

INTERNATIONAL

NOAA STUDY
Landfills a
key source of
methane

REUTERS, London

Decomposing food waste is releasing thousands of tonnes of planet-warming methane gas at landfills in Buenos Aires, Delhi, Mumbai, and Lahore, new research finds.

With about 570 million tonnes of the greenhouse gas emitted every year from both industrial and natural processes, the concentration of methane in the atmosphere has been increasing at a record pace, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In some countries, the biggest source is agricultural fields and farm animals — particularly cows but also livestock and chickens. In the United States, the oil and gas industry is largely responsible.

Yet there is another major global source — garbage.

With data from a satellite-mounted detector showing high methane levels over cities in India, Pakistan and Argentina, a team of scientists looked more closely to pin down the emissions sources.

A landfill in Mumbai, for example, was putting out about 9.8 tonnes of methane per hour, or 85,000 tonnes per year, according to the study's findings.

Landfill waste — responsible for about 11% of global methane emissions — is expected to increase about 70% by 2050, according to the World Bank.

Methane is 80 times more powerful than CO₂ over a 20-year period.

Satellite technologies are a boost to scientists, said Jean Bogner, a University of Illinois environmental scientist not involved in the research. This new approach helps to "adequately capture site-specific emissions, which for landfills can vary by orders of magnitude" depending on everything from soil conditions to whether mitigation measures are in place.



A wildfire burns in Manteigas, central Portugal, on Wednesday night. Wildfires tore through parts of France, Spain and Portugal yesterday. The head of the European Space Agency urged immediate action to fight climate change.

PHOTO: AFP

China threat remains
Says Taiwan president

AGENCIES

China's threat of force is undiminished, Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said yesterday, even though Beijing's largest ever military drills around the island seemed to be scaling down.

Furious about a visit to Taiwan last week by US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, China launched ballistic missiles and deployed multiple aircraft and warships in recent days to simulate sea and air attacks.

China said on Wednesday it would keep up patrols but had "completed various tasks" around Taiwan, signalling a possible end to the war games even while keeping up pressure.

In a white paper published the same day, China's Taiwan Affairs Office said Beijing would "not renounce the use of force" against its neighbour and reserved "the option of taking all necessary measures". "We are ready to create vast space for peaceful reunification, but we will leave no room for separatist activities in any form," it said in the paper.

Taiwan has also been conducting relatively small-scale, annual exercises, scheduled before the flare-up and aimed at preparing to repel an invasion.

"At present, the threat of Chinese military

force has not decreased," Tsai told air force officers, according to a statement from her office.

Taiwan will not escalate conflict nor provoke disputes, her office quoted her as saying, adding: "We will firmly defend our sovereignty and national security, and adhere to the line of defence of democracy and freedom."

A source briefed on the matter told Reuters that the number of warships close to the Taiwan Strait's median line, an unofficial buffer, was "greatly reduced" from previous days.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said in a statement it had detected 21 Chinese military aircraft and six Chinese naval ships in and around the Taiwan Strait yesterday, of which 11 planes had crossed over the median line.

Taiwan has lived under the threat of Chinese invasion since 1949 when the defeated Republic of China nationalist government fled to the island after Mao Zedong's Communist Party won a civil war.

China says its relations with Taiwan are an internal matter and it reserves the right to bring the island under its control, by force if necessary. Taiwan's democratically-elected government says the People's Republic of China has never governed the island so has no right to decide its future or claim it for themselves.

Return Kabul's
frozen assets
Economists urge US

AFP, Washington

Several dozen prominent US and international economists urged the United States Wednesday to hand over to Afghanistan \$7 billion in central bank reserves frozen when the Taliban seized control of the country nearly one year ago.

"We are deeply concerned by the compounding economic and humanitarian catastrophes unfolding in Afghanistan, and, in particular, by the role of US policy in driving them," 71 economists and development experts said in a letter to US President Joe Biden and US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

"Seventy percent of Afghan households are unable to meet their basic needs," they wrote. "Some 22.8 million people face acute food insecurity, and three million children are at risk of malnutrition."

This is worsened by the refusal of the United States to return to the Afghan central bank the \$7 billion in foreign exchange reserves, as well as \$2 billion blocked by Britain, Germany, and the UAE, they said.

Tell people why fuel prices

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for importing medicines without government approval or licence; marketing, stockpiling, selling or showcasing drugs without registration; stealing and selling government's drugs, said Cabinet Secretary Anwarul.

The existing act allows a maximum punishment of three-year jail and Tk 2 lakh fine, he said.

The meeting gave the final

endorsement to the draft of the State Acquisition and Tenancy (Amendment) Act-2022, bringing a minor change to the existing law to reduce the number of pending cases.

The cabinet approved in principle the draft of the National Industry Policy, 2022. It cleared the proposal for ratification of two agreements to be signed with Saudi Arabia and Serbia.

Lobbying on for top posts

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incumbent chief of the Special Branch of police, might be made the next IGP.

This is because the 12th BCS batch officials will reach close to their retirement age within the possible one-year contract period of Benazir.

CID chief Mahbubur Rahman went into PRL on July 30. After he reached the retirement age on July 31 last year, the government reappointed him on a one-year contract. The position, which is of the rank of additional inspector general, has been vacant for more than a week.

The sources said names of two officials — Md Atiqul Islam of 12th BCS batch and Mohammad Ali Miah of 15th BCS batch — were being discussed as CID chief. An official order will be issued soon in this regard.

Md Moinur Rahman Chowdhury, additional IG (admin) of PHQ, will reach retirement age on September 2. SM Ruhul Amin, a 12th BCS batch official from Gopalganj, is thought to be the favourite to replace Moinur.

Mallick Faqru might be appointed the next Rab chief if incumbent DG Mamun is made the police chief.

However, the name of Md Mahbubur Rahman, an officer of 15th BCS batch, is also coming to the fore as the next Rab chief.

DMP Commissioner Shafiqul

Islam's one-year contract is going to end on September 12. Habibur Rahman, deputy inspector general of Dhaka Range, may replace him. An official of 17th BCS batch, Habibur hails from Gopalganj.

But a group of police officials is lobbying for Mahbubur Rahman to take over as DMP chief. Mahbubur, who hails from Jamalpur, is now serving Industrial Police.

In a major reshuffle of the top police admin, 50 SPs were transferred and given new posts on August 3. Forty of them were transferred to as many districts in what officials said was the largest reshuffle of SPs in a decade.

Nurul Huda, former inspector general of police, yesterday said reaching the retirement age does not mean that all officials are leaving the force.

"Some of the officials may be reappointed based on their service records and competency," he told The Daily Star.

It is quite normal that if a top post in the police admin falls vacant, changes would be made to seven-eight posts, Huda added.

Asked if the transfer of 40 SPs ahead of the next parliamentary election would provoke a controversy, he said the election was still far away as it was not going to be held before December next year.

The former IGP said it was a routine transfer of SPs.

Facebook use
plunges

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The report said some 95 percent of the teens surveyed said they use YouTube, compared with 67 percent saying they are TikTok users.

Just 32 percent of teens surveyed said they log on to Facebook — a big drop from the 71 percent who reported being users during a similar survey some seven years ago.

Once the place to be online, Facebook has become seen as a venue for older folks with young drawn to social networks where people express themselves with pictures and video snippets.

About 62 percent of the teens said they use Instagram, owned by Facebook-parent Meta, while 59 percent said they used Snapchat, researchers stated.

"A quarter of teens who use Snapchat or TikTok say they use these apps almost constantly, and a fifth of teen YouTube users say the same," the report said.

In a bit of good news for Meta's business, its photo and video sharing service Instagram was more popular with US teens than it was in the 2014-2015 survey.

Meanwhile, less than a quarter of the teens surveyed said they ever use Twitter, the report said.

The study also confirmed what casual observers may have suspected, 95 percent of US teens say they have smartphones, while nearly as many of them have desktop or laptop computers.

And the share of teens who say they are online almost constantly has nearly doubled to 46 percent when compared to survey results from seven years ago, researchers noted.

The report was based on a survey of 1,316 US teens, ranging in age from 13 years old to 17 years old, conducted from mid-April to early May of this year, according to Pew.

Swiss envoy's claim

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information on its citizens' money deposited with Swiss banks.

The amount of money that individuals from around the world stashed in Swiss banks has decreased recently, she said.

However, according to the annual report published in June this year by Switzerland's central bank, the funds deposited by Bangladeshis in Swiss banks have increased by nearly 55 percent to 871.11 million Swiss francs year-on-year in 2021.

There are allegations that most of this money was earned illegally.

Chuard had further said Switzerland is committed to maintaining international standards, and it is possible to exchange information with the consent of the two parties.

"We have informed the government about what needs to be done to get the information, but we have not been asked for any specific information."

Contacted, the spokesperson

in response to the foreign minister's allegations, said they cannot make a comment on the matter immediately.

HC SEEKS ANSWER
Meanwhile, in another development, the High Court wanted to know whether the government and the ACC had sought specific information from the Swiss authorities on Bangladeshis who deposited money with banks in Switzerland.

