

Global warming: Oceans may be losing ability to absorb Co2

AFP, Paris

The world's oceans may be losing their ability to soak up extra carbon dioxide (CO2) from the atmosphere, with the risk that this will help stoke global warming, two new studies say.

Absorption of atmospheric CO2 by the North Atlantic plunged by half between the mid-1990s and 2002-5, British researchers say in a paper published in the November issue of the Journal of Geophysical Research.

The data comes from sensors lowered by a container ship carrying bananas, which makes a round trip from the West Indies to Britain every month. It has generated more than 90,000 measurements of ocean CO2.

The finding touches on a key aspect of the global warming question, because for decades the ocean has been absorbing much of the CO2 released into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels.

If the sea performs less well as a carbon sponge, or "sink" according to the technical jargon, more CO2

will remain in the atmosphere, thus accelerating the greenhouse effect.

Ute Schuster, who led the research with Professor Andrew Watson of the University of East Anglia's School of Environmental Sciences, admitted she was astonished by the data.

"Such large changes are a tremendous surprise. We expected that the uptake would change only slowly because of the ocean's great mass," Schuster was quoted by the university in a press release Monday as saying.

Research last year pointed to rising acidification of the oceans as a result of CO2 uptake, highlighting the risk of carbon saturation as well as a looming peril for biodiversity.

Schuster was cautious about drawing too swift a conclusion from the new research.

"Perhaps this is partly a natural oscillation or perhaps it is a response to the recent rapid climate warming," she said.

"In either case, we now know that the sink can change quickly and we need to continue to monitor the ocean uptake."

In another study also published on Monday, the researchers said that economic growth had caused levels of atmospheric CO2 to increase 35 percent faster than expected since 2000.

Eighteen percent of the increase could be attributed to a decline in the efficiency of sinks -- the oceans as well as forests -- in soaking up airborne CO2. The remainder came from fossil fuels.

"Fifty years ago, for every tonne

of CO2 emitted, 600 kilograms (1,300 pounds) were removed by natural sinks. In 2006, only 550 kilograms were removed per tonne and that amount is falling," said lead author Pep Canadell of the Global Carbon Project.

The findings were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, which like the Journal of Geophysical Research is published in the United States.

30 US helicopters for Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

The United States yesterday handed over 30 military helicopters to key ally Pakistan to help fight extremism and provide humanitarian relief in the region, officials said.

US ambassador Anne Patterson

turned over the aircraft during a ceremony with Defence Secretary Kamran Rasool at an aviation base in the garrison city of Rawalpindi, the military said.

Pakistan's army aviation personnel were an asset to "to our combined effort to fight extremism and bring peace and stability to the region," Patterson said in a statement.

"This event demonstrates the continued commitment of the United States to cooperate with Pakistan," she said.

Rasool said the 26 new Bell-412 and four refurbished Cobra helicopters "will significantly enhance" the military's "operational capabilities".

As part of a 235-million dollar project, Pakistan leased the Bell-412 helicopters from the US, which provided the resources and manpower training to run them, the US embassy said.

"The Pakistan army now takes ownership of these helicopters," Patterson said.

Pakistan is a key ally in the US-led "war on terror" launched after the September 11, 2001, attacks.

The director general of army aviation, Major General Syed Taqi Naseer Rizvi, said the helicopters "would go a long way in helping fortify the country's capability to effectively combat the menace of terrorism".

Kenyan parliament dissolved

AFP, Nairobi

Kenya's President Mwai Kibaki on Monday dissolved the country's parliament, paving the way for elections expected in December.

But the Electoral Commission of Kenya is yet to announce the date for the country's fourth multiparty polls since pluralism was reintroduced in 1992.

"I hereby dissolve the ninth parliament of the Republic of Kenya with immediate effect," Kibaki said in a televised national speech.

"I appeal to all political leaders and Kenyans in general to ensure that we have peaceful, free and fair general elections."

Kibaki, 75, is seeking reelection for a second and final term.



Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka briefs journalists at his office at Nagar Bhaban yesterday after a meeting with the special taskforce. (Story on page 1)

India, Dow Chemical may settle Bhopal gas disaster claims

AFP, New Delhi

India could reach an out-of-court settlement with US giant Dow Chemical to clean up the Bhopal gas disaster site and end liability claims after more than two decades, a report said yesterday.

India's law ministry said the move would clear "legal hurdles" to future Dow Chemical investments in India by setting up a fund to clean up thousands of tonnes of contaminated soil along with other measures to resolve long-running lawsuits linked to the disaster, the Hindustan Times newspaper reported.

The government was prompted by Indian industrial conglomerate the Tata Group to pursue a settlement, and Dow Chemical's chief executive wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh earlier this year on the issue, the newspaper said.

