

## IT waste 'major challenge' to human health: UNEP

AFP, NUSA DUA, Indonesia

Millions of discarded mobile phones and computers are posing a "major challenge" to human health, the chief of the United Nations Environment Programme said Thursday.

Achim Steiner told a UN conference on waste management on the Indonesian resort island of Bali that 20 million mobile phones were thrown away each year in China.

Meanwhile, the global number of personal computers was expected to double to two billion by 2015.

"The rapid growth and rapid redundancy of all this equipment ... represents a major challenge to the international community in terms of human health and the environment," he said.

He said 20 to 50 million tonnes of electronics waste was produced every year -- enough to load a train that would stretch around the world.

"The growth in electronics is unlikely to abate any time soon, especially as disposable incomes rise in the rapidly developing and developing economies."

Much of this waste was ending up in landfills usually in developing countries in Africa and Asia, where it leaks chemicals and heavy metals into the environment, Steiner said.

"This is effectively long-distance dumping," he said.

The disposal of massive numbers of unwanted electronics goods has been a key focus of the five-day meeting of parties to the 1992 Basel Convention on waste management that began Monday.

More than 1,000 delegates from 170 countries are taking part in the talks to review the impact of hazardous waste on human health and livelihoods.

The Basel Convention is an international treaty that regulates the global trade in hazardous waste and aims to minimise its generation and movement across borders.

Participants were expected to adopt a "Bali Declaration" aimed at highlighting the importance of health and waste management to global development strategies, such as reducing poverty.



Artists render song at an anti-drug concert at Fantasy Kingdom at Ashulia yesterday on the occasion of International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. The Prothom Alo and Banglalink organised the event.

## AIDS epidemic a disaster for Africa: Red Cross

AFP, Geneva

Africa's AIDS epidemic is so severe that it should be classed as a disaster comparable to floods or famine, the Red Cross said Thursday.

In its annual "World Disasters Report", the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said that there was "no doubt" that HIV/AIDS matches the UN definition of disaster.

About two thirds of the world's HIV-positive cases are in sub-Saharan Africa. At least one person in 10 is living with HIV in nations such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia, the report said.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs classifies a disaster as a "serious disruption of the functioning of a society, causing widespread human, material or environmental

losses which exceed the ability of a society to cope using only its own resources."

The Red Cross said such a crisis now exists in Africa.

The consequences of the epidemic are felt by all of society and not just those who are sick, due to the economic strain and social tensions.

"Reflecting on the lives of most people living in sub-Saharan Africa raises more alarm than hope," the IFRC said.

"The virus is directly responsible for restraining and reducing human and resource capacities across societies because HIV infections and AIDS deaths are common among workers of all qualifications and expertise, and in all industries."

"Coupled with the high costs of caring for people living with HIV, those capacity constraints lead to withered health and education systems, declining food security, skilled labour shortages and an increasingly ramshackle infrastructure," the report warned.

Lindsay Knight, who edited the report said: "The HIV and AIDS epidemic is a disaster whose scale and extent could have been prevented. Ignorance, stigma, political inaction, indifference and denial all contributed to millions of deaths."

Mobility and migration are adding further difficulties in the management of the disaster.

"The HIV epidemic can spell disaster for both sending and receiving communities, as well as communities along transit routes," said the report.

For instance, in countries with relatively low HIV prevalence, such as the Philippines, Bangladesh and Pakistan, a larger proportion of returning migrants had the disease compared to the general populations.

About 35 percent of all documented HIV cases in the Philippines were among returning workers who have worked overseas, while in 2006, they made up 42 percent of new HIV cases, the report noted.

The World Health Organisation said this month that the number of people in developing countries receiving antiretroviral drugs to combat HIV had risen sevenfold in the past three years to nearly three million by 2007.

But a WHO co-authored report found that much more needed to be done: despite the increase, an estimated 6.7 million people in need of anti-retrovirals were still unable to access medicines, out of a total of 9.7 million.

