

BANGLADESH UPDATE



3,473
New cases in 24hrs



7,15,252
Total cases



10,283
Deaths



6,08,815
Recoveries



3,018,645
Deaths



141,117,691
Total cases

LEADERS' SUMMIT ON CLIMATE

Focus on temperature, funding, technology

Experts urge govt

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Keeping global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, climate funding, technology transfer, and rehabilitating the climate migrants should be the major issues that Bangladesh needs to focus on at the Leaders' Summit on Climate, said leading climate experts and policymakers yesterday.

The summit is scheduled to be held from April 22 to April 23.

At the same time, Bangladesh also needs to focus on the damages that are being incurred by the frequent and intense events of climate change -- flood, cyclones, salinity intrusion, they said.

These events are affecting the health and livelihoods of millions of people, mostly in the coastal and char areas, they added.

Experts say the Leaders' Summit on Climate is going to be virtually hosted by US President Joe Biden and joined by 40 countries including Bangladesh ahead of the COP26 in November.

The observations came at a webinar jointly organised by COAST Foundation, Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihood (CSRL), Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network, Bangladesh Indigenous People Network on Climate Change & Biodiversity (BIPNet-CCBD), and Centre for Participatory Research and Development (CPRD).

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change, said Biden has returned to Paris Agreement and is now seeking to take a leadership position on climate.

Biden's new plan to spend USD 2 trillion in four years, to significantly escalate the use of clean energy, is a testimony to it.

"The US will do a lot of research and development on renewable energy technology. We should focus on how Bangladesh can benefit from the new technologies," he said.

He said the Paris Agreement, signed in 2015, speaks of keeping the global temperature rise within 2 degrees Celsius, but "we should demand that to keep it within 1.5 degrees Celsius. It should be an imperative."

Saber said Bangladesh should strongly demand mobilising USD 100 billion for

the Green Climate Fund annually from 2020.

Barrister Shamim Haider Patwary, a lawmaker from Gaibandha, said climate events like floods are causing huge displacement in his constituency.

Parts of North Bengal saw floods four times last year and river erosion in three phases, causing displacement of thousands of people and damaging infrastructures, he added.

Citing studies, he said 25 percent of people in Bangladesh could be displaced due to extreme climate events by 2040 if global temperature rise can't be kept below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

"We need funding to protect the people from climate events. We also should demand punishment for the major carbon emitters who don't meet the climate targets," the MP said.

Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, chairman of Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation, said it is important to highlight what Bangladesh has already done for mitigation and adaptation from its own fund.

At the same time, he said, Bangladesh, as a climate-vulnerable country, should get money from the Green Climate Fund as grants, not a loan.

Atiq Rahaman, executive director of Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, criticised the US for forgetting its role in reducing carbon emission in the last four years and demanded that the country compensates for the damages caused by the extreme climate events globally.

BRAC University Prof Emeritus Dr Ainnun Nishat said Bangladesh may not benefit from the market mechanism under the Paris Agreement. Therefore, the focus should be on finance and climate migration as the US is recognising the issue of climate migration.

Ziaul Hoque Mukta of CSRL; Dr Manjurul Hannan Khan, former additional secretary at the ministry of environment; Sharif Jamil, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon; Shamsuddoha, chief executive of CPRD; Mrinal Kanti Tripathy of BIPNet-CCBD; Hasan Mehedi of CLEAN-BD; and Kawser Rahman of Bangladesh Climate Journalists Forum; also spoke at the webinar moderated by Rezaul Karim Chowdhury of COAST Foundation.



Tahmina Yasmin, 35, who has severe breathing difficulties due to Covid-19, was brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday after her health took a turn for the worse the night before. Health officials said the number of young people testing positive for the virus increased recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

5 workers killed as cops open fire

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local hospitals in Banskhali, but they refused to admit him. He died of his injuries after being brought to Chattogram Medical College Hospital," narrated an emotional Miran.

He informed this daily that that Raihan just joined the site five months ago.

Apart from Raihan, the other deceased were identified as Rony of Chuadanga, Md Rahad of Kishoreganj, Shuvo of Narsingdi, and Mahmud Reza of Banskhali, said district police and Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) police outpost sources. Their ages could not be known immediately.

