

Spain, Portugal battle wildfires as death toll mounts

AFP, Madrid

Thousands of firefighters backed by the military and water-bombing aircraft yesterday battled dozens of wildfires across Spain and Portugal, as the death toll increased to six since the outbreaks began.

The Iberian peninsula has been particularly affected by forest fires fuelled by a succession of heatwaves and droughts blamed on climate change that have hit the southern Mediterranean.

Two firefighters were killed on Sunday -- one in each country, both in road accidents -- taking the death toll to two in Portugal and four in Spain.

The head of Spain's Civil Protection and Emergencies, Virginia Barcones, told broadcaster TVE there were currently 23 "active fires in operation status two", indicating a serious and direct threat to the population.

The fires, now in their second week, were concentrated in Galicia, Castile and Leon, and Extremadura regions.

Sylhet DC withdrawn amid flak

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Administration issued a notification regarding the transfers yesterday.

Meanwhile, Companiganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Azizunnahar has been transferred to Fenchuganj upazila, and Md Shafiqul Islam, the current UNO of Fenchuganj, has been appointed as the new Companiganj UNO.

Sylhet's Divisional Commissioner Khan Md Reza Un-Nabi issued the transfer orders, confirmed Debajit Singha, additional divisional commissioner of Sylhet.

The local authorities have faced widespread criticism after reports surfaced on the rampant looting of



As the Ducusu polls near, at least 442 aspirants picked up nomination forms yesterday, raising the total to 565 candidates for 28 posts since August 12. The deadline for collection, originally set for yesterday, has been extended until this afternoon. The photo was taken at the Senate Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Tk 707cr spent in 9yrs

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a considerable sum on mosquito nets, sprays, coils, repellents, and cleaned his home regularly. Yet two weeks ago, he, his wife, and his elderly mother were infected with dengue.

"We did everything we could and even spent money beyond our capabilities," he said.

Asad said that although dengue has taken a dangerous turn in recent years, he has not seen any urgency in the authorities' response. In his neighbourhood, fogging is sporadic at best, and other preventive measures are rarely visible.

"It feels like we're on our own," he added.

First identified in 2000, dengue, once considered a seasonal issue, has now become a major public health concern, with cases occurring throughout the year.

Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data show the dengue outbreak is worsening. In 2016, the number of deaths was only 14, while 6,060 people were infected.

The situation worsened in 2019, when more than 100,000 cases and over 179 deaths were recorded. However, the worst dengue outbreak in the country's history occurred in 2023, with 1,705 deaths and 3,21,179 hospitalisations.

As of yesterday morning, 105 people have died from dengue this year, according to DGHS, with 45 of the fatalities reported from the Dhaka metropolitan areas. At least 380 dengue patients were hospitalised in the 24 hours leading up to yesterday morning, bringing the total number of reported infections to 26,758, including 6,133 from Dhaka metropolitan areas.

The daily dengue bulletin of DGHS is based on data from only 59 public and private hospitals in Dhaka and 80 district- and divisional level hospitals, whereas around 16,000 hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres across the country provide dengue care. This means the true scale of the outbreak remains undetermined.

SAME OLD APPROACH

Every year, both DNCC and DSCC launch mosquito control drives in the capital aimed at curbing the spread of dengue and other vector-borne diseases.

These efforts typically include fogging operations in residential areas, markets, and public spaces to kill adult mosquitoes, larvicide spraying in stagnant water bodies, drains, and construction sites. They also run awareness campaigns and some special drives.

And the lion's share of the city corporations' spending is on insecticide purchases.

For example, DNCC proposed allocating Tk 135.5 crore for mosquito control activities in fiscal 2025-26, of which Tk 80 crore has been set aside for insecticide purchase. It spent Tk 65

stones from Bholaganj Sada Pathor in Sylhet's Companiganj upazila that has allegedly been going on since August 5 last year.

In the face of public outrage, joint forces, including local administration, police, Rab, and the army, launched operations to recover the stolen mineral resources.

As of Sunday, around 4.5 lakh cubic feet of stones were recovered during multiple drives conducted all over the Sylhet district.

On the same day, Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan accused the local administration of complicity in the looting of stones from Sada Pathor, and called for immediate

action against those involved.