The law ministry was not immediately available to comment on the report.

Thousands of people were killed on December 3, 1984 when a then Union Carbide plant at Bhopal in central India disgorged 40 tonnes of lethal methyl isocyanate gas in one of the world's worst environmental disasters.

Dow Chemical, which took over Union Carbide in 2001, has long insisted that all liabilities regarding the disaster were settled when Union Carbide concluded a 470-million-dollar compensation settlement with New Delhi in 1989.

But local and federal court cases in India have challenged that view with lawsuits calling for more compensation for survivors and liability

claims for ongoing health problems linked to the disaster.

Social activist Sandeep Pandey, who is associated with the gas tragedy victims, told the newspaper that his supporters would oppose any move to settle with Dow Chemical.

"Allowing Dow Chemical in India without paying the liabilities is a crime," Pandey told the newspaper.

Compensation payments to survivors as well as medical atten-

tion have been delayed because of bureaucracy and lawsuits since the settlement.

According to the Indian government, at least 15,000 people have died from illness resulting from the disaster while Amnesty International said resulting illnesses had claimed 22,000 to 25,000 lives.

Local victims' rights activists put the figure as high as 30,000.

Beijing's population to hit 20m by 2020

AFP, Beijing

Beijing's population will hit the 20 million mark by 2020 as millions of migrants looking for work flood into the capital, an academic report said yesterday.

The increase is entirely down to people moving here from rural areas because growth due to birth rate has stood at zero for the past five years, according to the study by Peking University's Institute of Population Research.

Beijing's current population stands at around 17 million, including some five million migrants, according to the government.

The influx of migrants drawn by the capital's booming economy is set to continue, the report added, according to Xinhua news agency.



Election Working Group Chittagong takes out a colourful procession in the port city yesterday to motivate people to enlist their names in the voter list.

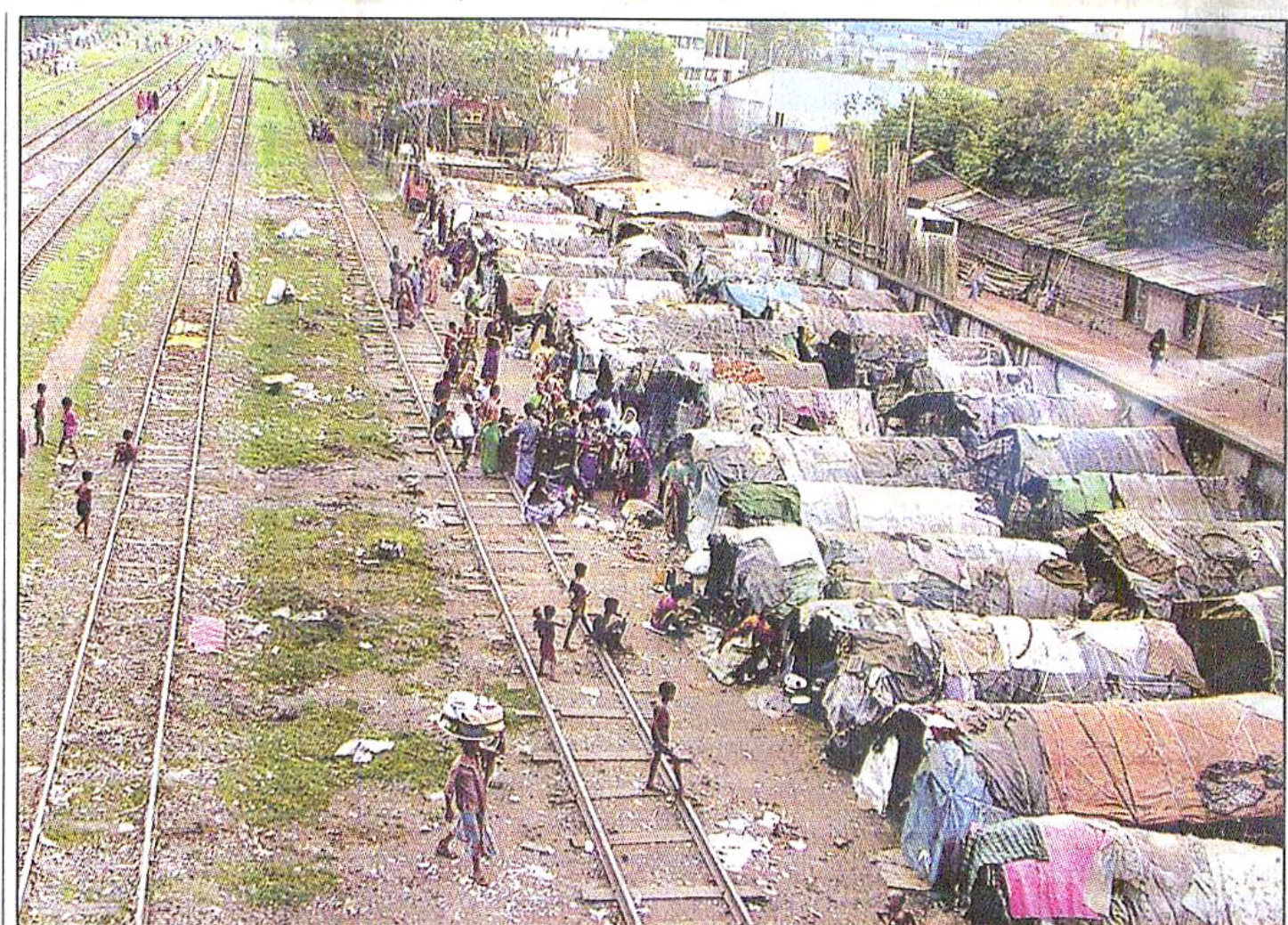
Israel hardliners plot release of Rabin killer

