

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 cheques 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."



PHOTO: AFP

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 engineer, 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 Bangla 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.

British Bangladeshi 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 said.

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.

Govt to help farmers buy agri tools

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The MoA in its letter said despite advancement in the agriculture production, costs of farmers are rising owing to high labour wages and inefficiency at various stages of cultivation.

"As a result, farmers fail to make a profit," it added.

According to agriculturalists and industry operators, currently, farmers prepare more than 90 percent of total croplands by using power tillers and tractors.

A majority of grains, mainly rice, are threshed by threshing machines and the rate of mechanisation is growing as farmers find the use of agricultural machinery beneficial in terms of cost-saving and timely cultivation.

Yet, progress in the transplanting paddy and harvesting the staple crop has been sluggish over the years owing to the high cost of machines, lack of the machinery suitable for harvesting all types of soils and the dearth of operators and mechanics, said agriculturalists.

Prof Md Monjurul Alam of the Department of Farm Power and Machinery of Bangladesh Agricultural

University (BAU), said nearly one percent of paddy are transplanted and harvested by using machines.

Due to the shortage of farmworkers, growers have to spend a lot for hiring labourers in order to ensure the timely harvest of their grains, he said.

"We have seen that labour shortage goes up to 45 percent during the transplanting and harvesting season of rice," he said, linking the deficit to the continuous shift of agricultural workforce to the non-farm sector.

Jobs in agriculture fell to 40.6 percent of total employment in 2016-17 from 47.3 percent in 2010, according to the Labour Force Survey by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Due to high demand and reduced supply, daily farm wages goes as high as Tk 600 during peak harvesting seasons up from nearly Tk 300 in slack seasons, said agriculturalists.

In its letter, the agriculture ministry said the surging cost of labour has been making farmers helpless during the harvesting period for the last several years on the one hand, and farmers are getting reluctant to grow the paddy on the other.

The programme will be taken in

all upazilas under 64 districts, said the MoA, expecting a 20 percent reduction in the cost of production and 10 percent cut of post-harvest losses.

"This is a kind of investment on the part of the government as the delay in harvest causes a loss of yield," said Alam of BAU.

Replying to query on the suitability of bigger machines on muddy soils, Prof Alam said there would be no difficulties in using the combine harvesters during the Aman season.

"But there will be difficulty in harvesting Boro paddy in areas where the crop is cultivated on wetlands," he said.

The BAU professor said rural road and irrigation infrastructure should be developed in a way that facilitates smooth movement of farm machinery along the roads and crop fields.

"To ensure after-sales services, we are imposing obligations on companies that will supply the machinery to farmers at a subsidised rate," said Sheikh Md Nazim Uddin, member secretary of the technical committee on Agri-Machinery Subsidy Programme at the MoA.

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

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 Borokheur 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