On August 15, Md Anwarul Habib, director general of the Bureau of Mineral Development (BMD), filed a case accusing around 1,500 unnamed individuals in connection to the looting of stones from Sada Pathor.

So far, five people have been arrested in the case.

According to the case statement, since August 5 last year, miscreants have been illegally extracting stones worth hundreds of crores of taka from the government gazetted quarry area, as reported by several media outlets.

The statement also noted that the identities of those directly involved had remained unconfirmed until now.

Meanwhile, DSCC proposed Tk 46.50 crore for mosquito control programmes, of which Tk 45 crore has been allocated for buying insecticides, up from Tk 40 crore in FY24-25.

The rest of the money is usually spent on equipment, including fogger, wheel, and spray machines, their transportation, and special cleaning activities.

Experts, however, say this old approach is unlikely to produce significant results in curbing the menace amid a changing climate.

Entomologist GM Saifur Rahman said the city corporations must identify breeding sources from the beginning of the year. Authorities should first categorise neighbourhoods based on dengue cases and then carry out vigorous anti-mosquito drives in those areas.

a multidisciplinary team, including biochemists, biologists, serologists, and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) experts, working year-round to track resistance patterns and guide insecticide use, he said.

"We do not even know which insecticide is currently effective against Aedes mosquitoes," he added.

Farhad Hussain, director (disease control) of DGHS, said they handle dengue management, while vector control is carried out by other authorities.

"Instructions have already been given to all centres under DGHS across the country to take necessary steps and strictly follow the national guidelines on dengue management," he said.

WHAT TWO CITY CORPORATIONS SAY

Asked whether the insecticides are effective, DSCC Chief Health Officer Nishat Parvin said they use insecticides

YEAR	DNCC'S BUDGET (IN CRORE)	DSCC'S BUDGET (IN CRORE)
2020-21	Tk 50.50	Tk 19.37
2019-20	Tk 58	Tk 25.75
2018-19	Tk 17.50	Tk 19.52
2017-18	Tk 17.50	Tk 13.90
2016-17	Tk 16.85	Tk 17.18

only after receiving positive results from three separate tests conducted by the IEDCR, the Plant Protection Wing of Agriculture Extension Department, and DSCC itself.

He also said insecticide resistance patterns vary from city to city and strategies must be tailored accordingly. "We keep using the same types of insecticides even though mosquitoes here have developed resistance to them. We have also failed to involve researchers in the process. The government must engage experts and use laboratory findings to design effective interventions," he added.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE
Experts said it will not be possible to check the Aedes mosquito population without an integrated vector management department.

The department would conduct research on vectors and develop plans to manage them. The outcomes would be shared with all city corporations, municipalities, upazilas, and union parishads across the country, they said.

"The absence of a dedicated national authority for vector management is a major gap in the efforts to control mosquitoes," said Saifur Rahman.

"City corporations alone cannot do the job. There should be a specialised government department led by entomologists to conduct surveillance, analyse data, issue directives, and coordinate responses nationwide."

The department would employ

95 percent effectiveness in this coordinated testing in field applications," she said. She added they have not found any proof of insecticide resistance so far.

On the complaint of irregular fogging, Nishat said they conduct area-based fogging drives based on patient lists provided by DGHS.

Contacted, DNCC Administrator Mohammad Azaz said the insecticides used for larvicide and adulticiding are effective. Apart from the three tests before purchase, he said they conduct daily chemical tests after collecting Aedes larvae.

Azaz, however, said the main challenge lies with fieldworkers, many of whom have not applied the insecticides properly in the past. Another problem, he said, is their inability to carry out drives inside houses, where breeding grounds exist and contribute to infections.

However, he claimed the situation has improved.

"We are conducting awareness campaigns and operating mobile courts to ensure the destruction of breeding sources inside houses across DNCC areas," he said.

Man dies after loan shark 'forces poison down his throat'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A man was allegedly poisoned to death by a loan shark and his associates in Rajshahi's Mohanpur upazila.

The deceased Fazlur Rahman Babu, 55, was forced to ingest a type of herbicide on Thursday, said his family.

He died while undergoing treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital on Friday.

On Saturday night, Fazlur's wife, Anjuara Begum, filed a murder case against Dhulu, 45, a known loan shark in the area.

Police arrested Dhulu the same night.

