

## WORLD BANK ON WATER POLLUTION

## Economic growth of some countries can be reduced by a third

AFP, Washington

Heavily polluted water is reducing economic growth by up to a third in some countries, a World Bank report said, calling for action to address human and environmental harm.

The report relied on what the Bank said was the biggest-ever database assembled on global water quality using monitoring stations, satellite data and machine learning models.

"Clean water is a key factor for economic growth. Deteriorating water quality is stalling economic growth, worsening health conditions, reducing food production, and exacerbating poverty in many countries," said World Bank Group President David Malpass on Tuesday.

The report found that when Biological Oxygen Demand -- an index of the degree of organic pollution and a proxy for overall water pollution -- crosses a threshold of 8 milligrams per liter, GDP growth in downstream regions drops by 0.83 percentage points, about a third for the mean growth rate of 2.33 percent used in the study.

This is because of impacts on health, agriculture, and ecosystems and a "stark indication that there often trade-offs between benefits of economic production and environmental quality, and that the externalities... can be circular," the report said.

A key contributor to poor water quality is nitrogen, essential for agricultural production but which leaches into rivers and oceans where it creates hypoxia and dead zones, and in the air where it forms nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas.

The report said that early exposure of children to nitrates affects their growth and brain development, reducing their health and earning potential.

For every additional kilogram of nitrogen fertilizer per hectare, yields may rise up to five percent, but childhood stunting increases as much as 19 percent and future adult earnings fall by up to two percent compared to those not affected.

And increased salinity as a result of manmade pressures such as irrigation, stormwater runoff, leaching of fertilizer, and urban wastewater discharge is pushing down agricultural yields.

The report estimated enough food is lost to saline water each year to feed 170 million people, about the population of Bangladesh.

The authors divided their recommendations into three main areas: information campaigns to raise awareness, prevention efforts to stem some of the worst problems and investments to treat pollution once it has occurred, with more modern technologies like reverse-osmosis offering new pathways.

## Johnson, Merkel to face off in first Brexit talks

AFP, Berlin

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was scheduled to visit Berlin yesterday to kick off a marathon of tense talks with key European and international leaders as the threat of a chaotic no-deal Brexit looms.

On his first foreign visit since taking office, he will seek to convince German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and on Thursday French President Emmanuel Macron, to renegotiate elements of the UK's impending divorce from the European Union -- something the EU leaders have already ruled out.

Then, at the weekend, all three will meet US President Donald Trump, a vocal supporter of Brexit and its champion Johnson, and the leaders of Canada, Italy and Japan at a G7 summit in the French seaside resort of Biarritz.

Johnson, in a do-or-die gamble, has insisted Britain will leave the EU on October 31, no matter whether it has ironed out remaining differences with the bloc or not, at the risk of economic turmoil.

The apparent hope is that the other 27 EU members will blink and make concessions to avoid a no-deal Brexit that would hurt people and companies on both sides of the Channel.

In Berlin, Johnson will be received with military honours at 1600 GMT

before his talks with Merkel.

Although chances for a breakthrough appeared slim, a Merkel spokesman said that, after the two had spoken by phone, "sitting at a table together to discuss Brexit and other European issues... is of course useful".

Johnson's tough stance has put him on a collision course with Merkel, Macron and other EU leaders who have insisted the withdrawal deal is final and stressed the need for unity among the other 27 nations.

On Tuesday, EU Council President Donald Tusk again made clear the bloc would not cave in to Johnson's demand to scrap the so-called Irish border backstop plan, which would keep Britain in the European customs union if no trade deal is signed.

The mechanism aims to avoid a "hard border" between EU-member Ireland and British-ruled Northern Ireland, which could raise the threat of renewed sectarian tensions.

However, Johnson has slammed the backstop as "undemocratic" and charged it would prevent Britain from pursuing a trade policy independent of EU rules.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar this week reiterated the EU 27 position that the withdrawal agreement struck under Johnson's predecessor Theresa May cannot be reopened.

## Med students

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unwilling to remain under the net." They also provide mental support to patients, and help the lab technicians with their tasks, he added.

Some patients do not have anyone to take their blood samples to the lab or receive their test reports from labs, he said.

"I feel content when I help with the crisis. Normally, the authorities do not allow medical students [to do these] before their internship."

Before Eid holidays, the hospital authorities dedicated two wards with 200 beds each for dengue patients. The management also dedicated more healthcare personnel at the ward to handle the rush of patients.