The report, produced in conjunction with UNAIDS and Unicef, said that the rise was due to the increased availability of drugs, in part due to price cuts, but also to delivery systems better adapted to specific country needs.

But there was also increased demand for the treatment, as the number of people tested and diagnosed with HIV climbed, the WHO noted.

Earlier this year, a joint UN study found that more than two million children worldwide were living with the HIV virus in 2007, most of whom were infected before they were born.

## Global warming causing plant migration in Europe

AFP, Washington

Global warming has caused numerous European plant species to migrate to higher elevations over the decades, according to new research published Thursday.

The research appears in the June 27 edition of the Journal Science, and has potentially "important ecological and evolutionary consequences," the study's authors wrote.

A team of international scientists working in mountainous regions of Western Europe compared the natural elevation range of 171 forest plant species between 1905 and 1985, and again between 1986 and 2005.

"Along the entire elevation range, 0 to 2,600 metres above sea level... we show that climate warming has resulted in a significant upward shift in species optimum elevation averaging 29 metres per decade," the researchers wrote.

The lead author of the study was Jonathan Lenoir of AgroParisTech in Nancy, France.

The report, compiled with data from the French National Climatic Network, was conducted in six mountainous regions throughout Europe.

They include the Northern Pyrenees, the Massif Central, the Western Jura, the Vosges, the Corsican range and the alpine regions, where average temperature increases have approached one degree Celsius since the start of the 1980s, researchers said.

## Water causes one in 10 diseases: WHO

AFP, Geneva

Unsafe water leads to one in 10 diseases and six percent of deaths worldwide, according to estimates in a report published by the World Health Organisation on Thursday.

While the UN agency estimates that problems relating to water cause 9.1 percent of diseases recorded yearly, the report highlights this disproportionately affects the world's poorest countries.

tries.

"In the 35 most affected countries, over 15 percent of diseases could easily be prevented by improved water, sanitation and hygiene," report author Annette Pruss-Ustun told the press.

In developed countries, water causes less than one percent of deaths. In developing countries, the toll leaps to an average eight percent -- with the extreme case being Angola, at 24 percent. Illnesses like malaria, dengue

fever, or diarrhoea can be transmitted through the water supply.

The problem particularly threatens children. An unsafe water supply is to blame for 22 percent of illnesses in those under 14 years of age, and one quarter of young deaths.

As a solution, Pruss-Ustun encouraged governments to invest in this area. Every dollar invested would bring an additional benefit of eight dollars in healthcare savings and productivity, she said.

## DU JAGANNATH HALL 'Construct building without felling trees'

DU CORRESPONDENT

Green Voice (GV), an environmental organisation, yesterday formed a human chain on Dhaka University (DU) campus demanding the authorities construct the proposed new building on Jagannath Hall premises without felling trees at the selected spot.

Authorities will cut down a good number of trees in order to build a five-storied residential building that would be constructed in between the hall pond and Udayan High School. Some 500 students of the hall's East Building, which was declared unsafe for living in 2006, would be shifted to the new one.

GV members and a group of DU students formed the human chain at Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) intersection.

Talking to the Daily Star, GV

Coordinator Alamgir Kabir said a number of trees can be saved if the authorities are willing to do so.

"There is no need to cut down the trees next to the school boundary as the building would be constructed piling the soil, and so there is a minimum chance of damaging roots of those trees," Alamgir said referring to architectures of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan (Bapa).

Bapa General Secretary Dr Abdul Matin, Joint Secretary Shahjahan Mridha Benu, architect Iqbal Habib and Sharif Jamil also participated at the programme.

After chopping down some trees, a group of hall students on Thursday protested the decision to fell the trees, which are next to the Udayan High School boundary.

Amid student agitation, authorities temporarily stopped felling of the trees next to the boundary.

## Piar, Ziko elected JBBA president, secretary

UNB, New York

Bangladeshi businessmen Md Piar and Zakaria Masud Ziko were elected president and secretary of Jackson Heights Bangladesh Business Association (JBBA), biggest organisation of Bangladeshi businessmen here.

