

BANGLADESH UPDATE

694
New cases in 24hrs

15,59,452
Total cases

27,614
Deaths

15,20,296
Recoveries

GLOBAL UPDATE

4,826,779
Deaths

236,410,457
Total cases

Dhaka worst-affected in world by urban heat

Says study unveiled by The Guardian

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka is the worst-affected city in the world by deadly urban heat, according to a study published by The Guardian yesterday.

Between 1983 and 2016, during which the city's population rose dramatically, Bangladesh's capital experienced an increase of 575 million person-days (the cumulative population exposed to cumulative heat in a given year for a particular place) of extreme heat, the study said.

Other cities that underwent rapid population growth include Shanghai and Guangzhou in China, Yangon in Myanmar, Bangkok in Thailand and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, the Guardian quoted the study as saying.

According to the study, exposure to deadly urban heat has tripled since the 1980s, and now affects nearly a quarter of the world's population.

Scientists put the worrying trend down to the combination of rising temperatures and growing numbers of people living in urban areas, and warned of its potentially fatal impact.

In recent decades, hundreds of millions of people have moved from rural areas to cities, which are now home to more than half the world's

population. Amid surfaces such as concrete and asphalt -- which trap and concentrate heat -- and little vegetation, temperatures are generally higher in urban areas.

"This has broad effects," said Cascade Tuholske, the lead author of the study published in the journal PNAS and a postdoctoral researcher at Columbia University's Earth Institute.

"It increases morbidity and mortality. It impacts people's ability to work, and results in lower economic output. It exacerbates pre-existing health conditions."

The study used infrared satellite imagery and maximum daily heat and humidity readings from more than 13,000 cities from 1983 to 2016 to determine the number of people exposed to days in a year that exceeded 30C (86F) on the wet-bulb globe temperature scale (which takes into account the multiplier effect of high humidity) in an area. They matched the findings with the cities' populations over the same period.

The study found that the number of person-days soared from 40 billion a year in 1983 to 119 billion in 2016, representing a threefold increase. In 2016, 1.7 billion people were subjected to extreme heat on multiple days.



An artist puts the finishing touches to an idol of Hindu Goddess Durga at Dhormoshoba Temple at Khulna city's Picture Palace intersection yesterday. The largest religious festival of the Hindus will be celebrated from next week at 1,003 temples in Khulna district, including 132 in the city. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Facebook outage hits

FROM PAGE 1

according to NetBlocks, a website that tracks internet outages and their impact on the global economy. Facebook's stocks dropped by about 5.5 percent, and CEO Mark Zuckerberg lost nearly \$7 billion.

The local small businesses and advertisers that rely heavily on the social networking platform also suffered.

F-commerce entrepreneurs in Bangladesh lost 25 percent orders in 24 hours ending at 9:40pm yesterday, claimed Jahangir Alam Shovon, general manager of e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-Cab).

He said customers in Bangladesh place about 2 lakh orders online every day and the average basket size is Tk 2,000. A large number of the orders is placed through Facebook and products are also sold on the platform.

The exact number of the country's F-commerce (Facebook commerce) entrepreneurs is not available, but sources in the digital commerce sector say the number is about 5 lakh.

F-commerce has been thriving in the country for the last few years, thanks to a huge Facebook user base of nearly 4 crore.

With the option available for boosting sales by paying Facebook to show products tailored to each prospective customer's interests, many youths, especially women entrepreneurs, started selling goods using the platform.

F-commerce grew rapidly after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic last year as many who lost jobs ventured into businesses to sell products ranging from fresh and organic vegetables, homemade food to clothing and lifestyle items.

The social media platform has become a boon for thousands of prospective small and micro entrepreneurs as it provides them with the scope to do business without having an actual store that requires a good amount of capital.

Many entrepreneurs were worried after being cut off from their customers, said Nasima Akter Nisha, president of Women and e-Commerce Forum (WE), a Facebook page where women with different skills can showcase their products or services for sale.

"Their fear is justified as they solely

depend on Facebook for their business. Facebook going down for a day means losing business for that day."

She, however, said the impact of the outage on business was minimal as Facebook restored services within several hours.

"Local F-commerce entrepreneurs are relieved to see that the service is back. We don't want to see this happen again. They should think about an alternative. If Facebook is down, they have no other place to go as they don't have any website or brick-and-mortar shops," said Nasima.

Nusrat Jahan, who runs Facebook page "Pasar Crafts", said she uploaded ads on popular women's wears, and "Katan" saris on Monday afternoon to attract customers ahead of Durga Puja.

The outage took away nearly one-day of her business opportunity. "Customers usually enquire within two hours after uploading an advertisement when the internet connection is smooth and there is no other disruption. It was different this time," she Nusrat who has been running the page for the last one and half years.

Tania Sultana, owner of Facebook page "Biraz Bou" which sells traditional Jamdani saris, first thought it was a local glitch.

"But when I learnt that it was Facebook's problem, I was afraid because everything -- from promotion of products to taking orders -- of my business is done using Facebook," she said.

AKM Fahim Mashroor, CEO of e-commerce platform AjkerDeal, said losses of businesses were not significant as it was night in Bangladesh when the outage happened.

"But if such a problem continues for a longer period or for a few days in future, then the e-commerce would also face huge damages as 50 percent of e-commerce business in Bangladesh depends on Facebook," he said.

"This is a warning to e-commerce businesses who rely heavily on Facebook," said Farhana A Rahman, senior vice president of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services.

She said e-commerce platforms should not rely only on Facebook, they should also focus on attracting customers using their own websites.

Judges ignoring

FROM PAGE 1

The HC imposed conditions on Mou in granting her bail in the case, saying the accused petitioner (Mou) must not, in future, engage in possessing or dealing in yaba and foreign liquor.

She must make herself available to the investigation as and when required, and during investigation of trial, she cannot tamper with the prosecution evidence by pressuring the witnesses, the HC said.

The HC judges also said accused Mou must cooperate in the trial sincerely without seeking any adjournment and she must not indulge in any criminal activity after being released on bail.

The breach of any condition will be a ground for cancelling her bail, the full text said.

Detectives on August 1 arrested Mou from her Mohammadpur home and seized 750 yaba pills and 12 bottles of foreign liquor from there.

On August 2, Metropolitan Magistrate Ashek Imam placed her on a remand for three days; on August 6, Metropolitan Magistrate Satyabrata Sikder placed her on remand for four days; and on August 10, Metropolitan Magistrate Abu Sufiyan Md Noman placed her on a two-day remand in the case filed against her with Mohammadpur Police Station.

On September 2, the HC bench sought explanation from two metropolitan magistrates Debrata Biswas and Atikul Islam, for placing actress Pori Moni on remand in multiple phases in a narcotics case.

The bench on September 15 expressed discontent at their explanations, saying that Debrata Biswas and Atikul Islam had "undermined" the HC. The bench on September 29 ordered the metropolitan magistrates to give further explanations to it by October 24.

Delayed by 100 months

FROM PAGE 1

Cost escalations and delays in development projects are common in the country and the prime minister expressed discontent over the issue on several occasions in the past.

More than 300 projects sought time extension last fiscal year.

Even yesterday, five of the nine project proposals placed before the Ecnc meeting were for time and cost revisions.

But action has hardly been taken against anyone for the delays and cost escalations, said officials concerned.

"The prime minister told us that no one would be spared. They will face action even if they have gone into retirement," Nasima Begum, member (socio economic infrastructure division) of the planning commission, told reporters after the meeting, which was presided over by the PM virtually from the Gono Bhaban.

Talking to The Daily Star later in the day, Prof Shamsul Hoque of Buet's civil engineering department said, "I am very happy that the prime minister has given such a directive. No one has been held accountable for project delays and cost escalations as yet."

He pointed out that poor feasibility study was the root cause of challenges faced during project implementation. Those responsible for such poor studies must be held accountable, he said.

The practice of changing project directors must be stopped as well. This practice prevents the authorities from holding project directors accountable.

Besides, officials in ministries or other supervising bodies must not take any undue benefits from any project. Because if they take such benefits, they will not be able to take action against those responsible, said Prof Shamsul.

THE MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL The government had approved the project to build Kushtia Medical College and Hospital between January 2012 and December 2014 at a cost of Tk 275.44 crore.

But no feasibility test was carried out before the project was approved. Even the land for the project was not selected at that time, according to an in-depth report of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) released in June last year.

Changes in the rate schedule, inclusion of new work and completion of incomplete work were cited as reasons for the second revision of the project, said officials

concerned.

The original deadline was extended to 2016 in two phases, without increasing the project costs. But when the project went through the first revision in 2018, the cost rose to Tk 611.08 crore and December 2019 was set as the deadline.

The project had seen only 34 percent physical progress until 2019 when the second revision was submitted, which had remained pending for more than one year.

"Mismanagement was found from the outset," read the IMED report.

The report also mentioned that bamboo and wood was being used, instead of steel, for the construction of a building. On January 17, 2019, a portion of that building collapsed, killing one worker and injuring 10 others.

In its report, IMED mentioned 25 weak points in implementation.

The medical college has been admitting 50 students every year since 2012. Its academic activities have been ongoing in some buildings without medical equipment.

No equipment could be procured as the construction work was not complete, said officials.

In January this year, when the second revision was placed before the Ecnc for approval, the prime minister directed the authorities concerned to investigate the delay and cost hike, instead of giving a go-ahead to the revised proposal.

A top official of the planning ministry, who is aware of the investigation, said the probe committee found project work "inconsistent with planning discipline" and held both the health department and public works department responsible.

"It is the responsibility of the ministries concerned to find out the responsible persons and take action against them," the official told The Daily Star, wishing not to be named.

The official said the project was approved in 2012 when the rate schedule of 2011 was available but the project cost was estimated following the rate schedule of 2008.

As a result, when the project authorities went to implement the project, they fell short of money, and curtailed work scope, he said.

Till 2016, the deadline of the project was changed twice but no one felt the necessity to change the rate schedule, he said.

After yesterday's meeting, Planning Minister MA Mannan said people, even local lawmakers, expressed discontent over the long delay.

The IMED secretary has already

visited the project site and submitted a report, which has already been placed before the prime minister, he said.

"The prime minister asked us to take action against the real culprits," he said.

Nasima Begum said the prime minister asked them to take action as per the recommendations of the probe report.

Several persons, whose names appeared in the probe report, have already gone into retirement.

"Action can be taken against them [retired persons] under the PDR [Public Demands Recovery] Act if money is involved," she said.

OTHER DELAYED PROJECTS

Ecnc yesterday also approved a proposal on the second revision of a project for the construction of the Khulna-Mongla port rail line.

The project to construct the 64.75km rail line was taken in 2010. The work was supposed to be completed within three years.

The project's physical work did not kick off even after six years of the approval but the cost rose to Tk 3,801 crore, 120 percent higher than the original estimates.

The project authorities then sought another Tk 459.27 crore and a one-and-a-half-year extension of the project's previous deadline in June this year. As of August, the project witnessed 86.72 percent progress.

Another project got approval yesterday in Sayedabad Water Treatment Project (Phase-3).

The original cost of the project was Tk 4597.36 crore and it was supposed to be implemented between July 2015 and June 2020. Now the cost would be Tk 7515.02 and the new deadline is June 2025.

Mamun-Al-Rashid, member (physical infrastructure division) of the planning commission, said the project witnessed only 2.4 percent physical work progress in the last seven years.

Complexities over funding by development partners and land acquisition mainly caused the delay, he said.

The prime minister yesterday also directed the authorities concerned to take strict measures so that industries set up on the river banks cannot dispose their untreated waste into the rivers.

She also directed to use money from the foreign currency reserve if the authorities failed to manage funds from development partners.

[Our Kushtia correspondent Amanur Aman contributed to this report]

Covid-related school absences increase by two-thirds in England

REUTERS, London

School absences in England related to COVID-19 jumped by two-thirds in the last two weeks of September, according to government data which could raise concerns about further disruption to education despite a pledge to keep schools open.

