

Insecticides put world food supplies at risk

THE GUARDIAN ONLINE

The world's most widely used insecticides have contaminated the environment across the planet so pervasively that global food production is at risk, according to a comprehensive scientific assessment of the chemicals' impacts.

The researchers compare their impact with that reported in Silent Spring, the landmark 1962 book by Rachel Carson that revealed the decimation of birds and insects by the blanket use of DDT and other pesticides and led to the modern environmental movement.

Billions of dollars' worth of the potent and long-lasting neurotoxins are sold every year but regulations have failed to prevent the poisoning of almost all habitats, the international team of scientists concluded in the most detailed study yet. As a result, they say, creatures essential to global food production – from bees to earthworms – are likely to be suffering grave harm and the chemicals must be phased out.

The new assessment analysed the risks associated with neonicotinoids, a class of insecticides on which farmers spend \$2.6bn (£1.53bn) a year. Neonicotinoids are applied routinely rather than in response to pest attacks but the scientists highlight the "striking" lack of evidence that this leads to increased crop yields.

"The evidence is very clear. We are witnessing a threat to the productivity of our natural and farmed environment equivalent to that posed by organophosphates or DDT," said Jean-Marc Bonmatin, of the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in France, one of the 29 international researchers who conducted the four-year assessment. "Far from protecting food production, the use of neonicotinoid insecticides is threatening the very infrastructure which enables it." He said the chemicals imperilled food supplies by harming bees and other pollinators, which fertilise about three-quarters of the world's crops, and the organisms that create the healthy soils which the world's food requires in order to grow.

Professor Dave Goulson, at the University of Sussex, another member of the team, said: "It is astonishing we have learned so little. After Silent Spring revealed the unfortunate side-effects of those chemicals, there was a big backlash. But we seem to have gone back to exactly what we were doing in the 1950s. It is just history repeating itself. The pervasive nature of these chemicals mean they are found everywhere now.

"If all our soils are toxic, that should really worry us, as soil is crucial to food production."

The assessment, published yesterday, cites the chemicals as a key factor

in the decline of bees, alongside the loss of flower-rich habitats meadows and disease. The insecticides harm bees' ability to navigate and learn, damage their immune systems and cut colony growth. In worms, which provide a critical role in aerating soil, exposure to the chemicals affects their ability to tunnel.

Dragonflies, which eat mosquitoes, and other creatures that live in water are also suffering, with some studies showing that ditchwater has become so contaminated it could be used directly as a lice-control pesticide.

The report warned that loss of insects may be linked to major declines in the birds that feed on them, though it also notes that eating just a few insecticide-treated seeds would kill birds directly.

"Overall, a compelling body of evidence has accumulated that clearly demonstrates that the wide-scale use of these persistent, water-soluble chemicals is having widespread, chronic impacts upon global biodiversity and is likely to be having major negative effects on ecosystem services such as pollination that are vital to food security," the study concluded.

The report is being published as a special issue of the peer-reviewed journal Environmental Science and Pollution Research and was funded by a charitable foundation run by the

Sushma Swaraj arrives today

FROM PAGE 16

"This is Swaraj's first visit abroad as the external affairs minister. It reflects the importance India attaches to its bilateral relations with Bangladesh, a close friend and neighbour," said the spokesperson of the external affairs ministry in a statement.

Swaraj is scheduled to meet President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her Bangladeshi counterpart AH Mahmood Ali and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Diplomatic sources said Swaraj would carry a letter from Prime Minister Narendra Modi inviting Sheikh Hasina to visit India between October and January.

Dhaka will press for early inking of the interim agreement on sharing of Teesta waters and ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA). New Delhi, however, is expected to come up with fresh proposals for road and railway transit through Bangladesh, according to sources.

The previous Congress government failed to ratify the LBA and sign the Teesta water sharing deal with Bangladesh due to opposition from the BJP, Trinamool Congress and

Asom Gana Parishad.

In a significant move ahead of Swaraj's visit, Dhaka has announced that it will allow India to ferry food grains to the landlocked north-eastern Indian states using Bangladesh's territory and infrastructure free of charges or fees.

As Modi has not picked Bangladesh for his first official visit abroad, he is sending Swaraj to convey a special message to Dhaka that the BJP government would work closely with the Awami League government, said diplomatic sources.

According to her schedule, Swaraj will arrive in Dhaka at 10:30pm today on a special plane.

