

PANDEMIC TALKS

No deal as deadline passes

AFP, Geneva

Countries trying to strike a landmark global agreement on handling future pandemics decided to keep negotiating for another fortnight after their deadline passed on Friday.

Scarred by the devastation caused by Covid-19 – which killed millions, shredded economies and crippled health systems – the World Health Organization's 194 member states have spent two years trying to hammer out binding commitments on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

The process was aimed at getting a deal finalised by the WHO's annual assembly which opens on May 27.

A final talks session in March got nowhere near consensus, so an additional fortnight of talks was crammed in. However, despite progress on several fronts, the talks



broke up on Friday without sealing a deal.

Despite a showing desire for commitments aimed at preventing another Covid-style disaster, big differences have emerged between country blocs on how to achieve them.

The talks were held behind closed doors at the WHO headquarters in Geneva.

The main disputes revolve around access and equity: access to pathogens detected within countries and to pandemic-fighting products such as vaccines produced from that knowledge; and equitable distribution of counter-pandemic tests, treatments and jabs, along with the means to produce them.



Palestinian boys injured in an Israeli air attack react in the yard of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on May 11, 2024.

PHOTO: AFP

Afghan floods kill over 300

Many remain missing; thousands of houses destroyed

AFP, Laqay

More than 300 people were killed in flash floods that ripped through multiple Afghan provinces, the World Food Programme said yesterday, as authorities declared a state of emergency and rushed to rescue the injured.

Heavy rains on Friday sent roaring rivers of water and mud crashing through villages and across agricultural land in several provinces.

Survivors yesterday picked through muddy, debris littered streets and damaged buildings, an AFP journalist saw, as authorities and non-governmental groups deployed rescue workers and aid, warning that some areas had been cut off by the flooding.

Northern Baghlan province was one of the hardest hit, with more than 300 people killed there alone, and thousands of houses destroyed or damaged, according to WFP.

"On current information: in Baghlan province there are 311 fatalities, 2,011 houses destroyed and 2,800 houses damaged," Rana Deraz, a communications officer for the UN agency in Afghanistan, told AFP.

There were disparities between the death tolls provided by the government and humanitarian agencies.

The UN migration agency, the International Organization for Migration, said there were 218 deaths in Baghlan.

Abdul Mateen Qani, spokesman for the interior ministry, told AFP that 131 people had been killed in Baghlan, but that the government toll could rise.

"Many people are still missing," he said. Another 20 people were reported dead in northern Takhar province and two in neighbouring Badakhshan, he added.

Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said, "Hundreds of our fellow citizens have succumbed to these calamitous floods", in a statement posted to X earlier yesterday.

"Moreover, the deluge has wrought extensive devastation upon residential properties, resulting in significant financial losses," he added.

Rains on Friday caused heavy damage in Baghlan, Takhar and Badakhshan, as well as western Ghor and Herat provinces, officials said, in a country wracked by poverty and heavily dependent on agriculture.

Emergency personnel were rushing to rescue injured and stranded people, according to the defence ministry.

The air force said it had started evacuation operations as the weather cleared yesterday, adding that more than a hundred injured people had been transferred to hospital, without specifying from which provinces.

Since mid-April, flash flooding and other floods had left about 100 people dead in 10 of Afghanistan's provinces, with no region entirely spared, according to authorities.

Iraq calls for UN mission's departure

AFP, United Nations

The government of Iraq has asked the UN to end its decades-long political mission to the country by 2025, stating that the force is no longer necessary, according to a letter seen by AFP Friday.

In the document sent to the Security Council, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani described what he said were "positive developments and the achievements" by successive Iraqi governments as well as fulfillment of the UN mission's mandate.

The United Nations Assistance

Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), in existence since 2003, has overcome "great and varied challenges," he said, concluding that "the grounds for having a political mission in Iraq" no longer exist.

Calling for an end date of December 31, 2025, al-Sudani specified that the mission in the meantime should focus only on issues pertaining to "economic reform, service provision, sustainable development, climate change and other development sectors."

UNAMI was established in 2003 by a UN Security Council resolution at

the request of the Iraqi government before being expanded four years later. It is renewed every year.