According to the Director General of Health Services (DGHS), 1,626 dengue patients were admitted to different hospitals across the country in the 24 hours until 8:00am yesterday.

At least 57,995 people have taken treatment at hospitals with dengue this year.

Prof Dr Uttam Kumar Barua, director of Suhrawady Medical College Hospital, said he requested college authorities to let 5th year students to help the doctors.

Now around 50 students have been working there, he said.

Around fifty other 5th year students of the Mugda Medical College and Hospital also gave similar voluntary services.

"They gave the services before Eid. But the services are not needed any longer because fewer dengue patients are coming to the hospital now," said the hospital Director Amin Ahmed Khan.

According to the DGHS, a total of 2,388 dengue patients have been admitted to the Suhrawady hospital. Of them, 344 are now undergoing treatment.

**WOMAN DIES**  
Khadija Aktar Nila, 27, a resident of Gendaria's Dayaganj, died of dengue on Tuesday night at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).



A dead Bengal tigress at Sharankhola range office of the forest department in the Sundarbans. Officials of the department found the carcass yesterday morning.

PHOTO: PARTHA CHAKRABORTTY

## Italy's kingmaker Mattarella holds talks after PM Conte resigns

AFP, Rome

Italian President Sergio Mattarella has begun talks with key players in a bid to end Italy's political limbo the day after Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte resigned.

The usually mild-mannered Conte handed in his resignation after lashing out at far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini for pursuing his own interests by pulling the plug on the ruling coalition with the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S).

The move left the eurozone's third

largest economy in a political vacuum until Mattarella decides whether to form a new coalition or call an election after talks with parties in the coming days.

Meanwhile Mattarella charged Conte with heading a caretaker administration, pending consultations on a new government which are set to begin at 1400 GMT.

Italy's constitution says that Mattarella should first consult former presidents, meaning Senator Giorgio Napolitano, 94, who was in the job from 2006-2015.

Those talks will be by telephone

as Napolitano is not in Rome, and will be followed by talks with house speakers and the leaders of political groups.

"It is irresponsible to initiate a government crisis," Conte told the Senate on Tuesday after Salvini tried to bring down the government in the hope of snap elections that could make him premier.

Salvini plunged Italy into crisis with the shock announcement on August 8 that his anti-migrant League party was pulling out of the 14-month coalition government with the M5S.

J&amp;K, ARTICLE 370

## It's India's internal matter

Says Bangladesh after Jaishankar's visit to Dhaka

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh yesterday termed the Indian government's revoking of article 370 "an internal issue of India".

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said this in a press release published on its official website 15 days into the scrapping of the article that provided special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Bangladesh maintains that the abrogation of article 370 by the Indian government is an internal issue of India," says the press release.

The statement comes a day after Indian External Affairs Minister of India S Jaishankar held meetings with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen.

"Bangladesh has always advocated, as a matter of principle, that maintaining regional peace and stability, as well as development should be a priority for all countries," the release added.

The BJP-led Indian government stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its autonomy and statehood, creating two federal territories, on August 5.

The order revokes article 370 of India's constitution, which forbids Indians outside the state from permanently settling, buying land, holding local government jobs, and securing educational scholarships.

## Indo-Bangla relations on positive trajectory

Says Jaishankar; leaves for Kathmandu

UNB, Dhaka

Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar yesterday said Bangladesh-India relationship was on a "positive trajectory".

"Good to see our ties on such a positive trajectory," he said before leaving Dhaka for Kathmandu in the morning.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam and Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Riva Ganguly Das saw him off at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 10:30am, said an official.

Jaishankar said he had "productive discussions" with his Bangladesh counterpart AK Abdul Momen on Tuesday.

The Indian minister met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban on the same day.

Bangladesh and India are working to find "mutually acceptable formulas" to share water of 54 common rivers keeping India's commitment to resolving Teesta issue unchanged.

Jaishankar said India's partnership with Bangladesh remains an example of what neighbours can do if they work together as two partners.

He said the Indian government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is determined to ensure that this partnership is truly a role model in South Asia and for the world.

The minister said they would like to offer all possible support to realise Bangladesh's development agenda which was in India's interest as well.

India is a leading development partner of Bangladesh as it has extended concessional lines of credit to the tune of around \$8 billion.

