

BANGLADESH UPDATE



785

New cases in 24hrs



5,20,690

Total cases



7,734

Deaths



4,65,279

Recoveries



1,914,052

Deaths



88,937,961

Total cases

2020 ties with 2016 as hottest year on record

AFP, Paris

The year 2020 tied with 2016 as the hottest year on record, the European Union's climate monitoring service said yesterday, keeping Earth on a global warming fast track that could devastate large swathes of humanity.

The six years since 2015 are the six warmest ever registered, as are 20 of the last 21, evidence of a persistent and deepening trend, the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) reported.

Last year's record high -- a soaring 1.25 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels -- was more alarming because it came without the help of a periodic natural weather event known as an El Nino, which added up to two-tenths of a degree to the 2016 average, according to Nasa and Britain's Met Office.

"It is quite clear that in the absence of El Nino and La Nina impacts on year-to-year temperatures, 2020 would be the warmest year on record," Zeke Hausfather, director of climate and energy at the Breakthrough Institute in Oakland, California, reported AFP.

During an El Nino, which occurs every two to seven years, warm surface water in the tropical Pacific Ocean can boost global temperatures. La Ninas -- such as one currently underway -- have the opposite cooling effect.

"2020 stands out for its exceptional warmth," said C3S Director Carlo Buontempo.

"This is yet another reminder of the urgency of ambitious emissions

reductions to prevent adverse climate impacts in the future."

In 2015, the world's nations vowed to cap global warming "well below" 2C, and 1.5C if possible.

A subsequent report from the UN's climate science advisory panel, the IPCC, left no doubt that 1.5C was the safer threshold.

With just over 1C of warming so far, the world has seen a crescendo of deadly droughts, heatwaves, flood-inducing rainfall, and superstorms made more destructive by rising seas.

2020 witnessed a record number, for example, of hurricanes in the Atlantic that the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) ran out of letters in the alphabet to name them.

Some regions last year experienced warming well beyond the global average, according to the Copernicus report, based largely on satellite data.

Europe's average surface temperature across 2020 was a searing 2.2C over the pre-industrial benchmark -- and nearly half a degree above 2019, the previous record year.

Warming in the Arctic region was even more spectacular, with northern Siberia and parts of the Arctic itself nearly 7C above mid-19th century levels.

Wildfires across Siberia lasting well into the autumn released a record quarter-billion tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, equivalent to the annual emissions of Spain, Egypt or Vietnam, and a third more than in 2019, the previous record year.

Key issues still unresolved

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"We are working on it. We are exploring the NID database and that would make it easier for us to create an area-wise database of people aged 60 and above," DGHS DG Prof Abul Bashar Mohammad Khurshid Alam told The Daily Star on Sunday.

He did not say how long it might take to create the database.

The DGHS is still struggling to collect data on people with comorbidities, he added.

Public health experts said antibody tests would reduce wastage of vaccine doses.

Since many people are asymptomatic and have developed antibodies, the vaccine is not needed for them, they added.

The DG said the A2I (Access to information), health services department, and the ICT ministry have been working to develop a mobile app, which is considered the first step in the vaccination programme.

After completing the registration process, people will be notified through an SMS about the vaccination date and place. After vaccination, the DGHS will give people a vaccine card containing the batch number of the vaccine and its expiry date, said Prof Khurshid.

He said officials have started training the health workers and preparing the venues to vaccinate people.

Vaccines will be administered at various government hospitals and specialised hospitals across the country, said the DG.

In the first phase, vaccines will be given to frontline workers of different professional groups, he added.

The frontliners include health professionals, public representatives, government officials, law enforcers, defence personnel, freedom fighters, media personnel and religious leaders.

But not everyone in the aforementioned groups will get the vaccine in the first phase; those aged 60 and above and having comorbidities in those groups will get priority, said Prof Khurshid.

He said the government was preparing the priority list for vaccination in the first phase.

Bangladesh will get 50 lakh Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine shots in each instalment every month from Serum Institute of India.

The government has given the emergency use authorisation (EUA) for the Oxford vaccine on Monday and has also disbursed advance payment of around \$59 million. It was initially decided to administer vaccines to 25 lakh people each month, with each person to be given two doses.

Recent developments, however, suggest that the authorities might go for inoculating 50 lakh people at one go.

"We've got communication from various sources suggesting that the efficacy of the second dose of vaccine is higher if administered in the latter part of a 4-to-12-week timeframe after the first dose," said a DGHS official, preferring not to be named.

