

Flawed vehicles make safe air a distant dream



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Removal of two-stroke vehicles is yet to offer city dwellers respite from air pollutants as thousands of faulty vehicles and brick kilns are still emitting black smokes. Officials of the Air Quality Management Project (AQMP) said with the removal of two-stroke vehicles, the city air does contain less gaseous pollutants but particulate matters have reached alarming levels and are increasing. But no initiative towards stopping unfit vehicles plying the roads is being taken. When asked about the issue, Assistant Director of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) official, Mahboob-e-Rabbani said they check the vehicle fitness once a year and that they do not allow any vehicle older than 20 years to ply. He said it is the traffic department's duty to nab unfit vehicles, not theirs.

However, Deputy Commissioner (South) of Traffic Department Abu Musa Md. Fakhru Islam Khan said they apprehend lots of faulty vehicles everyday. "We do file cases against those vehicles, but the

PHOTO: STAR

A passenger bus runs on a city road yesterday, trailing black smoke behind. The pollution threat turns severe in winter when the city faces a heavy concentration of dust particles in the air.

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Storm over RU teachers' recruitment

ANWAR ALI & ABU KALAM, Rajshahi

Executive members of the Rajshahi University Teachers' Association (RUTA) came up with a series of allegations against the university administration yesterday.

At a press conference on the Rajshahi University (RU) campus, the executive members also demanded immediate reconsideration of the recent teacher recruitment and an impartial probe into the 'cassette scandal'.

RUTA General Secretary Dr M Mahbubur Rahman alleged that the RU administration guided by an influential group appointed teachers of particular political ideals.

RUTA Vice-President Muhammad Nurullah and members Golam Sabbir Sattar, Dr Abu Taher Mollik, Dr Belayet Hossain

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Cabinet okays limited BB autonomy

STAR REPORT

The cabinet yesterday amended three banking laws aimed at giving limited autonomy to the Bangladesh Bank.

Under the proposed amendment, while a committee, led by the central bank governor and made up of economists and seasoned bankers, will recommend monetary policies, the bank will nonetheless need the finance ministry's approval for their implementation.

However, the governor from now on will be accountable to the parliamentary standing committee instead of the finance ministry.

The meeting yesterday, chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, also

approved amendment to three banking laws, namely the Bangladesh Bank Order, 1972, the Bank Company Act, 1991 and the Bangladesh Banks (Nationalisation) Order, 1972.

The amendments also opted for more secrecy in banking affairs and proposed enhancement of the financial penalty on any BB official or employee if found 'guilty' of divulging secret information.

The BB official or employee would face a fine of Tk 5 lakh for the offence, instead of the existing fine of Tk 500.

As an amendment to the Bank Company Act, 1991, inclusion of two depositors in the boards of commercial banks has been proposed to

protect depositors' interest. Besides, people with economic and banking backgrounds, and not political elements, would be included in the boards for efficient running of the banks.

As per an amendment to the Bangladesh Bank Order, 1972, the central bank would fix the exchange rate of taka on the basis of the foreign exchange reserve.

The meeting also recommended that government control over the BB should be done away with.

It also proposed formation of a monetary and fiscal policy coordination committee, headed by the finance minister, reduction of tenure of depositors in the boards of commercial banks has been proposed to

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Canada for expanding assistance to Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday requested the Canadian government to assist in setting up colleges in Bangladesh either independently or under joint venture to ensure quality education in the country.

Besides seeking investment in other prospective sectors, she also requested a visiting Canadian minister to take steps for setting up a nurse-training institute in Bangladesh for improving the standard of medical care.

Thanking the Canadian government

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PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia talks to visiting Canadian Minister for International Cooperation Susan Whelan at a meeting at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

16 more listed criminals in army net

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The joint forces arrested 97 people, including 16 listed criminals, from different parts of the country in the last 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

They also seized 18 firearms including four pistols, six revolvers, one pipe gun, four shotguns, one shooter gun. Eight rounds of bullets were also recovered during the drive, according to a home ministry press release.

The latest spate of arrests pushed the number of people rounded up since the start of the anti-crime crackdown on October 17 to 11,032 including 2,427 listed criminals. The joint forces have so far seized 1,994 firearms and 29,735 rounds of ammunitions.

In Manikganj, the joint forces arrested a local leader and an activist of the Jatiyatajubi Jubo Dal from the town.

In Sylhet, Police arrested two persons, including a woman, along

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Twin suicide blasts kill 25 in Tel Aviv

Israel to bar Palestinians from London peace parley

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Two Palestinian suicide bombers killed 23 people and wounded more than 100 in Tel Aviv, drawing a helicopter attack in Gaza City and an Israeli decision yesterday to bar Palestinians from attending a London peace parley.