She will also give a lecture on Bangladesh-India relations at an event of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies and have engagements with think-tanks, chambers of commerce and industries and cultural organisations.

She is expected to meet Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad prior to departure at 11:30am on Friday.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh foreign ministry has decided not to brief the

press or issue any release during or after the visit of the Indian minister.

The Indian side has asked Bangladesh to convey the message to media that no one would be allowed to ask Swaraj any questions during her stay in Dhaka, a senior foreign ministry official told The Daily Star seeking anonymity.

However, the Indian High Commission yesterday announced that it would hold a media briefing at the Surma Hall of Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel at 4:30pm tomorrow.

MEETING WITH KHALEDA

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will meet Sushma Swaraj on Friday morning.

Khaleda Zia's press secretary Maruf Kamal Khan confirmed this at a press conference last night.

The venue and the exact time will be announced later, he said.

"The [BNP] chairperson welcomes the visit of the external affairs minister of India's new government, saying that this tour would further expedite the new window of people-to-people relations between the two countries," Maruf added.

Campaign for by-polls ends

FROM PAGE 16

independent candidate SM Akram completed their campaigns yesterday in the constituency that has 3.42 lakh voters.

More than 4,500 members of Border Guard Bangladesh, Rapid Action Battalion, Armed Police Battalion, police, Ansar and Coast Guard have been deployed in the constituency to maintain law and order.

"We have deployed a sufficient number of law enforcers there. We will remain vigilant and take stern action against those who will violate electoral laws," Election Commissioner Abu Hafiz told reporters at his office in the capital yesterday.

A public perception is prevailing in Narayanganj that Selim and his men will forcibly occupy polling stations

and stuff ballot boxes.

Law enforcers, election officials and administration may work in favour of Selim, many voters said.

Expressing similar concern, independent candidate SM Akram earlier demanded that army be deployed for the sake of free and fair election.

EC rejected it, saying no such situation had been created, which required army deployment.

Meanwhile, an intelligence agency yesterday sent a list of around 40 government and non-government officers to EC with a suggestion that they should not be given election duty, as they were loyal to anti-government force.

EC then forwarded the letter to the returning officer, instructing him to take necessary steps based on the intelligence report, said EC officials.

Police consider 90 polling stations vulnerable out of 141 in Narayanganj-5.

SM Akram yesterday alleged that Selim and his supporters were threatening to occupy polling centres.

On the other hand, Selim claimed that Akram had made the allegations sensing his defeat.

Meanwhile, noted jurist Dr Kamal Hossain at a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka urged all concerned to play the role of vigilant guard to ensure a free and fair election. At the same function, Nagorik Oikyo Convenor Mahmudur Rahman Manna demanded that law enforcers increase their patrols in the vulnerable areas.

All sorts of preparations have been completed for the election, said returning officer Mihir Sarwar Morshed.

Uruguay send Italy home

FROM PAGE 1

Costa Rica in the last 16 of the tournament.

Italy coach Cesare Prandelli deployed a 3-5-2 designed to tighten the Azzurri defence and give them attacking options on the wings with Matteo Darmian and Mattia De Sciglio.

But despite a solid display in a scoreless first-half, the Azzurri's hunt for goals -- led by Ciro Immobile and Mario Balotelli -- reaped no reward.

Uruguay, starting with the same 4-4-2 line-up that defeated England 2-1, came closest early on when a free kick whipped in deep by Luiz Suarez forced Buffon into a desperate punch-out.

Italy suffered a blow when Balotelli was cautioned for a needless high tackle on Inter's Alvaro Pereira, who felt the AC Milan striker's boot come over the back of his head.

Balotelli's yellow card means he will miss Italy's next match, although that

will now be after the World Cup.

Paris Saint Germain midfielder Marco Verratti was Italy's star performer thus far.

On the half hour he dispossessed Cavani to launch Balotelli but the striker failed to release as Immobile ran through into an offside position.

Minutes later Andrea Pirlo's smart short pass found De Sciglio on the left but the wingback's pinpoint delivery to unmarked Immobile was volleyed off target.

Italy were composed, but minutes before half-time Buffon had to make two critical saves to keep the scoresheet clean, first stopping Suarez's snap-shot down low with his left arm and then denying Nicolas Lodeiro from the follow-up.

Prandelli replaced Balotelli with midfielder Parolo at half-time, a tactical switch that suggested the Azzurri would happily hold on for the

scoreless draw.