The mission also advises the government on political dialogue and reconciliation, as well as helping with elections and security sector reform.

The Security Council next week will debate renewal of the mission since the current mandate terminates at the end of the month.

During the mission's last renewal in May 2023, the Council asked the secretary-general to launch a strategic review, which was overseen by German diplomat Volker Perthes.

City dwellers suffer after morning rain

FROM PAGE 12

Meteorological Department (BMD) told The Daily Star yesterday.

Many low-lying areas in the capital, including Mirpur, Mouchak, Dhanmondi 27, Azimpur, New Market, Moghbazar, Modhubagh, Badda, Rampura, and DIT project area, were submerged, causing immense suffering to its residents.

Recounting her morning ordeal, Mirpur resident Farjana Jahan said, "I stepped out this morning to go to work, only to find the street in front of my house completely flooded. I had to wait 30 minutes before I could find

also transport, which made me late for work."

Similarly, other office-goers and school students struggled to find public transport in the flooded Mirpur-10 area.

Nazmul Islam, a private company employee, said it felt like he was commuting by waterway while sharing his experience of riding a rickshaw from Kalabagan to Farmgate through knee-deep water on Green Road.

He added that the situation was even worse for others who had to wade across the murky waters to reach their destinations.

Residents of Dhanmondi-6

also experienced similar waterlogging in their area.

Alimur Rahman, a resident of Bangshal area, said, "We are so used to waterlogging, we know it's going to happen whenever it rains."

Speaking to this newspaper, DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam said, "The issue of severe waterlogging after heavy rain has been largely addressed. In the past, major roads would be flooded for days. This is no longer the case. However, brief waterlogging persists in some areas due to clogged drains."

Contacted, DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said, "Since Dhaka is an

unplanned city, it continues to battle the persistent waterlogging issue, but we've managed to achieve a 20 percent reduction in its prevalence."

A regular Met office bulletin yesterday said rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind are likely to occur at many places over Chattogram division; at a few places over Dhaka, Khulna, Barishal, and Sylhet divisions; and at one or two places over Rangpur, Rajshahi, and Mymensingh divisions with hails at isolated places in the next three days.

Withdrawals put BASIC Bank

FROM PAGE 12

Jamuna Fertilizer Company Limited, and Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company deposit money with the bank, officials say.

The bank can no longer borrow from the central bank as it lacks the required securities, reads the letter.

If the situation persists, there is a risk that the bank will fail to give money to the depositors, in which case, the clients will lose confidence in the bank.

BASIC's employees even fear that they may not get paid because of the crisis, adds the letter signed by Anisur Rahman, the managing director.

Anisur neither responded to text messages nor answered his phone as this correspondent tried to reach him.

Abul Hashem, the chairman, refused to make comments on the matter.

After the merger decision was made public, Abu Md Molazzal, the

deputy managing director, said several government institutions and other entities were withdrawing their funds. The bank on April 17 wrote to the finance ministry seeking advice on how to cope with the situation.

The merger was decided at a meeting between the central bank governor and the managing directors and the chairman of City Bank.

The central bank claimed the merger was voluntary, but BASIC Bank

managers said the decision was forced.

BASIC was once a reputed state-run bank. In 2014, an investigation found the involvement of its chairman Sheikh Abdul Hye Bacchu in the embezzlement of Tk 4,500 crore. The bank's condition has been going downhill since.

As of December 2023, the bank's bad loans stood at Tk 8,204 crore, accounting for 64 percent of its total loans disbursed.

Family still awaits closure

FROM PAGE 12

Department pressed charges. As the court ordered a reinvestigation, the CID in May 2017 filed a supplementary charge sheet.

It pressed charges against Shafiqur Rahman Farabi, Mannan Yahya who goes by the alias Mannan Raht, Abul Khaer Rashid Ahmed, Abul Hossain, Harunur Rashid, and Faisal Ahmed.

Of them, only Yahya confessed to killing Ananta.

He died on November 2, 2017, after falling ill at Dhaka Central Jail.

In 2022, Judge Nurul Amin Biplol sentenced Khaer, Hossain, Harunur and Faisal to death and acquitted Farabi. Only Khaer is in jail now.

