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Air pollution in Dhaka 18 times above global limit

Says WB report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The average concentration of PM2.5 particles -- the most harmful air pollutants -- in Dhaka is about 18 times higher than the global health standard, leaving millions of residents struggling for relief.

The World Health Organization recommends a limit of five microgrammes per cubic metre (mcg/m³) of PM2.5, particles smaller than 2.5 micrometres in diameter.

However, in 2023, the average concentration in the greater Dhaka area was found to be 92 mcg/m³.

A World Bank (WB) presentation revealed that two-thirds of these pollutants are generated locally, while the remaining one-third originates from outside Bangladesh.

The findings were shared at a stakeholders' meeting titled "Air Quality in Bangladesh: Challenges and Solutions", held yesterday at the WB's office.

Eun Joo Allison Yi, senior environment specialist at the WB, said air pollution in Bangladesh affects health at all stages of life -- from premature births and low birth weights to chronic illnesses and

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People cover their faces as they travel through a dust-laden road in the capital's Shyampur area yesterday. Due to roadworks and construction, the area remains blanketed with dust. The situation exacerbates during the dry season. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Interim govt must be impartial in holding polls

Says Khasru

UNB, Dhaka



The interim government should proceed with the national election in a manner that leaves no room for doubt about its impartiality, said BNP senior leader Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday.

"This interim government should move towards the next election impartially, and no question should arise in anyone's mind about its impartiality. If any question arises, it will be a betrayal of those who shed blood, gave their lives, and made immense sacrifices during the 15-year movement," he said.

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ICT finds proof of Rab shooting from helicopter

Issues arrest warrant for then DG

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The investigation agency of the International Crimes Tribunal has found primary evidence suggesting that members of the Rapid Action Battalion fired bullets at protesters from helicopters during the July-August mass uprising.

The prosecution presented the findings to the tribunal yesterday, seeking arrest warrants for Md Harun-or-Rashid, the then director general (DG) of Rab.

Following the petition, the tribunal, led by Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mazumder, issued an arrest warrant for Harun-or-Rashid and set a hearing for March 23 to update the court on the investigation's progress.

If Harun is arrested before that date, he will be presented before the tribunal immediately.

According to the prosecution, Harun-or-Rashid, while serving as the DG of Rab, orchestrated a plan to target protesters, resulting in deaths and injuries.

The alleged plan involved shooting at civilians, torturing and detaining them, and using Rab vehicles to run over protesters. Notably, helicopters were also deployed to carry out these attacks, with subordinate officers following his orders.



FILE PHOTO

A Rab helicopter flies above Paltan area where protesters fought pitched battles with BGB personnel during the July uprising last year.

ICT Chief Prosecutor Muhammad Tajul Islam said the investigation has gathered preliminary evidence of Harun's involvement in these crimes. "Harun orchestrated these crimes through Rab. As the DG, he had the authority to prevent or punish the perpetrators but failed to do so," Tajul said.

He said Harun is being held accountable for command responsibility, as he planned, authorised, and failed to prevent the violence.

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Putul was Canadian citizen when nominated for WHO post

Finds ACC probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saima Wazed Putul, the daughter of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, was a Canadian citizen at the time when she was nominated by Bangladesh as the World Health Organization (WHO) regional director for South-East Asia, according to the Anti-Corruption Commission.

The anti-graft watchdog disclosed this information in a statement issued yesterday.

The ACC's investigation also revealed her misuse of state resources and irregular activities aimed at securing her position as the regional director.

Following the statement, SEE PAGE 4 COL 6

Several hurt as police swoop on madrasa teachers

Charge batons, use water canons to foil their march to CA office demanding nationalisation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police charged batons and used water cannons to disperse teachers of independent Ebtedayee madrasas -- primary-level educational institutions under the madrasa board -- at Shahbagh yesterday.

The attack took place as they were on their way to the Chief Adviser's Office, demanding the nationalisation of all such registered institutions.

The protesting teachers said several of their colleagues were injured in the police action, and at least five of them received treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Protesting the police action and to realise their six-point demand, the teachers immediately began a sit-in in front of the Fine Arts Faculty of Dhaka University.

The protest was ongoing there as of filing this report around 10:15pm.

Shamsul Alam, convener of the teachers' platform, said they held a meeting with the members of the education ministry. "They listened to our demands, but no decision was reached. We



will not withdraw our sit-in until our demands are met," he added.

Earlier, witnesses said several hundred teachers gathered at Jatiya Press Club, where they had been demonstrating for several days.

After holding a rally there, they started a march towards the Chief Adviser's Office around 12:30pm.

As the agitating teachers, under the banner of "Swatantra Ebtedayee Madrasa Shikkhak Oikyojote," reached Shahbagh and broke a police barricade near Shahbagh Police Station, the police took action, witnesses said.

Khalid Monsur, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said, "The teachers were heading towards the Chief Adviser's Office to lay siege with their procession. We stopped them at the Shahbagh intersection and dispersed them."

A police official said the teacher leaders had promised to stop at Shahbagh and nominate a team of representatives to send their memorandum to the office of the chief adviser. However, they did not keep their word and broke the police barricade.

"For this, we applied force to disperse them," SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

End dominance of fossil fuel in energy sector

Demands TIB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government has made no visible progress regarding clean and green energy since it took power five months ago, said TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman yesterday.

He said there have been no initiatives to move away from the dominance of fossil fuel usage, which controlled the sector over the last 15 years.

He made the remarks at a human chain titled "Clean Energy: Sustainable Future" organised by Transparency International Bangladesh in front of the national parliament building marking International Clean Energy Day.

The fossil fuel lobby is one of the driving forces of the global governance system, and its consequences have been found during the autocratic government in the last 15 years, said Iftekharuzzaman.

He demanded the cancellation of Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP) 2023.

"That [plan] was prepared with conflict of interests. A new opportunity for redemption has now been created in the new Bangladesh. We want a new master plan to be redesigned immediately

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3



Law Adviser Asif Nazrul speaks at a book launch at Shilpakala Academy yesterday as part of Bangla daily Prothom Alo's eight-day photo exhibition titled "July Uprising". At the event, covers four books on July uprising were unveiled. Among others, Constitution Reform Commission chief Ali Riaz, Jahangirnagar University Professor Al Masud Hasanuzzaman and Prothom Alo Executive Editor Sajjad Sharif were present. PHOTO: COLLECTED

ACC investigating 'irregularities' in EVM procurement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti Corruption Commission has launched an investigation into alleged irregularities in the procurement of Electronic Voting Machines by the Election Commission.

As part of the probe, a three-member ACC investigation team conducted an operation at the EC office yesterday, following allegations of substandard machines being purchased at inflated prices.

The ACC has requested documents from the EC to aid the inquiry.

Speaking to journalists after the operation, ACC Assistant Director Nur Alam Siddiqui said, "In 2018, the EC procured 150,000 EVMs, of which 1,500 were found to be non-functional. During the inspection, three machines stored at the EC office were examined. One was found defective, while the others were operational."

The EC currently stores 618 EVMs at its headquarters, 86,000 at the Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF), and 62,000 across regional offices.

This operation came after the anti-graft body decided to form a five-member team to probe the roles of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, chiefs of police and Rab, returning officers, and others during the December 30, 2018, national polls.

Opposition parties accused authorities of ballot-box stuffing the night before election day, with reports of between 30 and 60 percent of votes being cast in advance.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) later found evidence of ballot-stamping at multiple centres during a study conducted in 33 out of 50 surveyed constituencies.