On 58 minutes Cristian Rodriguez sent a great chance wide of the target after a smart one-two with Suarez on the left flank.

Moments later, Marchisio was given his marching orders for his challenge on Egidio Arevalo.

The decision had the expected impact, and after Suarez burst through confidently on 65 minutes Buffon had to get down low to block with his arm.

Prandelli replaced Immobile with Cassano, but despite Italy again finding opportunities on the counter Uruguay's insistence deep in Italian territory finally paid off.

The hosts gave away a corner, which Godin met with conviction to leave Buffon with no chance.

Italy rallied in desperation in the dying minutes, when Buffon ran up the field to leave his net empty, but to no avail.



PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

People crossing a bamboo bridge made after flood triggered by unrelenting heavy downpour and inflow of hill water from India washed away the culvert at Bashura village of Feni's Phulgazi upazila.

This May was hottest on Earth

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Last month was the hottest May globally since records began in 1880, new figures show.

The record heat, combined with increasingly certain predictions of an El Niño, means experts are now speculating whether 2014 could become the hottest year on record.

Data published by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Monday showed the average land and ocean surface temperature last month was 0.74C above the 20th century average of 14.8C, making it the highest on record.

Previously, the warmest May was 2010, followed by 2012, 1998 and 2013.

May 2014 was 0.74C above the 20th century average of 14.8C, making it the highest on record.

Biman staff

FROM PAGE 1

"As we protested the demand, a Biman staff asked us to give some money and settle the matter," she said, adding that when she doggedly continued protesting "the illegal demand", a Biman official threatened to drive her out of the office by security guards.

At one stage, Biman's Commercial Assistant Hafizur Rahman struck her on the head with an iron chair around 2:45pm.

Rubi said she is a cancer patient and had an appointment with doctors at Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore today. She was supposed to fly to Singapore from Kuala Lumpur. She filed a case with Motiheel Police Station, accusing Biman staff Hafizur, Abdul Hannan and five to six others of beating her up.

Police arrested Hafizur following the complaint.

Biman's Security Supervisor Saiful Islam, who conducted an initial investigation into the incident, however, said Rubi along with two others had requested the airlines staff to confirm a ticket so that she could fly to Malaysia yesterday.

"As there was no low-fare seat available for today's [yesterday's] flight, a Biman staff told her that she could only fly if she paid an additional amount to get a seat available on higher fare segment," he said.

The Biman staff even wanted to provide her with a money receipt for the additional amount, but the passenger began scolding the staff and termed all Biman staff corrupt.

Biman's acting managing director AM Mosaddique Ahmed said Hafizur had committed an atrocious act.

"We've already suspended him and will launch an investigation and take tough action against him if he is found guilty," he said.

He, however, said the authority in an initial investigation had not found anyone guilty of demanding bribes.

The airline's prime duty is to ensure customer service, but the incident suggests that it is doing the opposite, said Aviation analyst Kazi Wahidul Alam.

An additional payment had been asked for, maybe because seats were available only of the higher fare segment, but Biman staff should have briefed the passenger on the matter.

Wahidul went on to say that the passenger might have become furious as there was a wide perception that whenever anyone went to purchase tickets they were told that there was no seat, but during their travels they found many seats vacant.

Tk 30 lakh snatched

FROM PAGE 16

Two more people, including Ansar member Billal Hossain, who were also in the car, suffered injuries from broken glasses when the muggers shot at the vehicle.

Shamsur, one of the injured and an official of the real estate company, said Zakaria was supposed to buy a flat from them with the money and they were going to the company's head office.

When the car reached near the BRTC bus depot, close to the Kalyanpur footbridge, around 1:00pm, three to four masked men started firing at the vehicle, witnesses said.

The muggers shot at the car several times and snatched a bag from the passengers, said Apurba Das, a cobbler

who witnessed the incident from a footpath.

"At that time, the vehicles were moving slowly along the street due to the traffic jam," he added.

The muggers then ran towards their motorbikes, parked in front of a counter near the bus depot, and escaped the scene driving on the wrong side of the road, said another witness Mizanur Islam.

The victims were whisked off to nearby Ibn Sina Hospital and Diagnostic Centre. Later, they were shifted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

Of the injured, Zakaria sustained bullet wounds in the right leg while Shamsur in the left leg and Akhter in both hands, hospital sources said.

Politics, crime go hand

FROM PAGE 16

With the land prices spiralling up as money was flowing in abundantly, criminals found land grabbing and sand lifting an easy way to make money overnight, said a cross section of city dwellers.

