

Pollution

FROM PAGE 16 informed the authorities about the environmental impact of coal-fired power plants in other countries. But the government hadn't changed the plans.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said, "It seems like we are talking to a wall, and the wall is the government. The government is sticking to its position and the people of the country are being deprived of their constitutional rights."

China, India and Japan have convinced the government to implement those environment-unfriendly projects. A syndicate among the officials and investors is working to protect their business interest, he added.

"We don't want the development which will turn the country into hell."

Bapa Secretary General Sharif Jamil said that the government was planning to construct 17 coal-fired power plants within the next 10 years to generate 17,944MW.

Some of the plants will be within 25 km of Cox's Bazar and Chattogram city. And all the 17 power plants will be within 50 km of Cox's Bazar, he added.

"If all the power plants are built as per the plan, they will be polluting the region for 40 years and pose a great threat to people and wildlife. It will leave a permanent scar on the biodiversity."

The 17 power plants will generate 72 million tonnes of CO2 every year, which is more than the total footprint of Albania, Armenia, Bhutan, Cambodia, Congo, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Senegal and Zambia.

People living in Cox's Bazar have some specific livelihood options. As many as 247,000 people and their families are dependent on a few economic activities, including catering, fishing, fish processing, and salt, betel leaf and shrimp farming. Those power plants would put their livelihood in jeopardy, he added.

But there has been no effort by the authorities to measure the losses due to pollution, he said.

The fact-finding team had worked on the issue for over a year and had visited the areas multiple times. They interviewed locals, studied satellite images, and analysed government and media reports, the speakers said.

They urged the government to conduct a strategic environmental impact assessment before constructing the power plants.

It's far worse

FROM PAGE 16 The plot would have worked, say Democrats, if not for a whistleblower whose complaint about the July call reached Congress on September 9, ensuring the aid was handed over two days later.

"What we've seen here is far more serious than a third-rate burglary of the Democratic headquarters," said House Intelligence Committee chairman Adam Schiff, referring to the infamous 1972 Watergate break-in that Nixon ordered, eventually leading to his resignation.

"What we're talking about here is the withholding of recognition in that White House meeting (and) the withholding of military aid to an ally at war. This is beyond anything Nixon did."

STRONG EVIDENCE Schiff spoke at the close of marathon testimony by nine witnesses over three days -- on top of two days of hearings last week -- that produced an avalanche of corroboration for the allegations against Trump.

Democrats are expected to prepare formal articles accusing Trump of abusing his presidential powers, bribery and obstruction of justice.

The investigation threatens to make him the third US president to be impeached, although the Republican-controlled Senate would need to convict him to remove him from office.

In bombshell testimony Wednesday, Washington's envoy to the European Union testified that Trump tied the White House meeting to the investigation of Democratic 2020 frontrunner Joe Biden.

Ambassador Gordon Sondland told the panel Trump ordered him and other diplomats to answer to the president's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, a private citizen with no public office, on Ukraine policy.

The former Soviet state, Democrats have noted, is not in the European Union.

Giuliani's demands to Ukraine for investigations, Sondland said, "were a quid pro quo for arranging a White House visit for President Zelensky."

UKRAINE 'FICTIONS' On Thursday a former top White House Russia expert publicly rejected a Kremlin conspiracy theory pushed by Trump and his Republican allies that Ukraine helped the Democrats in the 2016 election.

The supposed plot, which Trump also asked Zelensky to investigate, was designed to stir havoc in US politics, said Fiona Hill, a senior official on Trump's National Security Council until July.

"This is a fictional narrative that has been perpetrated and propagated by the Russian security services themselves," she told lawmakers.

"These fictions are harmful even if they are deployed for purely domestic political purposes."

The end of King Bibi?

Indicted Netanyahu, Israel's longest serving PM, fights for future

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu's indictment on corruption charges prompted speculation yesterday that the end of his decade-long tenure as 'King Bibi' is nigh.

The Jewish state woke up to an indicted sitting prime minister for the first time, after the country's attorney general announced late Thursday he had charged the 70-year-old with bribery, fraud, and breach of trust.