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's most extreme right-wing fringe has launched a nationwide campaign to release the jailed assassin of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin to mark the 12th anniversary of the murder.

"If Israel is ready to release terrorists for peace, by the same principle, we demand the release of Yigal Amir," said Itamar Ben Gvir, who belongs to a committee in support of Israel's most famous political assassin.

On November 4, 1995 Amir fired three bullets into Rabin's



Illegal occupations like the slums beside Dhaka-Chittagong rail line at Dewanhat in the port city are haven for criminals and illegal activities. Time and again these slums were demolished by the authorities concerned and reestablished by influential quarters. Besides, a speeding train can also cause casualties anytime. The picture was taken yesterday.

EC may not seek audit reports

FROM PAGE 16

The EC proposal says a political party intending to get registered with it will have to submit copy of audit reports on its income and expenditure in immediate past financial year along with some other documents.

To ensure financial transparency and democracy within the parties, the EC wants to make registration mandatory for parties to contest parliamentary elections.

Participating in the dialogue on electoral reforms with the EC yesterday, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD - Ziku-Malek) proposed introducing the provision for audit reports after registration system for parties comes into force.

Substantiating the proposal, the JSD leaders said no political party properly maintains accounts of income and expenditure according to its constitution. If the EC now makes it mandatory, the parties will submit false audit reports to get registration, they argued.

"You [EC] should not begin the process of registration with the political parties submitting false statements on their funds," Abdul Malek Ratan, general secretary of the party, requested the commission.

In response to this, the CEC hinted at reconsidering the EC's proposal in this regard.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hussain appreciated the JSD's arguments and proposal for introducing the system of audit reports after registration of the parties.

Apart from non-compliance with the parties' constitutional provisions for keeping proper

account of party funds, major political parties have been accused of collecting funds in shady ways, keeping most of the parties' leaders in the dark.

On the JSD proposal for allocation of election symbols through lottery instead of allocating those permanently to different parties, the CEC said they do not want to change the system of allocation.

The EC declined to accept a JSD proposal for taking responsibilities of election campaign by arranging projection meetings and publishing leaflets for candidates to stop use of black money in polls. It cited difficulties in managing the huge task.

Sakawat however said they plan to arrange public debates among contenders in city corporation polls.

A 12-member JSD delegation that took part in the dialogue urged the EC to change the proposed provision for cancelling registration of a political party. The provision says registration of a party will be cancelled if the party chief and sec-

tary general apply to the EC for it.

The delegation proposed that registration of a party should be cancelled only when its policy-making body takes a resolution to this effect and sends it to the EC.

The JSD urged the government through the EC to initiate a broad-based dialogue with parties for greater political reforms.

It also urged the EC not to register any political party that "does not believe in the country's independence and national unity".

At the beginning of the dialogue, the CEC said, "We want to make a contribution to the nation. We want to create such a political atmosphere and culture where people can live in harmony and peace. For this, unhealthy politics must end paving the way for holding a genuine election free from nomination trade."

Political parties are the main clients of the EC, Shamsul Huda said. "We will hold talks with the parties again before announcing the election schedule."

Ruet academic activities resume today

RU CORRESPONDENT

Academic activities will resume at Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (Ruet) today, campus sources said.

All the dormitories of the university reopened for resident students yesterday.

Admission forms will be distributed among the admission seekers from October 24.

Meanwhile, all the dormitories of Rajshahi University (RU) will reopen for resident students after 63 days on October 25, RU sources said.

Administrative activities will resume at the university today, they said.

Academic activities will resume here on October 28.

The decision was taken at an extra-ordinary Syndicate meeting of the university on September 12. Vice-chancellor (VC) Prof Altaf Hossain presided. The university was closed since die following student unrest on the campus on August 20.

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