The election was held on June 22 at Bangladesh Plaza.

Other office bearers are: senior vice-president -- Dr Mansur Khan; vice-presidents -- Kaiser Halim and Sajid Mia; joint secretary -- A Rahim Hawlader; social welfare secretary -- Kazi MA Kaiyum; cultural secretary -- Md Rashed Ahmed; office secretary -- Shahin H Chowdhury; publicity secretary -- Ashraf Hasan Bulbul; publication secretary -- Md Azizul Haque.

Executive members are Md Anwar Hossain, A Salam Mia, Mawlana MK Rahman, Enayet Uddin Sarder, Md Mohsin Mia, Mohsin Noni Bhuiyan, Mansur K Chowdhury, Hossain S Rana, Md Feroz Alam and Nazir Sinha.



Green Voice, an environmental organisation, forms a human chain in front of Teacher-Student Centre (TSC) on Dhaka University (DU) campus yesterday demanding the authorities construct the proposed new building on Jagannath Hall premises without felling trees at the selected site.

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## Scientists rewrite history of avian evolution

AFP, Washington

A five-year project has revolutionized scientific thought on the evolution of birds and the results are so surprising that now even the textbooks will have to be rewritten, a study said Thursday.

"With this study, we learned two major things," said Sushma Reddy, lead author and a fellow at The Field Museum in Chicago, Illinois.

"First, appearances can be deceiving. Birds that look or act similar are not necessarily related. Second, much of bird classification and conventional wisdom on the evolutionary relationships of birds is wrong."

The results of the largest ever study of bird genetics are so widespread that the names of dozens of birds will now have to be changed, says the study to be published in Science magazine.

The Early Bird Assembling the Tree-of-Life Research Project has been researching the evolution of all major living groups of birds and has already examined 32 kilobases of DNA data in 19 places of some 169 bird species.

A kilobase is a unit of length for DNA fragments representing 1,000 base pairs of DNA.

Among new discoveries the team found that birds repeatedly adapted to new environments. For example, flamingos and grebes did not evolve from other waterbirds, while birds that now live on land such as cuckoos did not evolve from other landbirds.

Other findings were that, contrary to current thought, daytime hummingbirds evolved from nocturnal nightjars, falcons are not related to hawks and eagles and fast flying ocean birds are not related to pelicans and other waterbirds.

"We now have a robust evolutionary tree from which to study the evolution of birds and all their interesting features that have fascinated so many scientists and amateurs for centuries," Reddy said.

"Birds exhibit substantial diversity and using this 'family tree' we can begin to understand how this diversity originated as well as how different bird groups are interrelated."

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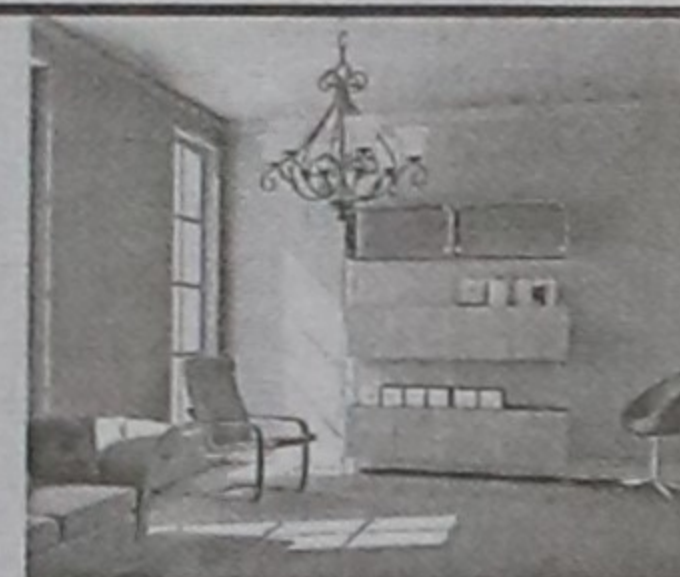
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