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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/m<sup>3</sup>) 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/m<sup>3</sup>.

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 STAFF CORRESPONDENT

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 warrant against 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, which resulted in numerous casualties.

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

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.



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,

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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 7:15pm.

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

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



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

The teachers were dispersed, but after regrouping, they began the sit-in in front of the Fine Arts Faculty, with the police taking position near.

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," the official said.

Speaking to reporters, a female teacher said, "Why did police attack us? How can police charge batons on teachers when we are demonstrating for a logical demand?"

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## 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 (IEPPM) 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

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Law Adviser Asif Nazrul speaks at a book launch at Shilpkala 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

## 7 DU-AFFILIATED COLLEGES Students' demo shuts Science Lab

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Students of seven Dhaka University colleges blocked the Science Lab intersection on the Mirpur Road in the capital's Dhanmondi yesterday evening.

They alleged that when they went to meet DU Pro VC Prof Dr Maman Ahmed to ask about the progress of their five-point demand, he misbehaved with them.

They held the blockade in response to that.

Their demands include separate admission exams for the affiliated colleges and abolition of the quota system in the admission test.

Contacted, DMP Assistant Commissioner (New Market zone) Tarique Latif said around 6:30pm, at least 200 students blocked the Science Lab intersection leading to a heavy traffic congestion in the adjoining areas.

The students were still holding the blockade till filing of this report at 9:45pm.

Dhaka College student Abdur Rahman told The Daily Star, "We went to meet Professor Mamun with our demands. He humiliated our students and threw them out [of his office]. We blocked the road in protest. If the teacher comes and apologises publicly, we will leave the road."

Contacted, Pro-VC Mamun Ahmed SEE PAGE 4 COL 1