After months of speculation Avichai Mandelblit's decision was the worst possible outcome for Netanyahu, hitting him with the most serious charges.

Israel's longest-serving premier swiftly hit back, vowing to fight on and accusing the police and legal system of bias against the right-wing in an often angry speech.

Any trial is likely months away, and -- if Netanyahu is found guilty -- a final conviction exhausting appeals could take years.

But his political authority is now under more intense scrutiny than ever.

Israel has been without a functioning government for nearly a year, with Netanyahu staying on in an interim capacity after two inconclusive elections in April and September.

Parliament has less than three weeks to find a candidate that can gain the support of more than half of the 120 lawmakers, or a deeply unpopular third election will be

called. For columnist Amit Segal, writing in the Yediot Ahronot daily, "irrespective of the moral and legal questions, the prime minister's political situation is painfully clear: his chances of reaching 61 seats are almost non-existent."

Netanyahu's centrist rival Benny Gantz may now seek to encourage defections either from within the PM's Likud party or from allied right-wing parties.

Gantz himself called on Netanyahu to step down and focus on the corruption allegations late Thursday -- a scenario that would see the premier out of power for the first time in ten years.

But he appeared primed to continue fighting the charges while clinging onto office.

"What is going on here is an attempt to stage a coup against the prime minister," Netanyahu declared in a televised response to the charges.

Under Israeli law, while ministers cannot remain in place after being indicted, a prime minister is not legally required to resign unless convicted with appeals processes exhausted.

In addition to the premiership, Netanyahu holds portfolios including agriculture and health, positions he will likely have to vacate in the coming days.

The charges against him range from receiving gifts worth thousands of dollars to a deal to change regulation in favour of a media group in exchange for positive coverage.



Mamata for importing

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Emerging from the over an hour-long meeting, Hasina told journalists that she wanted friendly and cordial relations between the two countries to flourish and continue, reports our correspondent from New Delhi.

"We would always remain grateful for the role played by India during our Liberation War. We will never forget it."

"India gave shelter to more than one crore refugees from Bangladesh," the premier said.

Chief Minister Mamata said they had a very cordial meeting in which they discussed a lot of bilateral issues.

"Hope the relationship between the two countries will flourish further in the days to come," she said without specifying any issue discussed.

This was the first meeting between Hasina and Mamata in more than a year since they had met in Kolkata in April last year when the former had paid an official visit to India and went to Shantiniketon.

Mamata's role was criticised by analysts for her refusal to sign the Teesta water-sharing agreement between India and Bangladesh

during former Indian PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Bangladesh in 2011.

The Indian government has since then repeatedly assured Bangladesh that New Delhi was committed to the Teesta deal, but was trying to bring the West Bengal chief minister on board as water was a state subject.

TWO PROPOSALS PLACED

At the meeting yesterday, Mamata placed two proposals. She said Bangladeshi entrepreneurs could set up joint venture bicycle industries in West Bengal and her government would allocate land for them.

Secondly, Bangladeshi investors could establish such industries in the country's bordering areas. This would reduce transportation cost to a great extent, she said.

Foreign Minister Momen said the West Bengal chief minister put emphasis on cooperation between Bangladesh and West Bengal in the fields of education, healthcare and industries.

Foreign Minister Momen, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque, and State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam, among others, were present.

Bangla Bond has huge demand

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subscription amount and any subsequent coupon and principal payments) will be settled in dollars, in an amount determined based on the applicable dollar-taka exchange rate, with the investors taking on the exchange rate risk.

The proceeds of the first tranche were converted to taka and lent out to Pran-RFL Group, which was about Tk 80 crore, at 11-11.5 percent interest -- much lower than what the local financial institutions are offering.

On coupon payment dates and upon maturity after three years, IFC will take the taka earnings from its investments in Bangladesh and convert the amounts back into dollars to pay the offshore investors in the taka bonds.

Thus, IFC will be taking on the credit risk of projects or clients in Bangladesh and investors, who are institutional investors and asset management companies and regular subscribers of IFC's local-currency denominated bonds, the exchange rate risk.

In other words, it is a win-win situation of Bangladeshi companies, the government and the country as a brand.