## Doomed to failure again?

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their ethnic identity in Myanmar where they have been discriminated against for decades.

As part of the latest repatriation plan, 235 Rohingya families were privately consulted by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in association with the officials of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) over the last two days, but it could not be confirmed if any of them had agreed to return.

"The consultation with the families has been recorded. These files will be sent to the higher authorities of the government. At the same time, the consultation will continue," RRRC Mohammad Abul Kalam told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

Asked if the repatriation would start today, he did answer directly, but said, "We are fully prepared. It can start anytime."

Before any repatriation takes place, refugees are taken to transit camps and kept there for two to three days, but no Rohingya was taken to any of the two transit camps -- one at Keruntoli in Teknaf and the other at Ghundhum border area in Naikhangchhari of Bandarban -- suggesting that the repatriation process would not be starting today.

The process was announced by Myanmar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Myint Thu on August 15 and scheduled to begin on August 22.

Myanmar had cleared the names of 3,450 Rohingyas from a list of 22,000 plus Rohingyas sent by Bangladesh.

In early August, Bangladesh provided the approved list to the UNHCR in Dhaka and sought its assistance in assessing their voluntariness for returning to Myanmar.

Accordingly, UNHCR and RRRC officials conducted an "intention survey" on those listed, although it could not be ascertained how many took part in it.

Diplomatic sources said China, which wants a bilateral solution to the Rohingya crisis, is mediating the repatriation process.

**'A SECRET LIST'**

Nearly 700 Rohingyas of camps 24, 26 and 27 in Shalban of Teknaf have signed a statement expressing concerns at the sudden repatriation plan made without their consultation.

"We are very concerned about how this secret list of names was created and why we are included in it. We

never volunteered [for] our names to go on the list," said a statement prepared by the community leaders of the camps.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the statement.

It said Rohingya leaders met a delegation from Myanmar and ASEAN countries in July and demanded that Rohingya representatives be engaged in any repatriation dialogue. The Myanmar delegation agreed to meet again in two months to continue the talks.

"While we were preparing for it [the talks], suddenly Myanmar and the UNHCR started their own repatriation plan without consulting us," said the statement.

"We want to make it very clear to the UNHCR, ASEAN and the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh that there will be no repatriation without talking to us first," it said.

Bodirul Islam, a Rohingya leader from camp 26, said the situation in the Rakhine State right now was not safe for their return.

"Clashes between the AA [Arakan Army] and Myanmar army is still going on. So, it is not safe for us to go there now," said Baron Roshid of camp 26.

Another leader, Nosima, from camp 26, said Rohingya women had been raped and killed.

"We need security. Without security we will never go back," she said.

"We need a real guarantee of citizenship, security and promise of returning to our original homelands. We must talk to the Myanmar government about these before repatriation," said Md Islam.

The Rohingyas raised similar concerns and demands even when the first round of repatriation was scheduled to begin on November 15 last year, a year after Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a bilateral deal in this regard.

To help Myanmar create conditions favourable for the Rohingyas to return, the UNDP and UNHCR signed a tripartite deal with Myanmar in June 2018, nearly a year after 740,000 Rohingyas fled military atrocities in Rakhine, which was termed as having "genocidal intent" by UN independent investigators.

The UN still maintains that the situation there is not right for repatriation.

**CALLS TO SUSPEND REPATRIATION**  
Non-government organisations and human rights bodies asked

pay respect to the memories of the massacre victims.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, advisory council member Amir Hossain Amu, presidium members

Corporation Sayeed Khokon, among others, spoke on the occasion.

The grisly grenade attack was carried out at an AL rally on Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital on August 21, 2004.

Twenty-four people, including then president of Mohila Awami League and late president Zillur Rahman's wife Ivy Rahman, were killed and over 500 injured in the attack.

Hasina, the then opposition leader, narrowly escaped the blast. The AL men saved her life forming a human shield around her.

## BNP-Jamaat govt involved in August 21 carnage: PM

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Hasina said she was not supposed to survive the attack and even then the government did not think so. "I know many things. Those who had carried out the attack took shelter in a place from where a call was made to know whether I was killed."

"Perhaps Khaleda Zia [then prime minister] also had kept a condolence message ready so that she could issue it soon after my death," the PM added.

At the beginning of the programme, a one-minute silence was observed to



Medical students helping out doctors and nurses in treating dengue patients at a ward in Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Sahara Khatun and Mayor of Dhaka South City