

# INTERNATIONAL

## Antarctic sea ice cover at record low Says EU monitor

AFP, Paris

Sea ice in Antarctica shrank to the smallest area on record in February for the second year in a row, continuing a decade-long decline, the European Union's climate monitoring service said Tuesday.

On February 16, the ocean surface covered by ice around the frozen continent shrank to 2.09 million square kilometres (nearly 800,000 square miles), the lowest level since satellite records began, according to figures provided to AFP by the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S).

"Antarctic sea ice reached its lowest extent in the 45-year satellite data record," said Samantha Burgess, Deputy Director of C3S.

US government scientists confirmed a new record last month but indicated an even lower figure of 1.79 million sq km, a difference Copernicus attributed to "different sea ice retrieval algorithms".

Sea ice concentrations during the



southern hemisphere summer were well below average in all sectors of the Southern Ocean.

Startlingly, the record lows this year and in 2022 are about 30 percent below the 1981-2010 average.

"These low sea ice conditions may have important implications for the stability of Antarctic ice shelves and ultimately for global sea level rise," said Burgess.

"Polar ice caps are a sensitive indicator of the climate crisis."

Melting sea ice has no discernible impact on sea levels because the ice is already in ocean water.

But diminished ice cover is nonetheless a major concern because it helps accelerate global warming, including in the Arctic region.

## Hasina, Modi

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face problems in transporting oil to the northern part of the country.

In the first year, 2.5 lakh tonnes of refined diesel will be imported, with the quantity progressively getting higher, said BPC officials.

It will be possible to supply 1,000 tonnes of diesel per day to 16 districts of the northern region.

Given the pipeline's 10-inch diameter, 10 lakh tonnes of diesel can be flown in annually, they said.

Fuel supply and management through the pipeline will be modern, up-to-date and easier. There will be cost and time savings and the supply will be uninterrupted even in adverse conditions, they said.

Currently, fuel oil imported by Bangladesh is first unloaded from ships at Chattogram or Mongla ports and then transported to other parts of the country by tankers, which is time-consuming and costlier.

And in transit, oil spills from the wagons, which is harmful to the environment.

Of the pipeline's total length of 131.57 km, 126.57 km is in Bangladesh part and 5 km is in India.

## Smiley, dimpled

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Saulnier had blasted it out of the temple. Egypt wants it back.

The country has unveiled major archaeological discoveries in recent months, primarily in the Saqqara necropolis south of Cairo but also in Giza, home of the only surviving structure of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

## Russians claim

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meeting, he said Russia was throwing more troops into the battle.

"They have suffered big losses, but at the same time we cannot rule out that Bakhmut may eventually fall in the coming days," Stoltenberg said.

Ukraine's president and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday called for the extension of a deal with Moscow that has allowed Kyiv to export grain via Black Sea ports during Russia's invasion.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said after talks with Guterres in Kyiv that the Black Sea Grain Initiative was necessary for the world, and the UN chief underlined the importance of the deal to global food security and food prices.



Anti-government demonstrators shout slogans during a protest organised by the "Women for Rights" group on the occasion of International Women's Day against the proposed tax reforms and the country's economic crisis, near the parliament building in Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Less than 1pc of world breathes clean air

Says study; Asian countries have the worst air quality

AGENCIES

Less than one percent of the world's population breathes pollution-free air – and Asian countries face some of the most severe health risks, according to a new study.

About 99.82 percent of the global land area is exposed to dangerous levels of particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5) that are above the safety limit recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO), according to the research published in *The Lancet Planetary Health*.

Only 0.001 percent of the world's population breathes air considered acceptable, it found. PM2.5 are tiny particles in the air that have been linked to

serious illnesses such as lung cancer and heart disease.

The study, conducted by scientists in Australia and China, used more than 5,000 monitoring stations worldwide and machine learning simulations, meteorological data and geographical factors to estimate global daily PM2.5 concentrations.

They found that on a global level, more than 70 percent of days in 2019 had daily PM2.5 concentrations exceeding 15 micrograms of gaseous pollutants per cubic metre, the WHO-recommended daily limit.