It ordered Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik and Anti-Corruption Commission lawyer Khurshid Alam to update this court on the issue by next Sunday — the same day the court will pass further orders on the matter.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khozir Hayat passed the order on a suo motu (voluntary) move following reports on different newspapers, including The Daily Star, regarding the Swiss ambassador's statement.

Contacted, DAG Amin Uddin

Manik said he will enquire the Bangladesh Bank and Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) about this issue and inform the HC.

On February 28 last year, the bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Mohi Uddin Shamim, in response to a writ petition, wanted to know the names, addresses, and current status of Bangladeshis who deposited laundered money with overseas banks.

The court asked the authorities and the ACC to provide details of such individuals and organisations by March 30 last year. But little progress has been made since then.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, ACC lawyer Khurshid said the commission has officially sought information from the foreign ministry, Bangladesh Bank and BFIU about the Bangladeshis who deposited money with foreign banks.

"The ACC is yet to get any information from them in this regard."

Regulator's mandate

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oil prices through government orders. Ever since a specific law was enacted in 2003, all the orders that the ministry issued regarding the increase of the prices of any petroleum products can be deemed illegal. These are punishable offences," he said.

Barua said when an order with regard to raising the prices of petroleum was issued in November last year, CAB filed a writ petition saying that the ministry does not have the authority to increase the prices arbitrarily.

The BERC never wrote to the ministry asking for the rationale behind hiking the price, he said.

"Now, you can ask what difference does it make whether the BERC or the ministry sets the price since both are state organisations. The difference is fundamental. Since there is a law in effect, the government must comply with it. But the government apparently does not obey the law. This is the reality and is a crime as well," Barua said.

He said when the ministry sets the

price, it leaves no scope for the public to give their input. When the hike is done through the BERC, however, the commission has to listen to stakeholders and arrange a public hearing before setting the prices — a practice that was followed recently for adjusting gas prices.

"But when it comes from the ministry, they [the ministry] can increase the price however they see fit, and they don't need to explain it," he added.

On August 6, the day the hiked prices came into effect, when asked whether it was a violation, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid told this newspaper, "It's a violation of law if we consider it in one way. But another logic says it isn't."

"Since the market is now volatile, the prices needed to be increased several times. Now if we arrange a hearing every time before raising prices, it would create problems. There would be difficulties if we were to give a 90-day time before increasing the prices."

BNP calls

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and the Election Commission has to be reconstituted for forming a new government and parliament of people through a credible election."

He said the BNP from August 22 will spread the anti-government movement to villages with programmes like rallies and demonstrations.

BNP's Dhaka south and north city units arranged the rally protesting the latest hike in fuel prices and the power crisis.

Thousands of leaders and activists of BNP and its associated bodies started thronging the venue since 10:00am, blocking both lanes of the VIP road, causing immense suffering to commuters.

Fakhrul said people were facing tough times as prices of essentials, including rice, pulses and edible oil, were going up.

"On the other hand, the electricity crisis deepening. The ordinary people are the worst affected by the fuel price hike as the prices of all essentials are increasing further."

The BNP leader said the government did not take any step to explore gas only to plunder public money in the name of importing LNG and LPG. "Power tariffs have been increased repeatedly because of the import of gas by their own people."

100 DETAINED FROM BUSES
Police yesterday stopped three buses in the capital's Uttara and detained at least 100 people, said sources.

The detainees were going to join the BNP's rally in Nayapaltan from Gazipur. They were taken to two police stations in Uttara.

Md Morshed Alam, additional deputy commissioner of DMP's Uttara Zone, told The Daily Star that police did not arrest anyone from buses.

"We conducted drives. We released all the detainees as we did not find anything suspicious," he added.

Bad loans

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Under the BB's moratorium in 2020, borrowers were not considered defaulters even when they missed instalments for an entire year.

The moratorium has been withdrawn, but the borrower-friendly repayment rules remain.

Ahsan reckons that borrowers are under a lot of pressure as they now have to pay their pending and current instalments, which is why many of them have been defaulting on their instalments.

The BB has recently relaxed the loan rescheduling policy to regularise default loans, allowing the wilful defaulters to give a lower amount in down payment, a portion of outstanding loans, he said.

In such a situation, bad loans will decrease to some extent in the coming days, but it will not bring any good news for banks as they will not recover their money, Ahsan said.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the economy was going through a tough time and the scale of corruption was also on the rise.

"Both Bangladesh Bank and the government should make concerted efforts to bring back discipline to the banking sector," she said.

Bad loans in nine state-run banks stood at Tk 59,623 crore as of June this year, which is 21.7 percent more than the amount six months ago.

Forty-one private banks had defaulted loans of Tk 62,677.5 crore, up 21.6 percent from December last year, while the bad loans in nine foreign banks increased to Tk 4,194 crore from Tk 2,785 crore in December.