

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: Bangladesh shuts schools, cuts power in longest heat wave in decades

Byline: By Agence France-Presse

Published Date: June 7, 2023

Section: world

Word Count: 600

Content:

DHAKA: Bangladesh has shut thousands of schools as it struggles through its longest heat wave in half a century, with widespread power cuts only compounding locals' misery.

Temperatures in the South Asian nation's capital Dhaka have surged to about 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit), with the poor bearing the brunt of the blazing sun.

"We have never seen such a prolonged heat wave since Bangladesh's independence in 1971," said Bazlur Rashid, a senior official at the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

Tens of thousands of elementary schools were shut down by the government, and electricity production has been drastically cut, even as demand for air conditioners and fans has surged.

On Monday, the country was forced to suspend operations at its biggest power plant because the government was unable to afford the coal to fuel it.

The Bangladeshi taka depreciated about 25 percent against the United States dollar last year, driving up the cost of fuel imports and power utilities.

Other plants have fallen well short of meeting demand, leading to hourslong blackouts.

Housewife Tania Akhter said her youngest child was resting at home with classes canceled, but her 12-year-old daughter was still going to school.

"Those classes should also be shut down because the students are suffering a lot in this heat. They are falling sick," Akhter said.

The heat wave began in April and ran into early May before easing, then resumed late last month, with forecasters predicting the mercury would remain high until the end of the week.

"Every summer, Bangladesh [endures] heat waves, but this year's heat wave is unusual," Rashid told AFP. "In the past, heat waves would only continue for a few days or a week, but this year it has continued for two weeks and more."

A study by the World Weather Attribution group last month found that climate change had made record-breaking deadly heatwaves in Bangladesh — as well as India, Laos and Thailand — at least 30 times more likely.

On June 3, the temperature in the northern Dinajpur district hit 41.3 degrees Celsius (106.3 degrees Fahrenheit), the highest recorded there since 1958.

"The heat wave in the past would affect only some parts of the country," Rashid said. "This year, it is very extensive and spread to almost all parts of the country."

Power cuts in some rural districts stretch for between six and 10 hours a day, officials from the state-run power company said.

Manual laborers and street vendors say working in the heat is tough, and with those who are able staying out of the sun at home, incomes are down.

"My income has significantly declined; I used to make 20 to 30 trips a day, but now it is down to 10 to 15," said 60-year-old motorized rickshaw driver Abdul Mannan. "My body doesn't allow more than this in this heat."

"It saps all your energy," said fellow driver Raisul Islam, 35, gulping a lime sherbet drink at a roadside stall in Dhaka. "It is tough to drive rickshaws in the scorching heat."

Rashid said the heat wave would cool once monsoon rains land in mid-June, while the government has said power production would increase in two weeks once fuel imports arrive.

Fruit seller Mohammad Manik, 31, exhausted by the heat, said he was seeing fewer customers in the high temperatures, and was just waiting for the weather to change.

"The situation is very bad in this heat. I spend my day here at work, and when I return home, there are power cuts," he said. "So I can't sleep well, staying awake for almost the whole night."