The study found that air quality is particularly worrisome in regions such as south Asia and east Asia, where more

than 90 percent of days had PM2.5 concentrations above the 15 microgram threshold, reports *Independent.co.uk*.

Short-term exposure, particularly a sudden increase, to PM2.5 is a leading contributor to the global burden of diseases and mortality, the study notes.

"I hope our study can change the minds of scientists and policymakers for the daily PM2.5 exposure. If we can make every day with clean air, of course, the long-term exposure of air pollution would be improved," said Yuming Guo, lead researcher and environmental health professor at Monash University.

The researchers also examined how air pollution changed over two decades up to 2019.

## DSA should

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special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

"The government would like to seek clarification as to what is actually being referred to as 'smear campaign,'" said the letter sent by the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh in Geneva.

The letter addressed the government's decision to deregister the NGO "Odhikar" and stated that the special procedure mechanism should not regard the legal position of the government about the NGO Odhikar as a 'smear campaign'.

"If the WGEID continues to accept allegations from Odhikar without assessing credibility, political motivation, evidentiary

standards and without considering the 'minimum elements' required for consideration of cases, it would only lead the WG to do injustice to their own valuable work for the protection of human rights that the member states entrusted them on," said the government's reply.

The letter urged the UN bodies "to understand the motive of its source which they are receiving the information from," stating that in absence of that, the government will assume that the UN "wishes to pre-judge the accuracy and veracity of the allegations".

"Indeed, Mr Adilur Rahman Khan is inherently biased towards a political party – BNP. Does it then suggest that Mr Adilur Rahman Khan's criminal activities should have been overlooked only because he has a political background?" the letter asked.

## Bangladesh, int'l partners

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The UN Refugee Agency and partners called on the international community to redouble efforts for sustained support for the Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi host communities.

In a statement, UNHCR said, "They [the Rohingyas] are desperate to return to their homes in Myanmar, which are currently out of reach, and instead live in extremely overcrowded, and sometimes dangerous conditions in refugee camps, relying almost entirely on humanitarian assistance for their survival."

Women and children, who make up more than 75 percent of the targeted refugee population, face higher risks of abuse, exploitation, and gender-based violence, it added.

Since the onset of this humanitarian crisis in 2017, the Bangladesh government and local communities, with aid agencies, have

been quick to respond to arriving refugees in what remains the world's largest refugee camp, it said.

"However, as global displacement continues to rise, so does the risk that the needs of Rohingya refugees and surrounding host communities will be forgotten."

With decreased funding, refugees stand to face even more challenges in their daily lives, the UNHCR said.

The lack of funds has already forced the World Food Programme to cut its lifesaving food assistance to all Rohingya living in the camps; despite concerted humanitarian efforts, 45 percent of Rohingya families are not eating a sufficiently healthy diet, and malnutrition is widespread.

"These ration cuts are likely to result in higher malnutrition rates, deteriorating health, school dropouts, increased incidents of child marriage, child labour and gender-based violence."

further attacks by fundamentalists.

On March 3, two people were killed and at least 30 others, including seven policemen, injured in a clash between law enforcers and supporters of Islamist organisations demonstrating against the Ahmadiyya community demanding cancellation of the three-day-long Jalsa Salana, an annual gathering of the members of the Ahmadiyya community.

Besides, the situation is slowly becoming normal in the panic-stricken Panchagarh town. Many shops and business institutions, which were kept shut after Friday's violence, resumed functioning yesterday.

The Ahmadiyya community people, however, said they are still passing days amid panic and fear of

## Govt looking into whether BNP had

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statement by BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamir that such successive incidents is suspicious, the minister said, "We agree with him. Such incidents are mysterious. We have to find out what is there ..."

Fakhrul in a statement on Tuesday said, "Suspicion in people's mind is growing as the nature of these explosions is almost same. So, it is necessary to investigate whether these incidents are planned."

Expressing deep sorrow at the death of people in the explosions in the capital's Siddikbazar and

Chattogram's Sitakunda, and at the damages in the massive fire at a Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar, Quader yesterday said the government was investigating to ascertain whether any person, organisation or group was behind those.

