

CLIMATE CHANGE

Rich nations must pay for damage

150 environmental groups say ahead of COP 25

AFP, Paris

Climate negotiations opening next week in Madrid must prioritise funding for nations already dealing with the cost of drought, floods and superstorms made worse by rising temperatures, more than 150 environmental groups said yesterday.

In an open letter to the president of the COP 25 talks, Chile's environment minister Carolina Schmidt, the organisations urged agreement on "the creation of a comprehensive financing facility, including debt relief, for developing countries experiencing such disasters."

They said money should come from wealthy nations -- historically most responsible for planet-warming carbon emissions -- in the form of tax on financial transactions, international air travel and fossil fuels.

The Madrid conference is set to be dominated by discussions on so-called "loss and damage" funding, with a sharp divide between developing nations and richer polluters over how finance should be structured.

Green groups this week said the increased pace and intensity of climate disasters, such as the twin cyclones that devastated parts of Mozambique this year, means that funding needs

boosting to keep track.

They said the amount needed for loss and damage would top \$300 billion annually by 2030.

"Without finance to help countries cope with climate-induced loss and damage, the most vulnerable parts of the world will sink deeper into debt and poverty every time they are hit by climate disasters they did not cause," the letter said.

Storms in Mozambique this year displaced millions, destroyed homes and crops, inflicting an estimated \$3 billion in damages -- roughly 20 percent of the country's GDP.

But without a global, unified process for climate damage funding, countries are not yet obliged to get their chequebooks out.

After Cyclone Idai, the International Monetary Fund provided Mozambique with an emergency loan of \$118 million -- woefully short of what was needed.

"Wealthy countries have been ignoring developing nations' demands for financial support to repair the loss and damage caused by climate disasters," said Harjeet Singh, global climate change lead at ActionAid.

"Meanwhile, the climate crisis has been causing death, despair and displacement in the Global South."



A young protester holds a placard during a demonstration of the Fridays for Future movement for climate protection in Tokyo, Japan, yesterday.

Twenty suspects face trial for deadly 2015 Paris attacks

AFP, Paris

French prosecutors called Friday for 20 suspects to go on trial over the massacre of 130 people by suicide bombers and gunmen in Paris four years ago.

In a 562-page indictment, the office of the national anti-terror prosecutor (PNAT) charged 14 people currently in prison or under judicial supervision, including Salah Abdeslam, the sole surviving suspected participant in the attacks.

Six others are currently targeted by arrest warrants, including Fabien

and Jean-Michel Clain, notorious propagandists for the Islamic State group, which claimed responsibility for the killings.

An IS online magazine claimed in March that the two brothers were killed in coalition airstrikes in Syria earlier this year.

The five judges overseeing investigations that wrapped up last month, and who have worked with colleagues in Austria, Germany, Greece and Bulgaria, will now decide when to hold the trial, expected in Paris during 2021.

Curious foreign trip

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Asked which institution they would visit, he said, "Dockyard and Engineering Works Limited will most likely hire an event management firm to conduct the study tour. There is a tentative programme, but I don't know much about it."

He added that the event management firm will prepare the itinerary and estimate the expenses. He declined to disclose the name of the event management firm.

The proposed expense is Tk 10 lakh per person, but that may change later, he said.

Asked how the people of this country would benefit from the training of Shamsul Karim, who is going to retire in December, Ruhul Amin said, "The water resources ministry would be in a better position to respond to the question."

He added that he had made the proposal for the tour by the officials and then the water development board endorsed it. The additional secretary was included by the ministry.

To a similar question asked over phone, Mir Mosharof Hossain, additional chief engineer who retires in May, said, "What will you do with this information?" and hung up when pressed further.

As to why the ministry approved the trip of soon-to-retire engineers, Mahmudul Islam, additional secretary to the water resources ministry, said, "Normally, we don't intervene in what the board recommends."

As to why the ministry endorsed the foreign tour of an engineer, who is retiring in a month, he said, "I don't know."

Asked why he, being an administration official, is going on the trip, he said, "It will help develop the knowledge base of the society."

According to official records, Mahmudul Islam went on at least two foreign tours in October: one in Hungary and another in Japan.

Abdul Matin, professor of water resources engineering at Buet, said, "I was not aware that senior engineers

and non-engineers like them go abroad to get knowledge on river bank protection, dredging, canal digging, and embankment restoration.

"We at Buet offer professional training and courses on water engineering," he said, "Our department has given professional training to water board and LGED engineers with World Bank and ADB support."

The foreign visit was proposed under Bakkhali River Flood Control, Drainage, Irrigation and Dredging project. The three-and-a-half-year project is scheduled to be completed in June next year and has made about 40 percent physical progress.

Officials familiar with the proceedings said the trip was going to cost almost half a crore taka.

According to a water resources ministry order issued on November 17, the officers would be deemed on duty while on the trip and they would be able to draw the regular pays and allowances.