"So I think that's what the real gamechanger here is," said Werner, who was previously IFC's manager for Trade and Competitiveness Advisory Services for the East Asia Pacific region.

The three-year bond carries a coupon rate of 6.3 percent, which is in line with what the emerging market and frontier countries' bonds fetch -- meaning investors are not being compensated an extraordinary amount for bearing the risk of carrying a taka-denominated bond that had no benchmark pricing or yield curve before this.

The investors who signed up for Bangla Bond are those who are interested in the South Asian nation but are not quite ready yet to set up something onshore and invest domestically in the stock market -- but they still want to have Bangladesh as part of their risk portfolio, according to Werner.

"This gave international investors a type of investment product that they know and that they already invest in but Bangladesh also got into the international game with this bond."

The benchmark pricing and the yield curve were set by the IFC's Treasury unit based in Washington DC after sounding out the market and hearing the sentiment of investors. But the government treasury bond served as a guide.

"Even though the Bangladesh government does not have an offshore sovereign bond, investors still would look at government treasuries as kind of a benchmark," said Werner, who holds a joint MBA and MA degree from George Washington University.

The germ for the Bangla Bond began as far back as 2015, after the successful launch of Indian rupee-denominated Masala Bond in 2014.

The government and the Bangladesh Bank endorsed the issue of Bangla Bond. Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal and his predecessor AMA Muhiht are strong proponents of the Bangla Bond.

"I think it's a way for Bangladesh to expand its reputation and footprint outside, which has been a big part of what the government wants to do," she said, adding that the name Bangla Bond was suggested by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Kamal.

Work on the Bangla Bond and how it would be structured took a few years.

"And we also had to find the right time in the market and the right projects to start with. So, all of those pieces you took a couple years to come together. But I think it's a good time for Bangladesh now."

Bangladesh's macro fundamentals have always been strong, but in the last month came the news of the country's eight-place leap forward in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business 2020 index, adequate to put it in the list of top 20 reformers for the year.

"So all of that made a very good story externally and it just worked out for this timing. It wasn't necessarily a few years ago that we set this date."

The bond is now trading on the LSE. "It is kind of more visible. You want these market-based instruments that give you an indication of what the market is saying about Bangladesh. And it's very positive indications already from the international market."

IFC plans to issue multiple tranches amounting to \$300 million over the next couple of years, with the next round taking place early next year. But that depends on a number of factors, mainly the takers for the taka proceeds of the bond.

"When we start any of these we have to start them in a way that we are linking directly to a project. IFC does financial intermediation -- we are not serving as an investment bank or a financial investor in the market. It's our bond for sure but we need to have projects that we directly linked the funding to."

Pran-RFL had already struck a deal with IFC when the first tranche was floated.

"But Bangladesh actually has a very strong market demand. This shows that the more projects there are and the more conducive the domestic business environment is, investors will come in."

They will come in through the offshore route like the Bangla Bond, onshore or by direct investment.

"Investors will come if you set up the right projects and serve their interests," she said, adding that IFC is considering floating a Nepalese rupee-denominated bond.

Within Asia, IFC has issued local currency denominated bonds of India, the Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Fiji, Kazakhstan, China and Japan.

Werner hopes other entities would come forward and issue Bangla Bonds of their own using the structure formulated by IFC.

"In India we have done more than \$3 billion in Masala bonds just from the IFC side and others have issued billions more. So the idea is that this should not just stay as an IFC instrument."

This has paved the way for the government and individual corporates in Bangladesh to issue offshore bonds denominated in taka.

"This was meant to get the market started. That's what the idea is and that's the same idea that we have used in 52 other locations."

Going forward, IFC will be scaling up its involvement in Bangladesh, both in terms of lending and advisory services. At present, its Bangladesh portfolio is worth \$1.2 billion.

Affordable housing, agri-business, infrastructure and financial inclusion will get particular focus.

Werner, who previously worked in Tajikistan and the West Balkans, is encouraged by the way the government has started addressing the issue of improving the business climate in Bangladesh.

"The government has clearly started down that path and we will see definite improvements over the coming years," she said, while lauding the initiative of setting up special economic zones.

