killings.

Dr Kamal

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Guyana and Surinam.

Leaders and activists of Gonoforum and the Awami League-led 14-party alliance welcomed him with flower garlands and slogans.

The Gonoforum chief praised the people for rejecting the election through a countrywide successful uprising. About the constitutional provision of holding the election within 90days, he said, "Holding a farcical and disorderly election within 90 days is not logical."

Crime, corruption, politicisation and sheltering militants are still going on and the people rejected the way this country is being run, Dr Kamal said adding, the public opinion was also formed in favour of a change through a fair election.

"A neutral referee is needed for a game...a neutral caretaker government (system) was introduced in the constitution, but the people do not see it (neutrality of the caretaker government)," he observed.

While commenting on if the upcoming election would be one-sided, he said, "Election cannot be held this way. Can one team keep on scoring goals when its opponent remains absent?"

The advisers (who resigned from this caretaker government) had made efforts to bring acceptability in the Election Commission (EC) by reconstituting it. But the president spoiled those efforts and compelled them (the advisers) to resign, said Dr Kamal.

Dr Kamal insisted, "We definitely want election. But a truly neutral person will have to take the responsibility, ensure neutrality in the administration and unbiased operation of the police."

Replying to a question whether they would resist the January 22 election, the Gonoforum chief said, "People will decide this."

Asked whether he would seek bail since he was charge-sheeted in a sedition case filed for vandalism at the Supreme Court, Dr Kamal refused to make any comment. "If anyone has done anything without any ground, I'll have to discuss it (with people concerned) to decide what to do in this regard."

Ershad

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The same year Ershad filed an appeal with the HC against the lower court verdict.

HM Ershad, who usurped power through a bloodless coup in March 1982 and was deposed in December 1990, was found guilty of misappropriating Tk 33 crore in a shady deal for purchasing 520 Japanese boats and 10 water-purifying machines for relief operation in 1989.

Iraq halts execution

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the Eid-ul-Azha festival end on Saturday. He did not give a date.

"The executions will be after the holidays," said Askari, who was present at Saddam's hanging on Saturday as Malik's representative.

Askari said there was also a view among some members of the government that the two former regime officials be hanged after the appeals court decides on a prosecution request to send another Saddam aside to the gallows.

The prosecution has requested that Taha Yassin Ramadan, former vice president, also be hanged. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, but a judicial panel ruled that this was insufficient.

On Wednesday, UN spokeswoman Michele Montas said United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon was opposed to the death penalty.

"The secretary general strongly believes in the wisdom of Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person," she said.

"He fully endorses the call made today by (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) Louise Arbour for restraint by the government of Iraq in the execution of the death sentences imposed by the Iraqi high tribunal," she added.

The US military has expressed concern over the manner in which Saddam was hanged, saying it would "have done things differently", and Britain has condemned the leaking of the video.

Saddam, Barzan and Bandar were found guilty on November 5 of ordering the judicial murder of 148 Shia men and boys from the village Dujaill in the 1980s. They were sentenced to death for crimes against humanity.

Saddam's execution five days ago has angered members of Iraq's large Sunni minority and triggered criticism from observers who felt he was humiliated minutes before being put to death.

A top Iraqi official, however, defended the process.

"Where was the humiliation? The shouting of the crowd?" demanded National Security Advisor Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, who was present at the execution, in an interview on CNN.

Agriously unofficial video released after Saddam was hanged showed one of the members of the execution party shouting the name of radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, a bitter opponent of Saddam. The two-and-half minute film shot on a mobile telephone camera has spread like wildfire on the Internet and triggered angry outbursts within Iraq's Sunni Arab community and from international leaders.

One of those present at the execution could be heard shouting "Moqtada! Moqtada! Moqtada!" at a sneering Saddam, inspiring some observers to compare the execution to a sectarian lynching.

"Basically they were doing their congregational prayers and suppli-

cations, and they mentioned at the end of their supplication the name of Moqtada," Rubaie said.

"I can't see where is the humiliation, to be quite honest. Moqtada, Moqtada, Moqtada is not a dirty word, not an obscene word. They were not cursing."

Rubaie also explained why the executioners and Iraqi officials danced around Saddam's body after the hanging.

"This is the tradition of the Iraqis -- when they do something they dance around the body and they express their feelings," he said.

"What is wrong with that? If that upsets the feelings of some of the Arab nations and Arab rulers, I think: 'The best of luck to them'."

"To the best of my knowledge and belief after I left the scene I was proud of what had happened and it was played by the book, but when the video was released I saw some wrongdoing and this has to be addressed," he said.

Askari said two justice ministry guards had been held for questioning.

"Two guards who are employees of the justice ministry have been held, but there are no charges against them yet," he told AFP.

Meanwhile, Iraq's bloody sectarian war continued.

At least 13 people were killed and 22 wounded when a car bomb went off near a petrol station in Baghdad's upscale western Mansour district, a security official and a medic said.

Police also found three bodies of men killed execution style south of Baghdad in the town of Iskandariyah.

7 left parties

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and bring out processions across the country tomorrow demanding resignation of President Iajuddin Ahmed from the post of chief adviser to the caretaker government (CG), recasting the administration and preparing a correct voter list.

They said an emergency meeting of the Andolon on Wednesday took the polls boycott decision as Iajuddin has failed to create an election friendly atmosphere in the country.

"Iajuddin-led caretaker government has not taken effective measures for holding a fair election, and he has totally failed to prove his neutrality. So, we have decided to boycott the election," said Khalekuzzaman, convener of the BSD.

He demanded that the CG must take steps to recover illegal arms and stop the use of black money in election.

Ganomukti Andolon will hold a rally at Muktagung in the capital at 3:30 pm tomorrow to press its demand for resignation of Iajuddin as chief adviser, he said.

Others present at the press conference included Workers Party President Khandakar Al Akkas, General Secretary Saiful Haq, Bangladesh Ganotantrik Andolon Member-Secretary Kamrul Alam Sabuj and Joint Convener of Sramajibi Mukti Andolon Babul Biswas.

Democrats set to take

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Foreign Relations Committee.

In the Senate another fierce White House opponent, Harry Reid, 67, will be the new majority leader, while Joseph Biden, 63, who hopes to run for the White House in 2008, will head the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The new Democratic majority has set high on their agenda hearings on quelling sectarian strife in Iraq and perceived administration mistakes getting into the war.

The new Congress will open as Bush prepares to announce an overhaul of his Iraq policy. Key proposals Bush is expected to announce in the next weeks is a short-term "surge" of thousands of additional US troops into Iraq.

The president however will face resistance from Capitol Hill after six years of an overwhelmingly sympathetic Republican-led Congress, and Democrats say he will have to compromise if he hopes to achieve anything substantive in his last two years in office.

"Democrats ran on a message of compromise and we certainly want to work with the president," said Democratic Senator Charles Schumer.

"We hope that when the president says compromise, it means more than 'do it my way,' which is what he's meant in the past," he said.

Indications are the Democrats plan to fully use their newfound clout.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Joe Biden is organising up to a dozen hearings on the Iraq war, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to testify.

Carl Levin, his counterpart on the Senate Armed Services Committee, plans to summon new Defence Secretary Robert Gates and other officials.

The first dogfight could come over Bush's expected shakeup of