According to the case statement, around 11:00pm on Thursday, some unidentified persons tied up and left Fazlur in front of a tea stall near his house at Belna Purbo Para village.

"Soon after, neighbours started gathering around him. After being informed, Fazlur's younger son, Tariqul, rushed to the spot and found smell of poison coming from his father's mouth. He was taken to Mohanpur Upazila Health Complex, where doctors referred him to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital," said the case statement.

While undergoing treatment, Fazlur told his elder son Shah Alam that Dhulu, along with 5-6 unidentified others, had tied him up and forced poison down his throat. Shah Alam kept a record

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Ducusu panels begin taking shape

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Al Muddassir Chowdhury, and Hasib Al Islam under discussion.

Separately, Jamaluddin Khalid, former Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Andolok leader, and Mahin Sarker, joint member secretary of National Citizen Party, announced an independent panel titled "DU First". Khalid will contest for VP, Sarker for GS, and Fateha Sharmin Anne for AGS.

Yesterday alone, 442 aspirants picked up forms, bringing the total to 565 candidates for 28 posts since August 12. Shibir's 28 member panel includes Abu Sadik Kayem for vice-president, SM Farhad for general secretary, and Mohiuddin Khan for assistant general secretary.

Yesterday alone, the NCP expelled Mahin for "breaching party discipline".

In a notice, Joint Member Secretary Saleh Uddin Sifat said Mahin did not seek permission from the convener or secretary before collecting forms, calling it a "serious breach".

Chhatra Odhikar Parishad declared an 18 member panel, eight from the parishad itself, leaving 10 posts vacant for possible alliances. Its slate includes Bin Yamin Mollah for VP, Sabina Yasmin for GS, and Rakibul Islam for AGS, alongside secretaries for science, social welfare, health, human rights, and career development.

Fatima Tasnim Juma of Inquilab Mancha will contest for Liberation War and democratic movement secretary, while Khan Jasim, who lost an eye during the uprising, is the candidate for international affairs secretary. Sorbo Mitra Chakma will vie for a member post.

Gonotantrik Chhatra Jote, a coalition of left-leaning groups, announced candidates for the top three posts: former Shamsunnahar Hall VP Sheikh Tasnim Afroze Emi for VP, DU Chhatra Union President Meghmallor Bosu for GS, and Jaber Ahmad Jubel of Biplobi Chhatra Maitree for AGS.

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front President Muzammel Haque has been nominated for Liberation War and democratic movement secretary. The alliance said it will announce its full panel today.

Ummara Fatema is expected to lead an independent panel and run for VP. Sources said the GS post remains undecided, with DU Journalists' Association President Mohiuddin Muzahid Mahi and its former president Al Sadi Bhuiyan under consideration.

Speaking to reporters, Hamim said, "We have over 400 aspirants. We've not finalised our panel yet but will do so by tonight [last night]."

Islami Chhatra Andolok members also collected papers, with candidates including Yasin Arifat (VP), Khairul Ahsan Marzan (GS), and Saif Mohammad Alauddin (AGS).

So far, 1,226 forms have also been collected for hall unions, Prof Zashim said at a briefing. Shahidullah Hall drew the highest with 97, followed by Zahirul Huq Hall (93), Surya Sen Hall (90), Bijoy Ekator Hall (88), and Amar Ekushey Hall (84). Kuwait Maitree Hall had the lowest with 29.

He said all forms were collected by valid DU students and no one used a party identity. "Any nominee found on a criminal list before polling day may be disqualified."

The final DUCSU voter list shows 39,775 eligible voters - 20,871 male and 18,902 female.

JUCSU CONCERNED

At a press conference in Madhur Canteen last night, DU JCD leaders alleged their activists were obstructed while collecting forms at Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall earlier in the day.

Its president Ganesh Chandra Roy

and

collection and submission were supposed to end by 5:00pm today.

However, after JCD called for an extension, backed by BGCS, Shibir and Chhatra Union, the administration set new deadlines collection until 2:00pm and submission until 4:00pm on August 21.

JU JCD Convener Jahir Uddin Babor said his group had not finalised its panel yet. Two factions of Chhatra Union and several cultural groups are also preparing line-ups, while Shibir has already finalised its JUCSU and hall candidates.

The JUCSU and hall elections are scheduled for September 11.

(Our JU correspondent contributed to this report.)

'Ukraine peace deal possible'

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