"In that case, we are planning to administer 50 lakh doses at one go. It will also help relieve the pressure from the huge demand for the vaccine," the official said, adding that they were also in discussions to include the national cricket, football and hockey team players and officials in the first phase of the vaccination plan.

WHO WILL NOT BE VACCINATED

Although the government has initially planned to vaccinate 80 percent of the population, leaving the remaining 20 percent for herd immunity, the number may fall because of recent developments.

It was recently decided not to vaccinate people below 18 years of

age. This age-group constitutes 37-40 percent of the country's over 170 million population, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data.

Besides, around 50 lakh pregnant mothers will not be vaccinated as a precaution in the first phase, said DGHS officials.

Those who were infected will also not be vaccinated. According to international protocol, those who were infected do not need vaccines as they have already developed antibodies, said an official.

According to updated DGHS data, 4,63,480 people have recovered till January 6.

VACCINE PROCUREMENT PLAN
The government has so far decided to procure those vaccines suited for the existing EPI (Expanded Programme on Immunization) cold chain, capable of storing vaccines in 2-8 degree Celsius.

The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine, which has already been in emergency use in developed countries and has got the approval from the World Health Organisation (WHO), requires a cold chain of between -112 and -76 degree Celsius, which Bangladesh can ill afford with its existing cold chain.

In that context, Bangladesh has decided to purchase the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which has recently gotten approval in the UK and India for emergency use. The government has signed a tripartite agreement with Serum Institute of India and its local agent Beximco, a Bangladeshi pharmaceutical company, to buy three crore Oxford vaccine shots at a cost of \$5 per dose.

The country is expected to get the three crore vaccine shots in six instalments, with the first instalment of 50 lakh expected to arrive in the country in the second week of February, said a DGHS official.

He said they were expecting to get vaccine shots from COVAX, a global vaccine alliance, not before May. Bangladesh would get vaccine shots for 20 percent of its population from COVAX, which is around 6.8 crore doses, at a cheaper price of around \$1.6 to \$2 per shot.

Officials said a coronavirus vaccine will arrive at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport from Pune via Delhi. From there it will be kept at a Beximco warehouse.

Nazmul Hasan Papon, managing director of Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd, told The Daily Star that each vaccine carton will contain temperature monitoring devices during transportation so that records of a 20-day cold chain could be preserved.

He said the vaccines will be transferred from the warehouses to government-designated sites.

"We will inspect physically in the airport. There would be various layers in the vaccine carton. We will finally open the carton in the government-designated place. The device will then give data of whether the temperature was compromised in any place," Papon said.

He said they are preparing a warehouse in Dhaka and also purchasing some specialised vehicles to transport vaccines from airport to warehouse to government-designated sites.

"We hope by January 15, all our work will be completed to receive the vaccines," he added.

Papon said a vial will consist of 10 doses of the vaccine.

The second dose should be administered 28 days after the first one, he added, hoping that if all approvals are fulfilled, the vaccines are likely to arrive at the end of January or early February.



About three-four people taking drugs under the red blanket on a footpath near the High Court premises in the evening yesterday. Mostly homeless people are often seen taking drugs on relatively quiet streets in the capital.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Doctor confirms rape, finds injury marks

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Police earlier said Dihan had taken the victim to Anwar Khan Modern Hospital in Dhanmondi area on Thursday afternoon. Doctors at the private hospital said she was brought dead.

CONFUSION OVER VICTIM'S AGE
Kalabagan police had requested the DMC forensic department to find out the age of the victim through medical tests.

In the case statement, the age is mentioned as 17. According to her passport, the victim was born on October 9, 2003.

But police in their inquest report said she was 19.

To determine the age, forensic experts suggested conducting medical tests on the body. As the department concerned at the hospital was closed yesterday, the body was handed over to the family without the tests.

"There are some issues regarding the age. We can't tell you the age now. Although we could not carry out the tests yesterday, we can still find out the age using samples from her body, including her teeth, and relevant documents," said Dr Sohel.

Kalabagan Sub-inspector Jakir Hossain, who prepared the police inquest report, said they mentioned the age as 19 based on the death certificate issued by the authorities of Anwar Khan Modern Hospital.

The death certificate, however, says the age is 17.

Asked, the SI said, "That's why we've requested the forensic department to determine the age."