Israeli government sources said Prime Minister Ariel Sharon tempered a military response to the back-to-back blasts in a Tel Aviv foreign workers' neighbourhood, in

a bid to avoid upsetting US efforts to win Arab support for possible war on Iraq.

The Tel Aviv bombings Sunday came just three weeks before a general election at which security concerns will be paramount in the minds of many Israeli voters, and could smooth right-winger Sharon's bid to regain power.

Hours after the blasts, at least 14 missiles streaked into targets in Gaza City that included two metal foundries which the Israeli army

used to make weapons for Palestinians in a 27-month-old uprising.

Five people suffered light shrapnel injuries, Palestinian officials said of the air raid that occurred late Sunday night when streets were largely empty.

Meeting in emergency session after one of the most serious attacks in Tel Aviv since the revolt for statehood began, Sharon's security cabinet decided to bar Palestinians

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Govt plans Ctg-Yangon feeder shipping service

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The government plans to introduce a feeder shipping service between Bangladesh and Myanmar to boost bilateral trade, official sources said yesterday.

Officials at the Chittagong Port and Mercantile Marine Department said the government had already asked a private shipping company to start operating its feeder container vessels on the Chittagong-Myanmar route as soon as possible to increase bilateral trade.

"A high-level meeting to this effect was held recently on this issue and if the service starts on this

route, the trade gap between the two countries will come down to a great extent," they said.

The officials said the step was a follow-up to the landmark visit by Myanmar Senior General Than Shwe in December when the countries pledged to boost bilateral ties to overcome economic challenges facing them both.

"The Myanmar government has also agreed to place a container vessel on the route," they said.

Shipping sources said due to a lack of vessels, the state-owned Bangladesh Shipping Corporation was unable to provide the service immediately, so the government

opted for the private HRC Shipping Lines, which is already operating feeder vessels between Chittagong and Sri Lanka as well as Malaysia.

At present, cargo from Myanmar is shipped to Chittagong through Singapore while some goods come through Teknaf border points, said Bangladesh Shipping Agents Association Chairman Farid Ahmed Chowdhury.

Imports from Myanmar include timber, maize, rice and fish, while exports include fertiliser, cement and medicines, but there are no official estimates of bilateral trade, which is said to be very small. Smuggling also takes place across the border.

Trinamul, BJP form alliance in W Bengal

SAKYASEN MITTRA, Kolkata

The Trinamul Congress and the BJP unit in West Bengal State of India have once again formed an alliance.

The alliance will fight against the Left Front when the state goes to Panchayat polls in May this year.

About the combine, Trinamul supreme Mamata Banerjee said, "In West Bengal, it is essential to prevent the division of the anti-Left votes."

BJP state unit President Tathagata Roy said politics in Delhi and in Kolkata are of different nature. "So even if the BJP-led NDA government at the centre has its own differences with the Trinamul Congress, it should not be an imped

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AL plans to set up three think-tanks

REAZ AHMAD

The Awami League (AL) plans to form three think-tanks within the party fold to deal exclusively with issues concerning politics, economy and the society.

"By forming the think-tanks, the party wants to best utilise the expertise of its advisory council members," a well-placed source in the major opposition party told The Daily Star yesterday.

The political think-tank, economic think-tank and social think-

tank would comprise members of the AL advisory council.

Each think-tank would consist of 11 members. These bodies would have updates on any developments in their respective fields, hold brainstorming and intellectual debates on contemporary issues and give policy advice to the AL central leadership, if and when required, the source said.

Following the December 26 triennial council of the party, the AL has so far announced names of 18 advisors. The list of advisors con-

sists of seven former armed forces personnel including three former army chiefs and 11 civilians.

"We will induct 15 more experienced and knowledgeable persons in our advisory council, raising the total to 33," said a top AL leader.

The advisors whose names have already been announced are Dr. SA Malek, SAMS Kibria, Gaziul Haq, architect Mazharul Islam, ASHK Sadek, Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, Abdul Mannan, Abdul Momin,

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DMP sets free seized rickshaws

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has started releasing all the seized rickshaws with a bond from the owners that the non-mechanised illegal three-wheelers would be taken out of the city.

As per a government decision, more than 5,000 rickshaws were released in the last few weeks from the old airport area where 11,757 illegal rickshaws were dumped, an official of the DMP Traffic Department said yesterday.

Rickshawpullers and owners who gathered at the site to get their vehicles back told this correspondent yesterday they had to spend Tk 1,000 to 1,200 to get a rickshaw back.

The procedure for getting back a seized rickshaw is that its owner is now required to write an application

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 7		5-26 pm
Jan 8	6-43 am	

Prayer Timings		
Jan 7		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-50	4-05
Maghrib	5-33	5-38
Esha	7-30	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation