

Forest fires rage in northern Morocco

AFP, Rabat

Firefighters in northern Morocco are battling to put out two forest blazes, a forestry official said yesterday as the North African kingdom swelters in a heatwave.

"Non-stop efforts are underway to control the fires which broke out on Saturday afternoon," said Rachid El-Anzi, director of the water and forestry department in the Chefchaouen region.

He said firefighting planes were being used to tackle the conflagrations which had already destroyed some 200 hectares (500 acres) of forest.

Several parts of the North African kingdom have seen temperatures of up to 49 degrees Celsius (120 Fahrenheit), according to weather authorities.

"There have been no victims, as priority has been given to preventing fires approaching residential areas," El-Anzi said.

He said the cause of the fires was not known, but that they had been spurred by high temperatures and strong winds, which are expected to last into today.

Morocco joins several other Mediterranean countries that have seen forest fires in recent weeks, including neighbouring Algeria where at least 90 people were killed in wildfires last week.

I Coast's first case of Ebola since 1994 of 'immense concern'

AFP, Abidjan

Ivory Coast's first recorded case of deadly Ebola disease in nearly three decades is of "immense concern", according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Institut Pasteur had confirmed the case after testing samples taken from an 18-year-old Guinean woman, Health Minister Pierre N'Gou Demba told RTI state television late on Saturday.

She had left the city of Labe in Guinea by road, arriving in Ivory Coast on Wednesday, he added.

"This is an isolated and imported case," he said. The patient was being treated in intensive care in Abidjan. Ivory Coast already had doses of the vaccine against Ebola, which will be given to anyone who had been in contact with her.

Vaccinations started yesterday for "target groups", health sources said.

And in a cross-border response, Guinea handed over 5,000 more doses of the vaccine with WHO support, the country's health security agency said in a tweet.

Prime Minister Patrick Achi had chaired an emergency interministerial meeting earlier on Saturday, the minister added.

2 children

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snatched gold ornaments from the grandmother, picked the girl and left the house.

The criminals took the girl to a nearby betel-leaf garden. One of them raped the girl while others acted as guards.

Around two hours later, the criminals released the girl.

Returning home, the girl shared the incident with her family members. Although the criminals were unmasked, she could not identify any of them.

Yesterday, the victim filed a rape case against an unidentified person with Kapasia Police Station, said Moniruzzaman, inspector of the police station, adding that police were trying to trace the criminals.

Meanwhile, in Patuakhali, a house-owner was sued on Saturday on charge of raping a minor domestic help in Kalapara upazila.

The accused is Rafiqul Islam Mridha, 50, of Fire Service Station area in the upazila headquarters, said police.

He appointed the twelve-year-old girl as domestic help around four months ago. The girl's accommodation was arranged at a ground floor's room of the three-story building.

Like other days, the girl on August 9 night went to sleep at the room after completing her works. Later, around 1:30am on early August 10, Rafiqul entered the room and raped her.

A day later, the girl left the job and returned to her village home and shared the incident with her mother.

Finally, the victim's father filed a rape case on Saturday night against Rafiqul with Kalapara Police Station.

The accused went into hiding since the case was filed. Police was trying to arrest him, said Khandaker Mostafizur Rahman, officer-in-charge of the police station.

[Our Gazipur and Patuakhali correspondents contributed to this report]



Patients accompanied by their relatives are seen outside a hospital damaged following a 7.2 magnitude earthquake in Les Cayes, Haiti on Saturday.

ERD urged to budge China on funding

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WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

In November 2018, the government took a project to turn the 174km Joydebpur-Ishwardi rail line into dual-gauge double lines. The project deadline was set to December 2024.

The China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation was supposed to implement the project and the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase in December 2018 approved a Tk 11,586.68 crore proposal for the initiative.

The BR in March 2019 sought for a loan for the project from the Chinese embassy in Dhaka through the ERD. On seven occasions in the last two years, the BR reminded the embassy about the loan.

In the last letter sent in January this year, the BR asked the Chinese government to expedite the process of signing the loan deal, stressing the importance of synchronisation of the two projects -- the rail lines and the under-construction Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Railway Bridge on the Jamuna river -- in reaping the desired

benefits.

In another development, the PMO in October last year, formed a committee to review the negotiated contract prices of three projects involving China, including Joydebpur-Ishwardi and Akhaura-Sylhet projects.

The other project -- Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur dual gauge conversion project -- has not been approved by the Ecnc, and negotiation with China Railway International Group is yet to be complete.

As part of measures to bring down the cost of the Joydebpur-Ishwardi double-line project, the PMO in November last year directed the BR to slash Tk 1,495.52 crore (12.91 percent) from the project's contract price of Tk 11,586.68 crore approved by the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase.

It also asked the BR to reduce the cost of Akhaura-Sylhet project by Tk 3,354.31 crore which is 20.8 percent of the total.

Both the Chinese contractors disagreed with the revised costs and

conveyed the message to the BR earlier this year.

BR'S EXPLANATION

The railways ministry on June 9 held a meeting to discuss the developments and find out solutions regarding the projects.

Presided over by Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan, the meeting decided to send a letter to the Chinese authorities through ERD regarding the Joydebpur-Ishwardi project.

Chinese authorities cited four reasons for not funding the project.

China authorities said detailed investment estimation of the project was missing and the unit cost was too high.

BR said detailed cost of the project was included in the revised feasibility report. The total investment cost of the project was \$1230.10 million, excluding IT-VAT.

However, as per the PMO-commissioned cost rationalisation committee, construction cost of the project would be reduced by \$ 152.39 million, the BR wrote.

About Chinese authorities

observation that the earning from the project is low and debt repayment after operation will be at a great risk, the BR said detailed analysis shows that the project will return enough revenue from travelers and freight operations. There are other indirect benefits as well.

"Moreover, the national economy of Bangladesh is growing at a very fast rate ... Besides, Bangladesh government has a good track record of repaying foreign debts."

China had also said the basis for prediction of freight volume was insufficient and the financial calculation did not reflect the actual financial situation.

In this regard, the BR said the project would increase the line capacity from 28 trains per day to 74 trains per day, out of which, 10 would be freight trains.

"Hence, it is clearly understood that freight volume of the section will be increased by more than 5 percent annually and it will accumulate more revenue for Bangladesh Railway," the BR said.

Disaster risk assessment in Bangladesh

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policy-making -- and requires close collaboration of various stakeholders. Besides the approximation of potential losses and their impact, it allows for the determination of the level of risk that is acceptable without destroying lives, national economy or personal finances.

As the pandemic drags on and we are hit by waves of Covid-19 cases, Bangladesh is approaching a crushing situation. The impact of community transmission is increasing, healthcare capacity is exhausted, hospitals are affected and a significant number of healthcare workers have been infected.

As Bangladesh is a developing

country, the Covid-19 pandemic can increase morbidity and mortality. To minimise the devastating effects of the pandemic on the country, application of risk assessment and emergency management should be done to evaluate the magnitude and likelihood of potential losses and to also provide a full understanding of the causes and impact of those losses.

This new threat reveals challenges in managing health risks, deaths, sufficient necessary drugs, healthcare equipment like ventilator support systems, oxygen supply, ICU beds, necessary health workers, enough test facilities, psychosocial issues, food system, economic stability, increased

political stresses, disasters, and other health impacts. The Covid-19 situation in Bangladesh can be compared to an iceberg because what we are seeing is only the tip.

Suggested steps:

· Risk assessment indicators along with sub-indicators should be developed for the convenience of decision- and policy-makers on healthcare issues -- both on prevention and curing aspects of Covid-19.

· Assessment and reporting systems for cases should be developed and standardised at an international level, particularly to measure all dimensions of health before, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic in

Bangladesh.