It is unlikely that the country would benefit from such an expensive trip by an admin cadre officer to learn technical matters, said a senior engineer of Water Development Board, adding that the officer in question might even get transferred to some other ministry in future.

According to records, WDB engineers have built 16,261km of embankments, including 5,757km in coastal region, dredged 1,388km of rivers, and had done many other water development work.

Some of the WDB engineers are eminent experts with global recognition, said officials.

SIMILAR CASE

The water resources ministry on November 24 sanctioned a nine-day "experience sharing" tour by eight officials in Australia and Malaysia to learn river bank protection, dredging and construction of earthen embankment under a Tk-510 crore project in Sirajganj.

Among the officials chosen for the tour are a WDB chief engineer who would in December.



Part of a road dug up for work on storm drainage in the capital's Dainik Banglar intersection poses danger to vehicles and pedestrians. Locals said the road has been in this state for at least a couple of months. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Too costly for businesses

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said, adding the Dhaka airport is probably the world's second most expensive airport for cargo transport.

"Kolkata is cheap. It costs four cents as terminal handling and security scanning charges."

He, however, refused to comment on the undocumented charge of around 4 cents per kg, popularly known as "speed money" allegedly paid for smooth handling of cargo at the Dhaka airport.

Officials said it was possible to save 25 percent of the total cost if the goods were sent through the Kolkata airport.

Even after paying the charges, sometimes the goods have to be handled by the freight forwarders as the services are poor at the Dhaka airport, he added.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines is the authorised body to handle cargo at the airport, but logistic support like infrastructure and other facilities are provided by the Caab.

Bakhtiar said the cargo village at the Hsia was so small that sometimes the goods are left unattended under the open sky.

"As a result, incidents of frequent theft also take place and quality of goods stored to be exported also deteriorates," he said.

Exporters send nearly 2,500 tonnes of dry garment cargo a month through this route, he said, adding that the quantity increases during peak season.

The Hsia handled 3,60,171 tonnes of cargos in the 2018-19 fiscal year, of which export cargo was 2,30,264 tonnes, according to a Caab report that shows an upward trend of cargo handling over the last seven years.

Talking to The Daily Star, aviation expert Kazi Wahidul Alam said, "We do not have a proper cargo village at the Hsia in a true sense. The infrastructure at the cargo areas is also poor and outdated. Besides, every year the demand for air cargo has been increasing by 20 percent, but the space has not."

There is a lack of adequate facilities to preserve sensitive items like medicines, he added.

Asif Ibrahim, director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the organisation which has the highest users of air cargo facilities, said, "At present, the cargo handling facilities at the Shahjalal airport are not up to the international standard. The trade facilitation capacity is inadequate. Often, one can see imported raw materials kept in the open."

"BGMEA has been advocating for improvement of the infrastructure

and shorter lead time for clearing consignments. However, whatever little improvements have taken place, those have always been on an ad-hoc basis."

The government has taken an ambitious plan to upgrade the facilities at Hsia, but it will take a long time to be implemented, he said.

Ibrahim also said the West Bengal government and the Airport Authorities of India had constructed an international standard airport in Kolkata and would soon set up an express courier terminal there. The operations of the terminal will be outsourced to ensure efficient handling of inbound and outbound cargos and courier services.

Speed was of utmost importance to exporters and if Bangladeshi exporters can save time using the Kolkata airport, then it is an option worth exploring, he said.

"We talk about LDC graduation and becoming a middle-income country, but our main international airport and cargo village needs to reflect our ambitions."

The Kolkata route, while viable, is still picking up pace.

Expo Freight Limited is the sole body that handles garment cargos from Bangladesh through Kolkata's Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport.

Its Managing Director Mahbubul Anam, who is also the president of the BAFFA, said they handle 40 tonnes of garment cargo through the new route every day, while more than 500 tonnes of garment items are sent through Hsia.

He said they launched air transhipment of apparel items in December last year. The goods are sent mainly from Dhaka and its adjacent areas to the Benapole land port at night for completing the customs procedures. Afterwards, the goods are sent in trucks to the Kolkata airport from where planes carry the products to their European destinations, he added.

Mahbubul Anam said it was possible to save 25 percent cost if the goods were sent through the Kolkata airport. "For instance, if goods are carried by any airline from Dhaka, it costs around \$2.20 per kg but the same goods costs \$1.50 per kg from the Kolkata airport," he said.

Contacted, a top Biman official, wishing anonymity, said they had already decided to reduce the charges at the airport.

"But it will hardly benefit the businessmen if Caab does not reduce its various charges on aircraft for landing and using the airport," he

added. He also said that some businessmen are airlifting their goods through the Colombo airport after a short sea freight from Chattogram, adding that the Colombo route would be cheaper than that of Kolkata.

A top Caab official admitted that cargo transport charges through Hsia were high and that the airport lacked adequate infrastructure and facilities. "We are working to reduce the charges," said Caab Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman. He also said that Caab's departments concerned were working to lower the charges.