The home minister said they are also investigating to find out whether those incidents were acts of sabotage," he added.

Reiterating that the AL would continue to hold programmes, the party general secretary said, "The opposition is saying that these are counter programmes. But we are holding peace rallies as we are worried

that the BNP may cause an unrest.

"Since we are in power, it is our duty to protect the lives of the people. That's why we are standing by the people," he added.

Quader said the BNP previously "resorted to arson" after failing with its movement and that's why the AL is on alert now.

AL presidium members Kazi Zafarullah, Abdur Rahman, Quamrul Islam, and Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, joint general secretaries Mahbub ul-Alam Hanif, and AFM Bahauddin Nasim, and Office Secretary Biplob Barua were present at the meeting.

## Myanmar not willing to take Rohingyas back

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Sheikh Hasina said Bangladesh gave shelter to Rohingyas – the victims of persecution, murder and rape in Myanmar – on humanitarian grounds.

Replying to a question about improving the situation of Rohingyas, the prime minister said: "When the Rohingya persecution started in Myanmar, Rohingyas were subjected to torture, murder and rape... we felt sorry for the Rohingyas... we opened the border... we allowed them to come. Besides, we provide shelter and treatment for all of them from the

homeland."

"Unfortunately, they are not responding positively. These people should go back to their own land," the PM said.

The prime minister said: "The international community is exerting pressure on Myanmar. But it is really difficult. We arranged accommodation for them in a

separate place. Bhasan Char is a good place, a good place to live... We have arranged good accommodation and excellent facilities for children there."

On living conditions in the Rohingya camps and the loss of shelter of more than 12,000 Rohingyas in the fire, she said infighting among Rohingya groups has worsened the condition in the camps.

"They (Rohingyas) are fighting each other. They engaged in different types of activities that include drugs, arms and human trafficking. They have conflicts among themselves," the PM added.

## Of buzzing flies, a raised hand

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not my friend."

Arif further said they were hoping Momin would be rescued alive the night before, but their hopes faded when Rajuk imposed restrictions citing the building was risky.

Meanwhile, the family of Mehedi Hasan Swapan still holds out hope. The man from Sonaimuri in Noakhali has two children aged eight and four, who traveled all the way to Dhaka to look for their father yesterday.

"We have not lost hope," said his brother.

The only reason that Ariful Haque Sunny, an employee at a shop of the ill-fated building, could be spotted and rescued is because he managed to free one arm and raise it above the debris.

He is currently being treated at DMCH with 19 others who were injured in the blast.

"Around 4:45pm, the ceiling and the walls began to collapse following a big blast. I can't remember much of what happened afterwards," Sunny

said.

Another victim, Md Tuhin, who is receiving treatment in the same ward, worked at a shoe-making shop in a building next to the one where the explosion took place.

"I heard a loud bang and suddenly the room went dark. Debris fell on my head, and I tried to make my way to the stairs. But I broke my leg as I stumbled."

Saiful Islam was working for a Sundarban Courier Service's outlet in the building's basement, when he heard a loud noise.

He initially feared that his computer had exploded.

Saiful recounted how he managed to climb over the wall and escape the building, only to see two bodies beside him when he fell to the floor.

Expressing gratitude for his survival, he felt as though he had been given a new lease of life.

Currently undergoing treatment in Ward 103 of DMCH, Saiful was taken to the hospital by his colleagues.

Jahangir Hossain and his brother

Khalilur Rahman were visiting a courier service at the Gulistan building. After completing their work, Khalil left the building but Jahangir was still inside when the explosion occurred.

Jahangir, with severe injuries, is now being treated at DMCH.

Khalil said, "After the blast, I was searching for my brother everywhere. Someone informed me that he had been taken to the hospital."

**Women first**

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The Taliban government adheres to an austere interpretation of Islam and has imposed a slew of restrictions on girls and women since seizing power in August 2021.

"It has been distressing to witness their methodical, deliberate, and systematic efforts to push Afghan women and girls out of the public sphere," Roza Otunbayeva, head of the UN mission in Afghanistan, said in a statement marking International Women's Day.