None of the protesting workers was direct employees of S Alam Group or Shandong Electric Power Construction Corporation III, the Chinese company it is in partnership with for the power plant construction. Instead, the conglomerate had outsourced labourers from 27 subcontracting organisations, workers told our correspondents.

The workers' other demands included an one hour break for iftar, an hour break for prayers, half day on the weekend (Friday), two Eid bonuses based on workers' salaries and end of cutting wages.

"When the Ramadan started, the workers wanted their work hours to be slashed by a few hours from the current 10," said Shahedul Karim Raju, one of the workers. "They wanted break for iftar and sehri, depending on their shifts. At present, if workers took a break for iftar or sehri, their pay is cut," he claimed.

Contacted, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Chattogram Range Anwar Hossain told The Daily Star said, "Workers of the coal-based power plant had been demonstrating since Friday morning over several demands."

"A meeting was held between them and the plant authorities, but the workers started demonstration the next morning. At one point of the demo, they attacked the plant and on-duty

police personnel in the project area," he said.

"During the attack, police retaliated with fire, leaving four people dead," added the DIG Anwar.

"Three of our policemen were also injured. They were sent to the CMCH for treatment," said DIG Anwar.

The injured police constables are: Yasir, 24, Abdur Kabir, 26 and Asaduzzaman, 23.

The injured workers included Md Habibullah, 21, Md Rahat, 30, Md Mizan, 22, Md Marad, 25, Md Shakil, 23, Md Kamrul, 26, Md Masum, 24, Md Aminul, 25, Md Didar, 23, Md Omar, 20 and Ovi, 22. The name of the other injured workers could not be known immediately.

Most of the injured workers had bullet injuries, said on-duty doctors of the CMCH emergency ward.

Workers, however, said police fired first.

Another witness, Nazim Uddin, a driver employed at the power plant project, told The Daily Star at the CMCH said, "During the incident, I was standing just outside the factory gate where I saw workers gathering to press home their demands. Suddenly, I heard indiscriminate gunshots and later found many workers bullet hit."

After the firing started, six vehicles were set on fire, reported our correspondents. The police blamed the workers for arson, while the workers blamed it on the law enforcers.

The situation in the area had been tense since the shooting.

Several hours after the workers were killed, a cement warehouse in the area was set on fire.

The family of each of the deceased would be given Tk 3 lakh by the district commissioner's office, while those injured would get Tk 50,000, announced the local administration.

"Whatever steps we took, we had to protect the lives and properties of the Chinese citizens in the area," commented SM Rashidul Haque,

superintendent of police in Chattogram.

No police case was lodged when this report was filed late last night.

The DIG said the situation was under control and that additional police members were deployed to fend off any untoward incident.

Meanwhile, Azizul Islam, officer-in-charge (investigation), of Banskhali Police Station, said a case was being filed over the assault on police. He, however, could not say how many people would be accused.

Ebadat Hossen, chief financial officer of SS Power Plant, told The Daily Star that they did not deal with their labourers directly. The subcontractors under the Chinese company looks after them, he said.

"We don't know exactly what has happened, but we are collecting information and will come up with a statement after a few days," he said.

The workers said they used to work 12 hours, including an overtime of four hours, daily.

The Daily Star correspondents, who visited the spot yesterday, saw workers living in deplorable conditions and being forced into using overflowing toilets.

S Alam Group is installing the 1,224 megawatt coal-fired power plant at Gandamara of Banskhali.

On April 4, 2016, four villagers were killed during a clash over land acquisition for the power plant project.

Meanwhile, several rights bodies have decried the use of excessive force against the protesters.

Ain o Salish Kendra, Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), Manabdhikar Shangskriti Forum, headed by Sultana Kamal, Garments Workers Trade Union Centre, and Garments Workers Trade Union Centre issued statements, protesting the incident.

Leaders and activists of Bangladesh Socialist Students Front also staged a protest rally at TSC, Dhaka University yesterday.

Cops arrest 2 more

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arrest of Zunayed while Aduzzaman, deputy commissioner of the Detective Branch of Police (Motijheel Division), confirmed the arrest of Jalaluddin.

The drive is still going on, he added.