Around one in seven secondary school students were off for either coronavirus-related or other reasons, the Department for Education said, and the age group has the highest prevalence of infections in the country.

Jatiya Party hits

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After the news spread inside the party, some senior leaders held a meeting with the party Co-chairman Kazi Firoz Rashid on Monday.

They expressed outrage over the move to appoint Patwari as the secretary general, a JP leader present at the meeting told The Daily Star yesterday.

Preferring to remain anonymous, the JP leader said senior leaders at the meeting spoke in favour of appointing one of them to the post of secretary general.

JP Co-chairmen ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader, Moshir Rahman Ranga, Mujibul Haque Chunnun, Syed Abu Hossain Babla, Additional Secretary General (Khulna) Shahidur Rahman, Presidium Member Shaiful Islam, and Advisory Council Member Zahurul Alam were among those present at the meeting.

"Many senior leaders came to my office after news spread that Shameem Haider Patwari may be made secretary general of the party. They expressed their disappointment and anger," Firoz Rashid told different media outlets on Monday.

"Shameem Haider Patwari has been in Jatiya Party politics for two or three years. If he is made secretary general, the senior leaders will not accept him," a senior JP leader, wishing not to be named, told The Daily Star.

According to party sources, two former secretaries general Ruhul Amin Hawlader and Moshir Rahman Ranga, Syed Abu Hossain Babla, lawmaker from Dhaka-4 (Shyam-pur-Demra), Additional Secretary General Shahidur Rahman and Shameem Haider Patwari are interested in becoming the secretary general of the main opposition.

JP Chairman GM Quader told different media outlets on Monday that the post of secretary general is an administrative post in the party and according to the JP's constitution, it is below the post of chief patron and co-chairman of the party.

"I don't understand why the co-chairmen of the party are so greedy for this position."

Party sources said Shameem has drawn attention for his active participation and knowledgeable speeches inside and outside parliament on various issues.

"Young voters may be attracted to Jatiya Party if he is made the secretary general. The party's image may also improve as he is a clean-image politician," said a JP presidium member.

Considering these aspects, the JP high-ups are thinking of making him secretary general, the JP leader said wishing not to be named.

GM Quader said according to Article 20/1 (1) A of the party's constitution, the chairman has the power to appoint anyone to the post of secretary general.

We'll open fire to stop arms

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MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

Momen said two lakh Rohingyas came to Bangladesh in 1982 and they were repatriated through negotiations. "In 1992, another 2.53 lakh Rohingyas arrived and 2.36 lakh of them returned while others were taken away by UNHCR [relocated from Bangladesh]. This time [the last influx since August 2017] the number is bigger -- 11 lakh."

Referring to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's statement delivered on Monday, he said, "We are talking about repatriation. But several international agencies are talking of long-term rehabilitation. There has been no conflict in Rakhine for the

last four years; yet they [agencies] do not speak about repatriation. All they [agencies] talk about is keeping them in good conditions and about their human rights here.

"They [agencies] are raising absurd demands like giving Rohingyas the right to buy land, giving them employment opportunities and proper schooling. But these are not acceptable. Their [agencies'] intention is that if they [Rohingyas] stay here, their [agencies'] jobs will be there for an extended period. They are receiving a lot of money from around the world, and we don't know how that money is being spent," the minister said.

Regarding the recent murder of Rohingya leader Mohib Ullah in a Cox's Bazar camp, Momen said he was

an educated man and his only goal was to return home.

"He used to say they have no future here and must go back home [Myanmar] for a better future. It's sad that he was killed. We want to investigate the incident to identify the killers and they must be punished."

Speaking to journalists at a press conference at the Gono Bhaban on Monday, PM Hasina said keeping Rohingyas in Bangladesh has apparently become a business for some organisations.

"I'm very sorry to say it seems that keeping Rohingyas has become a business to some organisations. If they [Rohingya] are not here, they [NGO officials] will lose jobs," she said.