Meanwhile, the victim's family

alleged that police were trying to show her as an adult person to "lessen the merit of the case". They accused police of trying to save the accused as "he is from an influential family."

"The accused is a son of a former district registrar. His relatives are quite influential people. The accused is two years older than my daughter," said the victim's mother.

Dr Sohel said the actual age would be determined by the court.

Asked, the forensic expert said they would conduct DNA profiling to determine whether one or multiple persons were involved in the incident. Doctors would also see if any sedative was used, he said.

He said the cause of the death would be known after getting the post-mortem report.

In the death certificate, the cause of the death is mentioned as hemorrhagic shock due to post-coital vaginal tear.

In the inquest report, police said the victim died due to excessive bleeding and it could be a case of rape. The report said her weight was 45kg.

'IT'S MURDER'

Elders among three siblings, the victim wanted to become a doctor. Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, her mother said she was a meritorious student and used to attend online classes of six coaching centres.

She was about to sit for her O-level final exams in four months.

The mother said their world turned upside down after she received a phone call at 1:18pm on Thursday.

Dihan called her and informed her that her daughter had suddenly fell sick and that he was taking her to hospital.

"I want justice from the prime minister. My daughter just can't die like this. She has been killed," the mother said.

Meanwhile, police yesterday urged everyone not to "exaggerate" the issue on social media, saying that they were working to crack the case.

Sajjadur Rahman, deputy commissioner (Ramna zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, made the call while talking to reporters at the Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh (CRAB) in the capital's Segunbagicha.

PROTEST

People from different walks of life, including students, held rallies in the capital yesterday, protesting the rape and murder of the victim.

In the morning, protesters under the banner of "Bangladesh against Rape and Injustice" attended a rally at the Press Club. The demonstrators urged to boycott all rapists and oppressors.

In the afternoon, another group of protesters under the banner of "Pritilata Brigade" held a rally in Shahbagh area, demanding an end to all violence against women in plain land and in the hills.

A section of students held another rally in Dhanmondi 27 area to push for their four-point demand, including bringing all sexual assaulters and murderers to book and taking stern action against victim-blaming.

Calls for Trump's impeachment getting louder

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"To all of those who have asked, I will not be going to the Inauguration on January 20th," Trump tweeted, making formal what many had long assumed: that Trump would eschew the traditional step of personally demonstrating the peaceful hand-off of power to President-elect Joe Biden. He'll be the first outgoing president to skip his replacement's inauguration in more than 150 years.

Meanwhile, the two top Democrats in Congress urged his immediate removal, fearing damage he can still inflict in his less than two weeks left in the world's most powerful job.

And the editorial board of The Wall Street Journal piled on, calling for Trump "to take personal responsibility and resign."

Biden, who won seven million votes more than Trump in the November 3 election as well as a decisive edge in the vital state-by-state Electoral College, declined on Thursday to address demands for Trump's removal but accused him of an "all-out assault on the institutions of our democracy."

"Yesterday, in my view, was one of the darkest days in the history of our nation," Biden said at an event to introduce his nominee for attorney general, respected judge Merrick Garland, who if confirmed will quickly need to decide whether to prosecute Trump.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer urged Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment, which allows a majority of the cabinet to remove a president deemed unable to discharge his duties.

They threatened to impeach Trump for an unprecedented second time in the hopes that the Senate will oust him.

"This is an emergency of the highest magnitude," Pelosi said, describing Trump as a "very dangerous person."

"By inciting sedition, as he did yesterday, he must be removed from office," she said. "While it's only 13 days left, any day can be a horror show for America."

his remaining 12 days in office.

Few Republicans came forward to back such remedies, although Representative Adam Kinzinger, a frequent Trump critic within his party, said it was time to "end this nightmare" and also called for invoking the 25th Amendment, which would make Pence the acting president.

"The president is unfit," Kinzinger said. "And the president is unwell."

However, the New York Times on Thursday reported that Pence is opposed to using the 25th Amendment to force Trump from office. While Pence has not spoken publicly about invoking the mechanism, never used before in US history, the newspaper cited a person close to the vice president saying he is against the radical move.

The Times said Pence's stance is supported by several cabinet members.

Meanwhile Democrats in the US House of Representatives said that if the 25th Amendment is not invoked they will move quickly to impeach Trump.