· Consideration for people with knowledge and experience in risk assessment and emergency management, and disaster management policies and programmes for the implementation of national plans and policies should be ensured.

Above all, we know that prevention is always better than cure. Awareness among all, not just for self but also for the safety of near and dear ones is most crucial during this global fight against the deadly virus.

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Kennedy terms Pakistani drive genocide

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As to the 20-year Soviet-Indian friendship treaty signed a week ago, the senator said he saw nothing inconsistent with India's stated policy of non-alignment and did not think it was "in any way disadvantageous to US friendship with India". As a matter of fact, he added, Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh had indicated that India was willing to sign a similar treaty with the United States.

Kennedy also planned to visit both East and West Pakistan and had obtained a Pakistani visa. But after his arrival in India on August 10, 1971, the Pakistan government cancelled the visit, saying it would serve no useful purpose because "the partisan statements he made on arrival in India showed how deeply he imbibed

Indian propaganda".

PAKISTAN ASSAILED BEFORE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Pakistan government's action in Bangladesh was assailed before the UN sub-commission on human rights. John Salzberg, representing the International Commission of Jurists, said from all information available to the public and the sub-commission, including Pakistan government's own white paper, it was clear that there had been a consistent pattern of violation of human rights in Bangladesh.

The sub-commission, he urged, should either set up its own investigatory body or recommend its parent body the Commission on Human Rights for the setting up of such a body. The sub-commission should also call for a halt to the secret

trial of Bangabandhu, he said.

ROUNDUP OF REBELS IN DHAKA

The New York Times today reported that Pakistani troops made house-to-house sweeps through Dhaka over the weekend to thwart the attack by Bangladeshi guerrillas. According to rebel posters and handbills, guerrilla attacks were planned to coincide with observances of Pakistan's National Day.

Sounds of shooting were heard in several parts of the city, added the report.

It was further reported that institutions of higher education, which reopened August 2 for the first time since March, remained virtually deserted. According to the latest unofficial tally, at Dhaka University, which normally had about 6,000

students, there were 32; at Chittagong, 30 of 2,000 and at Mymensingh Agricultural University six of 1,200, disclosed the New York Times.

COMMISSION FORMED TO MANAGE BANGLADESH GOVT RESOURCES

The Bangladesh Government-in-exile today formed a three-member commission to oversee the management and distribution of financial resources brought to the headquarters from different parts of Bangladesh. Abdul Hannan Chowdhury was made the chairman of the commission. The other two members were Joy Gobinda Bhowmik and S Barua

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England ends self-isolation for Covid contacts

AFP, London

Fully vaccinated people in England will from today no longer be required to self-isolate if they have had close contact with a coronavirus case, as restrictions continue to be eased.

Instead of self-isolating, those double jabbed and the under 18s will be advised to get a free polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test if they are identified as being in close contact with a case.

The change was announced last month, as part of step four of the government's plan to open up after more than a year of rolling lockdowns. Anyone who tests positive

following the PCR test will still be legally required to self-isolate.

Britain is still battling another wave of the virus, with the emergence of the Delta variant.

Although cases are down around 50 percent from their peak, the number of people catching the disease has been rising slightly over the last two weeks, with around 100 people a day dying from the disease.

Britain has been one of the countries worst hit by the virus, recording more than 130,000 fatalities, but has been able to ease restrictions thanks to a successful vaccine rollout, with 75 percent of adults receiving both doses. Before today, people who were

"pinged" by the National Health Service app, warning them that they had come into close contact with a positive case, were required to self-isolate for 10 days.

England officially fully opened up again on July 19, but millions were subsequently contacted by the country's test-and-trace scheme, forcing them to stay away from family, friends and the workplace.