Prosecutor Muminur Rahman Titu said, "After the verdict, we appealed against Farabi's acquittal. The appeal and death reference are pending with the Supreme

Court."

Debasish Debu, a spokesperson of Ganajagan Mancha in Sylhet, said, "The killing of Ananta was a sign of the rise of militants in Bangladesh. The government and the Supreme Court should prioritise the case to set an example of the state's stand against militancy."

Ananta's friends will hold a vigil at 11:00am today at the place where he was killed.

'Govt meddling in airlines monitoring'

FROM PAGE 1

that "oversight of operators, especially Biman, is hindered by government involvement and various exemptions".

"While there are gaps, the first step is to recognise them, accept them, and then change them for the better," Captain Gabriele Ascenzo, an airlines safety expert from ICAO, said in a letter to the CAAB chairman.

ICAO flagged an engine-exceedance incident on a Biman flight on February 1, 2022, as an "operational anomaly of Biman and a safety concern". In that incident, a pilot put the aircraft engines on emergency mode and burned those.

Flight BG601 was flying from Dhaka to Sylhet with

71 passengers, and the pilot in command was Capt Ali Rubyat Chowdhury.

"Flight data capture did not appear post flight. It may have been tampered with and/or erased," noted ICAO.

"Repairing the engines cost Biman Tk 16.5 crore since the damage of the engines was solely the pilots' fault."

"The above indicates a systemic failure of the management, flight operations, flight safety and the training department," added ICAO.

Though the ICAO pointed out that the engine exceedance event was the pilots' fault and the flight data recorder (FDR) data was either erased or tampered with, the civil aviation ministry

submitted a report to the High Court on March 12 denying that there was a cover-up.

The High Court in August last year had ordered the ministry to launch an investigation into the anomalies in Biman.

The ministry report, prepared on orders from the court, claimed that the pilots did not realise that the plane's engines had gone into emergency mode. This was in a direct contradiction to the ICAO's findings.

The aviation watchdog also flagged what it termed anomalies in recruitment. "The current shortage of pilots stems from the non-transparent recruitment policy and the present expansion to new destinations with a deficit

of 60 flight crew members as per the rostering process," it said.

The ICAO mentioned the recruitment of 14 pilots in 2022 as "wasted resources", where the chief of the training department was given the responsibility to recruit pilots despite his wife being a candidate.

It quoted the chief of planning and scheduling, Capt Ishiaque Hossain, as saying, "We could not respect the flight duty limitations as Biman started four new destinations with the same number of pilots."

The ICAO found that there are insufficient qualified flight operation inspectors. CAAB has a total of seven such inspectors.

There is also a lack of monitoring and oversight

of designated examiners, it added.

Also, the ICAO inspection cited the recruitment anomalies in their report, but Biman Bangladesh Airlines submitted a report to the HC on May 8 claiming that they had done everything by the book.

The ICAO audit will be carried out in September. Bangladesh had shown considerable progress in the last ICAO audit of 2017.

"We hope the hard work undertaken by the [ICAO] inspectorate is appreciated at the highest levels of the government. This should be recognised as the means to bring the aviation industry in Bangladesh back to the previous high standards [...]," said Captain Gabriele in the ICAO report.

Call for Proposals (CfP)

The Nagorikata Civic Engagement Fund (CEF) invites project proposals from Civil Society Organisations registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau and/or the Department of Social Services. However, we strongly encourage registered CSOs to form partnerships or coalitions with grassroots organisations for the implementation of the projects that are presented in their proposals. Switzerland, USAID and Global Affairs Canada, in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh have launched the CEF to empower all Bangladeshis, particularly women, girls, and marginalised people, by amplifying their voices and ensuring their rights to equality, freedom of expression, involvement in decision-making, and access to information. The CEF promotes gender equality aligned to SDG 5, and peace, justice and stronger institutions aligned to SDG 16.

CfP Documents: The Call for Proposals (CfP) documents are available for download at the following link. [<https://rb.gov/muk238>]

Submission Deadline: The deadline for the submission of proposals is **June 27, 2024, by 5:00 PM** (Bangladesh time)