About the inadequate space and infrastructure facilities at the existing cargo village, the Caab boss said they would construct a new cargo area with all types of facilities and the work was underway in that regard.

In the meantime, they are trying to expedite the cargo facilities through installing necessary equipment, he added.

The CAAB chief also said they have taken the initiative to operate cargo flight from Chattogram and Sylhet to reduce the pressure on Hsia.

Currently nine scheduled and four non-scheduled airline careers are operating 51 flights from the Hsia every week.

A Biman official said sometimes some non-scheduled flights also carry goods, especially of Chinese airlines, as per the demand and supply.

Responding to written queries from The Daily Star, Biman said the size of the cargo village for export goods is 1,98,000 square feet and the RA3 area under it is 60,500 sqft of which fenced an area of 40,500 square feet.

"But in the peak time it is not adequate as per the requirement. It needs to be expanded," the Biman letter said.

"The expansion is needed also as the demand has increased over the years."

The 1,58,000 sqft Biman Cargo Terminal, where the incoming cargoes are stored, should also be expanded as well, as quantity of both incoming and outgoing cargos increased manifold at the Hsia, it said.

Biman earned Tk 905.56 crore from cargo handling in the 2018-19 fiscal year, the amount was Tk 643.03 crore in the previous fiscal and Tk 523.26 crore in 2016-17.

Biman, which has no dedicated cargo plane, handled 27,737 tonnes outgoing and 1,564 tonnes incoming cargos in 2018-19 fiscal years by its own careers. The rest was handled by other airline careers.

BSF shoots Bangladeshi dead in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The Indian Border Security Force shot dead a Bangladeshi youth in Dona border area of Sylhet's Kanaighat upazila on Thursday afternoon.

Informed by locals, police recovered the body of Salman Ahmed, 18, from the area yesterday afternoon, said Kanaighat OC Md Shamsuddoha.

Salman was from Borokheer village in the upazila.

Lt Col Sayeed Hossain, commanding officer of Zakiganj BGB Battalion-19, said they came to know that the youth was shot by BSF after he had entered India through the border.

The OC said although Salman crossed the border, his body was recovered from the territory of Bangladesh.

The body was sent to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

New Zealand increases Samoa measles aid as epidemic worsens

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand announced extra aid for Samoa Friday as the Pacific nation's measles epidemic raced past 3,000 cases and experts warned the number could double before the crisis was over.

Samoa's government said the death toll from the outbreak had reached 42, up three in 24 hours, while the overall number of cases rose by 213 to 3,149 over the same period.

"The Samoan health system is under serious strain, with growing numbers of people, many of whom are very young, needing complex care as a result of the measles outbreak," New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters said.

He said Wellington was sending 100,000 doses of measles vaccine to Samoa, enough to immunise half the 200,000 population. UNICEF has already dispatched 110,000 doses.

Peters said more medical specialists were on their way from Wellington to help with Samoa's compulsory vaccination programme, as well as a much-needed oxygen-producing machine.

"New Zealand is also looking to provide psychological support for health workers in Samoa, who have been confronted with some distressing cases in very demanding conditions," he added.

Over 1 lakh

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Control and Research has received 264 reports of dengue-related deaths across the country.

It has reviewed 203 of them and confirmed 129 deaths.

The mosquito-borne disease broke out infecting people across the country, especially in the capital, this year.

Rohingya man

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Ghumdhum, three of them are drug peddlers.

Mahmudul was taken to Chattogram Medical College Hospital with critical wounds while Habibur was taken to a medical centre inside the Kutupalong camp.

"We suspect that they fell victim to a landmine explosion inside Myanmar as the injured bore signs of being a victim of landmine explosions," said Lt Col Ali Haider.

Five Rohingya refugees died in four incidents of landmine blasts in the same area over the last six months, Commander Ali told this paper.

A BGB official, wishing not to be named, said, "Myanmar security forces regularly bury mines along Ghumdhum area that Rohingya refugees regularly use to commute."

Myanmar troops have been accused of waging an ethnic cleansing campaign against the country's Rohingya Muslim minority, with some 740,000 fleeing to Bangladesh since August 2017.

At the height of the mass exodus when tens of thousands of Rohingyas poured into Bangladesh every day, several were killed or seriously hurt in suspected landmine explosions along the border.

Anti-personnel mines were banned under a global treaty in 1997.

Cops try

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against the seven people -- five policemen and their two sources -- with the police station under the narcotics control act.

Later, the district police administration suspended the five policemen.

Contacted, Amir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Sakhipur Police Station, said the arrestees were produced before a Tangail court yesterday with a five-day remand prayer, and the court placed them on a two-day remand.

Locals alleged that several days ago, ASI Riazul along with his accomplices realised money from a man of Palashtoly village in Mirzapur upazila in the same way.