The so-called "pingdemic", which even grounded Prime Minister Boris Johnson, severely disrupted businesses and critical services, hampering efforts to kickstart the ailing economy. "Asking the close contacts of

people with Covid-19 to self-isolate has played a critical role in helping us get this virus under control, and millions of people across the UK have made enormous sacrifices by doing this," said health minister Sajid Javid.

"Getting two doses of a vaccine has tipped the odds in our favour and allowed us to safely reclaim our lost freedoms, and from Monday [today] we can take another huge step back towards our normal lives," he added.

Removing self-isolation for under 18s comes three weeks before thousands of pupils and students return to school and college, and they will no longer be required to socially distance.

Rescuers rush to free 19 trapped miners in NW China

AFP, Beijing

Rescuers in northwestern China yesterday worked to free 19 trapped coal miners, hours after their site was flooded by mud in an accident that has already killed one worker.

The flooding happened around noon Saturday at the Chaidai'er coal mine in Qinghai province, state media reported.

Mining accidents are common in China, where the industry has a poor safety record and regulations are often weakly enforced.

At Chaidai'er, 21 people were working underground at the time of the accident, and one person was rescued with injuries, China's emergency management ministry said.

Another was found dead, with the remaining trapped in the mine.

Qinghai authorities said in a press conference yesterday that the mine had been ordered to suspend production at the start of the month because of "severe safety hazards", the official Xinhua news agency reported.

More than 200 rescuers have been rushed to the scenes, and local authorities have vowed a thorough investigation and an improvement in coal mine safety.

In January, a group of miners were trapped underground for about two weeks in China's eastern Shandong province.

And in April, workers were stranded in another mine in the northwestern Xinjiang region, after flooding cut power and disrupted communications.

187 more die

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so far.

At least 14,18,902 people have so far tested positive for the virus across the country.

Of the yesterday's deceased, 101 were men and 86 women. Of them, 71 died in Dhaka, 39 in Chattogram, 21 in Khulna, 13 each in Sylhet and Rangpur, 12 in Rajshahi, 10 in Mymensingh and eight in Barishal divisions.

Death toll rises

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percent of Haiti's healthcare system, leaving island authorities and the international humanitarian community with a colossal challenge.

The latest quake comes just over a month after President Jovenel Moise was assassinated in his home by a team of gunmen, shaking a country already battling poverty, spiraling gang violence and Covid-19.

Police say they have arrested 44 people in connection with the killing, including 12 Haitian police officers, 18 Colombians who were allegedly part of the commando team, and two Americans of Haitian descent.

Two new

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The researchers have since determined that two of those specimens were from previously unknown species, which they have named Silutitan sinensis -- "silu" meaning "Silk Road" in Mandarin -- and Hamititan xinjiangensis, a nod to the region where it was found. Both incorporate the Greek word "titan," which means "giant," in reference to their size.

The Silutitan specimen is estimated to be over 20 meters (65.6 feet) long, while the Hamititan specimen was 17 meters (55.77 feet) long. That makes the dinosaurs almost as large as blue whales, which range from 23 to 30 meters (75 to 98 feet), depending on the hemisphere they're located in.

The researchers, from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the National Museum of Brazil, published their findings in Scientific Reports, part of the Nature family of journals.

The fossil fragments were dated to the early Cretaceous period, about 120 to 130 million years ago. Both new species both belong to the sauropod family, a group of plant-eating dinosaurs known for their signature long necks, and that were the largest animals to ever walk the earth.

Apart from one pterosaur species and a theropod tooth, these two dinosaurs are also the first vertebrates reported in this region, "increasing the diversity of the fauna as well as the information on Chinese sauropods," said the study.

The third specimen that researchers studied was not a new species, but may have been a somphospondylan sauropod, a group of dinosaurs that lived from the late Jurassic to late Cretaceous periods.

Researchers have made a number of discoveries in China over the past few decades, shedding more light on the diversity of sauropods in East Asia, said the study -- though there is still debate over the relationships between species and their taxonomical classification, and where they fall in the dinosaur family tree.