The other challenges for the government are coming up with the next solid export earner after garment and enhancing the overall state of manufacturing in terms of compliance, value-addition and sustainability.

"But it's all going in the right direction for Bangladesh."

Conference of academics

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"Future of Entrepreneurship Education and Experiential Learning: Determinants of Developing Successful Entrepreneurial Eco-System in Asian Economies".

"This is a significant event as the Asian universities will showcase their best practices at the programme so that other universities can learn from it and replicate it if they want," said Sabur, also chairman of DIU board of trustees.

"Decision makers and academicians will participate in the programme. This would be an incredible opportunity for the participants to interact and collaborate with other university presidents and leaders."

"We select the theme aiming for entrepreneurship development. For that, we will need to build a system among universities so that students can get the opportunity to become entrepreneurs. Nowadays, many investors are looking for innovative ideas to invest in these," he said.

Baybars Altuntas, chairperson of World Business Angels Investment Forum, Turkey, will be the keynote speaker at the opening ceremony.

Sub-themes of the conference are entrepreneurial education and experiential learning; Asian context;

AUPF 1ST DAY INTERVIEW

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entrepreneurial education and fourth industrial revolution in Asian countries; road map to enterprise and entrepreneurship education; future teaching learning method: from entrepreneurial education point of view; and alternative fund for the growth of emerging entrepreneur, said DIU.

The conference will also illustrate different ideas and concepts which will lead to identifying research problems for conducting empirical research into relevant areas.

Sabur said of the 200 participants, 75 from 59 universities of 17 Asian countries would join the programme.

About 60 percent of the participating universities are private universities.

Meanwhile, participants attended a welcome dinner on the DIU campus last night.

AKM Enamul Haque Shamim, deputy minister for water resources, Sabur Khan, and DIU VC Prof Yousuf Mahbubul Islam spoke on the occasion.

In the afternoon, participants paid homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman while visiting Bangabandhu Bhaban in Dhanmondi.

On Monday, the closing ceremony of AUPF will take place on the DIU permanent campus at Ashulia in Savar. University Grants Commission Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah will be the chief guest.

Originating from a friendly collaboration between institutions of higher education in China and Thailand, the AUPF was officially established in 2002 to include higher education institutions across Asia.

Since its inception, the AUPF has expanded throughout Asia and has congregated annually in different Asian countries. The last conference was held in Indonesia and the next one would be held in India.

Hospitals breach

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The main reason behind lack of proper disposal is that used plastic items can fetch money from the recycling businesses. While recycling without any harm to public health and environment is permissible, hospital records and evidence collected by The Daily Star point to the fact that even medical items made of plastic end up in the black market in connivance with the hospitals' authorities.

The correspondents visited eight private hospitals in Shahbagh and Dhanmondi and four public hospitals. They all are flouting the system. **EVIDENCE OF RULES VIOLATION** The Central Hospital Limited log book which keeps data of wastes handed over to Prism every day was blank.

There were zero kgs of infectious, sharp and recyclable wastes in October, September and in previous months of the year, if hospital records are to be believed. For a hospital that serves about 160 patients on a daily basis, producing zero waste is inexplicable.

The 2008 rules have a provision of weighing different types of wastes and maintaining data by both sides -- the waste disposal organisation and the healthcare unit. The record keeping is one of the tools for monitoring and ensuring accountability.

Khalilur Rahman, deputy administrative officer of the Central Hospital, said Prism was responsible for the missing data. "Those [from PRISM] involved in data keeping are not educated," he claimed.

He also claimed his organisation had proper in-house waste management but could not answer why the authority didn't complain if it was not getting the required services from Prism, especially as they were charged a monthly fee of Tk 16,500, as suggested by the records. This kind of book-keeping was also seen elsewhere.

Popular Medical College Hospital generated only infectious waste, as per its records. The columns of the data sheets for sharp and plastic recyclables were blank for October and in the months prior.

Hafizur Rahman, biomedical engineer of Popular hospital, said separated wastes were kept in polybags and weighed together, but that was not to be as per the 2008 rules.