And that's when these criminals needed political backings to make their illegal activities hassle-free. And political leaders started patronising these people.

Narayanganj's politics was by and large fair after the Liberation War when Shamim Osman's father Shamsujjoha and Selina Hayat Ivy's father Ali Ahmed Chunka led the AL in the town. They maintained tolerance and a healthy competition and made sure that their differences would not affect the people.

Chunka, who was the municipal chairman, died in 1984, leaving Ivy to fill his shoes.

But when Shamsujjoha, who was an AL lawmaker, died in 1986, things started getting murky in Narayanganj. His sons Nasim Osman, Shamim Osman and Selim Osman did not follow the peaceful path practiced by their father.

Instead, Shamim and Nasim locked horns with Ivy, who practices a pro-people politics, according to many locals.

This rivalry took its worst turn after Shamim Osman's humiliating defeat against Ivy in the maiden Narayanganj city corporation election in 2011. This result was largely seen as a mass rejection of the Osman family's wrongdoings.

After more than two years, people of Narayanganj-5 constituency will cast ballots in the by-polls tomorrow not only to elect their MP, but also to show their support for or rejection of the Osman family, which allegedly controls the underworld of the city. Recently, Shamim Osman made headlines for allegedly helping the key accused of the sensational 7-murder case in Narayanganj, revealing the reality of the city's politics.

Shamim's brother Selim Osman is contesting the by-polls with JP ticket and the ruling AL's blessings. The parliamentary seat fell vacant after Nasim Osman, who had become the MP uncontested through the January 5 polls, died in April. Shamim became a lawmaker the same way.

Selim Osman's main opponent SM Akram is widely considered as a man with clean image. Akram was the convener of the district unit AL but quit the party after Ivy's victory in 2011.

In the run up to the by-polls, the issue of criminalisation of politics in Narayanganj has been one of the crucial issues.

The current state of politics in Narayanganj has its root in the period of Ershad's autocratic regime when Nasim Osman first introduced an armed cadre force after becoming a lawmaker from Jatiya Party in 1986 elections, locals told The Daily Star.

A rival group led by MA Sattar then emerged to counter Nasim's group at

that time. After becoming the jute minister in 1985, Sattar started jute business in Narayanganj. Since Sattar hailed from Rangpur, he needed cadres there too to compete with Nasim.

This is when politics of murder began in the city.

Though the reigns of both Nasim and Sattar came to an end with the fall of Ershad in 1990, new faces emerged to inflict the city with terror.

After a democratic government came to power in 1991, the business of jhoot (garments wastage) emerged and so did new groups to take control of the business, resulting in the rise of murders in the city.

At the beginning of the BNP regime in 1991, Shamim Osman of the AL and Muminullah David, the then joint convener of Jubo Dal's Narayanganj district unit, started to make their fortune using their political identity.

They engaged in a deadly practice of wiping out their opponents and those who would speak against their activities, said locals.

Illegal drugs trading, sand lifting and river encroachment and land grabbing spread in the city under the aegis of Shamim and David.

"A section of both Awami League and BNP built cadre forces to make fortune illegally. They used the forces to keep their illegal business running, said Anisul Islam Sunny, a BNP leader of Narayanganj who started his political career during the regime of late president Ziaur Rahman.

"And now the criminals are patronising those politicians by providing them with different undue benefits," he added.

When the AL came to power in 1996, David went into hiding and Shamim Osman allegedly became the sole controller of everything, be it politics or business or the crime world, locals alleged.

Then in 2001, BNP formed the government and it was Shamim's turn to disappear from the scene. He left the country with his family and David returned to the scene and regained the control Narayanganj's crime world with the help of the then local BNP lawmaker Giasuddin Ahmed. Gias allegedly controlled different illegal businesses, including sand extraction and river grabbing.

After David's death in a 'shootout' with Rapid Action Battalion on November 24, 2004, Gias gained absolute control over everything.

According to locals, Gias was the prime accused in Sabbir Alam Khandaker murder case in 2001. Sabbir was a JP leader and brother of Taimur Alam Khandaker, president of BNP's Narayanganj district.

However, his reign was over when he landed in jail during the political changeover of 2007.

Once the rule of the army-backed caretaker government ended with the AL forming the government in 2009, the scenario again changed with Shamim Osman re-emerging in the forefront of the crime world of Narayanganj.