Earlier several top leaders of Hefajat, including its Dhaka unit Vice-President Maulana Jubair Ahmed, was arrested on Friday from his house in the capital. Mufti Sharifullah, central assistant organising secretary, was arrested on Tuesday, and Shakhawat Hossain, central assistant secretary general, was arrested on Wednesday.

They were all involved in the recent incidents of Hefajat mayhem and also involved in the 2013 mayhem in Dhaka, police officials said.

The recent spate of violence from the Qawmi madrasa-based organisation erupted during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh and the subsequent hatched call by Hefajat on March 28.

On May 5, 2013, thousands of Hefajat members clashed with law enforcers and ruling AL men, turning Motijheel and Paltan areas into battlefields.

A total of 83 cases were filed in seven districts, including Dhaka, accusing 3,416 named and 84,796 unnamed people. Many of the accused were from Hefajat, Jamaat-e-Islam and BNP.

Police have pressed charges in 18 cases and given final reports in two other cases. Investigations of 62 others have been stalled.

Recently, police officials were directed to complete investigations within one or two months, said officials.

The Daily Star's Brahmanbaria correspondent reported that seven more supporters of Hefajat-e-Islam were arrested in several cases filed over vandalism and arson in Brahmanbaria on March 26 and 28, according to a press release of Special Branch of district police.

Law enforcers arrested them from different areas conducting a special drive from Thursday night to Friday night, said Md Roish Uddin, additional superintendent of police in Brahmanbaria.

So far, 55 cases have been filed over

the mayhem -- 49 with Brahmanbaria Sadar Model Police Station, three with Ashuganj Police Station, two with Sarail Police Station, and one with Akhaura Railway Police Station.

Some 414 people have been named in these cases alongside more than 35,000 unknown individuals.

Until yesterday, total 268 people were arrested in connection with the cases and among them, 228 are activists and supporters of Hefajat and 37 of BNP, while three are of Jamaat-e-Islami.

District police claimed that those accused in the cases were identified from photos and video footages of the incidents.

Meanwhile, Maulana Jubair Ahmed, vice-president of Hefajat-e-Islam's Dhaka city unit, was placed on a five-day remand yesterday in a case filed with Paltan Police Station over the 2013 incident in Dhaka.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Jashim passed the order after Md Kamrul Islam Talukder, an inspector of the Detective Branch of Police, and also the investigation officer of the case, produced him with a 10-day remand prayer in the case.

In the remand prayer, the IO said Jubair and others accused were directly involved with the incident on May 5, 2013, in the city's Paltan area.

"Moreover, he [Jubair] refused to disclose the names of others who were responsible for the incidents and that is why he needs to be remanded for us to gather information about the whereabouts of the others accused," Kamrul added.

In another development, Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque said Hefajat will not be spared and they will need to face legal trials for the violence they carried out, adding, "But still, I will say that those who run the state have a lot to consider", when asked if the state should take any responsibility.

He made the comments after paying homage to the portrait of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhanmondi 32 on the occasion of the historic Mujibnagar Day on April 17.

relations and foreign policy in the last two decades.

He completed his graduation and post-graduate degrees in Dhaka University.

He started teaching at the Department of Government and Politics at JU as a lecturer in 1992. He moved to the Department of International Relations in 2002. He retired from JU two years ago.

His notable books include Post-Iraq War International Politics, Enemies and Friends of Democracy, Bangladesh: State and Politics, Bangladesh: 25 Years of Politics, Bangladesh: Four Decades of Politics, Ganga Water Treaty: Perspectives and Prospects, Transit Issues and Gas Export, Soviet-Bangladesh Relations, and 100 Years of World Politics.

He also wrote columns for different newspapers and was known as one of the best political analysts in the country.

JU Vice-Chancellor Prof Farzana Islam and UGC Chairman Prof Kazi Shahidullah expressed deep shock at his death.

Prof Tareque

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was locked from the inside and there was no response after repeated knocks on the door, we called the police," he said.

Mehedi Hasan, officer-in-charge of Turag Police Station, said, "The cause of his death is not known yet. There were signs of throwing up. The crime scene unit of the Criminal Investigation Department was there. They collected evidence."

An autopsy may reveal the exact cause of his death, he added.