Anwer Khan Modern Medical College and Hospital didn't share its data under the pretext that the designated official who looks after waste management had gone on leave. When requested for the data of the day during the visit, hospital Director Jasim Uddin Khan said it was not available.

Mazibur Rahman, hospital superintendent of Ibrahim Cardiac Hospital and Research Institute, said the hospital didn't keep records of waste disposal. Prism takes only sharp wastes and other wastes are disposed of with general waste, he added.

In response to queries over the hospitals' records or no records that bring into question the services they get, Mazharul Islam, programme coordinator of Prism, said the monthly payment bill was always attached to the data sheet and "if there were any mistakes from our part, the authority would have raised it while making the payment."

About three years ago, the Department of Environment (DoE) conducted raids at private hospitals and fined some of them when they were found guilty of flouting the waste rules. The actions were followed by sudden fixing of in-house waste management but with time things went back to as it had been, Mazharul said.

The scenario at public hospitals is more or less similar and the mandatory condition of waste management doesn't apply to them. For the services that they get from Prism, DG Health disburses the payment.

Records of Sir Salimullah Medical College Hospital show that the hospital that treats about 1,300 to 1,400 patients a day gives away on an average 2-3 kgs of used plastic items to Prism.

To understand if the data gives the real picture of plastic waste generated

in the hospital, The Daily Star talked to officials of the medical store. About 150-250 saline bags are supplied to patients every day from that store. Each used saline bag weighs 50gm and so the total weight of only saline bags is 7.5-12.5kg.

Ward master Sazzad Hossain said the items supplied by the store were dealt with separately after use. But Abdur Rahman, a staff looking after the operation of the store, said all used plastic items were given to Prism.

Prism official Mazharul said, "We cannot point the finger at anybody.... Our job is to collect waste from designated places at hospitals, diagnostic centres. As an NGO we cannot do more than that."

Aminul Hasan, director (hospital and clinics) of DGHS, who has the licensing authority, said he had no knowledge about the malpractices by healthcare facilities. "We have to see if this is happening and then will take measures."

PRISM OPERATING AT THE OPTIMUM LEVEL While healthcare facilities are not abiding by the rules, Prism is working beyond capacity.

Right now, it has 10 covered vans servicing about 1,200 facilities in Dhaka, Narayanganj and Savar every day.

Each van collects medical waste from 120 healthcare units.

Experts though believe Prism alone cannot do much. They say the present scenario offers no solution as Prism was the only organisation authorised to deal with medical waste management and there was only one treatment plant for the purpose.

Experts also said that more third-party contractors like Prism need to be engaged to deal with medical wastes, so that there is competition, and more efficiency and accountability.

According to Satyakam Chakraborty, line director of hospital services management, DGHS, it is not his organisation's responsibility to oversee medical waste management outside the facilities. "It is between city corporations and Prism."

"We only check in-house management. Actions are taken if any anomaly is found during random inspections," Satyakam said.

The city corporations and the Department of Environment also shift the responsibility to each other and the blame game continues, while people's lives are put at risk.

Kids receive

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The Bandung government said that 2,000 chicks and 1,500 chili seeds are being provided to 10 elementary schools and two junior high schools in the city, which is about 150 kilometres (93 miles) southeast of the capital Jakarta.

Mayor Oded M Danial held a symbolic hand-over ceremony earlier this week to launch the programme. He said he hopes the project will help get children to use electronic gadgets less frequently, but that local education authorities need time to evaluate it.

The average Indonesian internet user spends eight hours and 36 minutes per day online -- almost two hours higher than the global average -- according to the Global Digital Report 2019, created by social media management platform Hootsuite and digital marketing agency We Are Social.

Several parents in Bandung appeared supportive of the program dubbed "chickenization," according to an article posted on the local government's official website.

"It's good to increase the discipline of children. Caring for trees is better than playing with cellphones," local parent Elis Puri said. Elis' daughter was given chili seeds.

Several children who were given chicks said they had various plans for the birds. One fifth grade student said he hoped to breed chickens, while a seventh-grader said he hoped to care for his chick until it was big enough to cook.