Assistant House Speaker Katherine Clark yesterday said if Pence and other cabinet members do not remove Trump from office, then impeachment proceedings will start next week. Democrats in the House of Representatives were due to hold a conference call to discuss this at noon yesterday (17:00 GMT).

In another development, US justice department on Thursday confirmed that US federal investigators were examining everyone who might have played a role in the violence - and that includes considering possible charges against Trump.

"We are looking at all actors, not only the people who went into the building," said acting US attorney Michael Sherwin, Washington's top federal prosecutor.

Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, who is married to Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell and is one of Trump's longest-serving cabinet members, announced she would resign over the "entirely avoidable" violence at the Capitol.

On Thursday evening Education Secretary Betsy DeVos became the second cabinet member to quit, telling Trump in a letter that such "behavior was unconscionable for our country."

Others who resigned included

Don't 'interfere' over US unrest: Hungarian PM

AFP, Budapest

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, one of President Donald Trump's main supporters in the EU, yesterday cautioned against interfering in "America's business" over the unrest in Washington this week.

Foreign leaders including in the EU have roundly condemned pro-Trump protesters after they stormed the US Capitol building in anger over his election defeat.

But the nationalist Hungarian leader cautioned against criticising events in other countries during a state radio interview.

"We should not interfere in what is happening in America, that is America's business, we are rooting for them and we trust that they will manage to solve their own problems," said Orban.

Victim blaming

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happened without the girl's consent... Didn't she know the guy?"

Anthropology Professor Ainoon Naher of Jahangirnagar University said, "The offence of the perpetrator must be given more importance, because sexual violence doesn't only exist outside of home."

Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori, said, "When someone is killed by a car or hacked to death by robbers, people consider it as a criminal offence. Then why does a woman's character become relevant when she is raped and murdered?"

The mindset of men is the cause of frequent incidents of rape, and it has nothing to do with who the victim is, how she dresses or whether she has an affair, she told The Daily Star.

Taqbir Huda, research specialist at Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, who leads the Rape Law Reform Now Campaign, said "Whenever a rape gets reported, we see a large section of society normalising the crime and implying that the rape was almost inevitable."

"When you treat rape as inevitable by stretching the concept of 'boys will be boys', you are essentially telling men and boys to go and rape a girl to death, because we'll always find a way to put the blame on her."

"As long as we keep telling women and girls to 'avoid' getting raped instead of teaching boys not to rape, such incidents will repeat."

Umama Zillur, founder of KOTHA, a programme that addresses the attitudes, behaviours and conditions that support, condone and lead to sexual violence, said the victim-blaming on social media was just another reflection of how "comfortable we are with demonising women and their actions and behaviours, instead of holding men accountable."

"The victim-blaming even extended to the girl's parents. Some demanded they be punished for letting their daughter have too much freedom. But there was no question about the kind of environment at home and school and society that leads men to feel entitled to women's bodies," she added.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra, at least 1,627 women were raped and gang-raped across the country in 2020. Of them, 53 were killed after rape and 14 died by suicide.

The number of rape victims was 1,413 in 2019 and 732 in 2018, ASK mentioned in its 2020 annual report.

Interpol issues

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"The Interpol sent the red notice to its offices in different countries. The red notice will remain valid for next five years," he said.

The announcement came three days after NCB of Bangladesh Police requested Interpol to issue a red notice against Halder.

According to Canadian media reports, Halder is now in Toronto and the director of P&L Hal Holding Inc, a Canadian corporation.

The three other NBFs from which Halder allegedly embezzled crores of taka are International Leasing and Financial Services Limited (ILFSL), FAS Finance and Investment, and Reliance Finance.

Halder came to limelight during the anti-casino drives in 2019. The ACC launched an investigation into the involvement of 43 people, including him, in the illegal casino business.

The ACC, on January 8 last year, filed a case against Halder on charges of illegally amassing wealth worth Tk 275 crore.

In connection with the graft case, on January 4, the ACC arrested Shankha Bepari, an associate of Halder.

On the following day, the High Court (HC) issued a travel ban against 25 accomplices of Halder, including his mother Lilaboti Halder.

On the last week of December, the ACC seized Halder's two flats and six acres of immovable properties following a court order.

He joined NRB Global Bank as its managing director in 2015.

Several enquiries over embezzlement of crores of taka from NBFs by Halder are pending with the ACC.

The anti-graft watchdog has summoned seven persons to appear before it this week to face questioning over embezzlement of over Tk 3,500 crore from Peoples' Leasing.