Contacted, Fazul Halim Rana, chairman of JU International Relations, said, "As a colleague and teacher, he was very helpful, popular and committed. I pray for his departed soul."

He added that his body was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. "We contacted his family members and policemen to look after the namaj-e-janaza."

Prof Tareque, a former member of Bangladesh University Grants Commission, researched on international politics, international

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rickshaw pulling, and launch and boat driving.

Self-employed people like street vendors, hawkers, tea sellers, food stall owners and repairmen were also among the worst hit.

The urban informal sector has lost about 1.08 million jobs, which was over 8 percent of total urban employment at the level of 2016-17 fiscal. The workers' wages declined by 42 percent in Dhaka and 33 percent in Chittogram districts. The decline in income of salaried workers was much higher at 49 percent due to a sharp reduction in demand for the services.

The SMEs expected to lose revenue by 66 percent during the pandemic.

The income of all the families, including migrants dropped by 20 percent, and due to the fall in income poverty increased in the country.

The head-count poverty rate has increased from 20 percent in FY 2016-17 to 33 percent in FY 2019-20. If the income of working people in urban and rural areas declined by 80 percent and 20 percent, respectively, the poverty level is likely to increase by 9.1 percent.

Low-income workers' families confronted different types of financial difficulties like the inability to pay rent, unpaid utility bills, unpaid school fees and the inability to send money back to their village homes.

Syed Manzur Elahi, chairman of the Apex Group, suggested an effective tripartite social dialogue for minimising the communication gap among the government, union leaders, and owners.

He said it was not a big deal to arrange transport for the workers who are commuting to factories on foot.

CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan said workers should be reached by the union leaders at the different factories to check whether the social distancing is properly maintained.

Although the owners committed to providing transport support, there is no indication of how many of them provided the support, he added.

"The workers are now in a much more isolated and vulnerable position as collective action is not there," he said.

He suggested that the union leaders keep in touch with as many workers as possible and monitor the working conditions.

Tuomo Poutiainen, country director of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Bangladesh said the union leaders should continue the support to protect the wage.

The fallouts of Covid-19 in the industries are a reminder of the importance of industrial relations, he said.

Naimul Hossain Jewel, member of the advisory council of BILS, said some two crore people have lost their jobs during the pandemic, but many of them did not get the government's financial support from the stimulus packages.

Many of the workers in the informal sectors that generate 87 percent of the employment did not get the financial aid of the stimulus funds, he said.

Amirul Haque Amin, president of the National Garment Workers Federation demanded payment of salaries and full bonuses to the workers 10 days ahead of Eid.

He said some two lakh garment workers lost their jobs in the first phase of the Covid-19 and so far 1.5 lakh could join work while the rest are still unemployed.

Shirin Akhter, member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, asked the government to make a database of workers so that they can avail the government benefit in time.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the CPD, Nazrul Islam Khan, secretary-general and executive director of the BILS also spoke.

54 districts

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second week of March. The daily infection rate, which was hovering around 3 percent in January and February, crossed 5 percent-mark early last month.

The infection rate and deaths have continued to soar since then as the country posted grim milestones one after another in terms of infections and deaths.

This compelled the government to enforce countrywide restrictions on movement, initially for seven days from April 5, to curb the transmission. The restrictions were intensified from April 14 by closing all private and public offices. However, factories are allowed to run maintaining health guidelines.

"We are hopeful that the ongoing restrictions on movement will positively impact the transmission rate within next two to three weeks if the restrictions remain in force," Prof Tahmina Shirin, director of the IEDCR, told The Daily Star.

"Controlling the transmission depends on how carefully we adhere to the health safety guidelines. Wearing masks properly, washing hands frequently and maintaining physical distancing are key to stay safe. Right now, there is no other way to keep the transmission under control," she added.

101 MORE DIE Meanwhile, the health directorate reported the all-time highest 101 Covid-19-related deaths for the second consecutive day yesterday, the 13th day of the ongoing lockdown.

With this, the death toll reached 10,182 with an overall fatality rate of 1.43 percent.

Among the total deaths, more than 58 percent were recorded in Dhaka division, followed by around 18 percent in Chattogram division.

Yesterday's 4,417 new cases took the number of total novel coronavirus cases in the country to 711,779. The overall infection rate now stands at 13.86 percent.