


hello dhaka

source: accuweather.com

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|--|---|-------------------|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| <br><b>Weekly weather forecast for the city</b> | <b>Today</b><br>Low: 19 °C<br>High: 25 °C<br>Sunshine and | <b>WEEK-AHEAD</b> | <b>Monday</b><br>Low: 18 °C<br>High: 23 °C<br>Sunny and pleasant | <b>Tuesday</b><br>Low: 16 °C<br>High: 23 °C<br>Partly sunny and pleasant | <b>Wednesday</b><br>Low: 15 °C<br>High: 26 °C<br>Partly sunny and nice | <b>Thursday</b><br>Low: 14 °C<br>High: 25 °C<br>Mostly sunny and pleasant | <b>Friday</b><br>Low: 15 °C<br>High: 24 °C<br>A full day of sunshine | <b>Saturday</b><br>Low: 15 °C<br>High: 26 °C<br>Sunshine |
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# Kilns turn city into virtual gas chamber

WAHIDA MITU

With the onset of winter and thousands of brick kilns coming back to operation, city's air quality is sharply deteriorating.

Moreover thousands of diesel-run vehicles, vehicles with faulty engines and industries are spewing toxic fumes to add to the worsening air pollution.

Millions of people especially children are the worst sufferers with various respiratory complications during this dry season. City clinics and hospitals are swarmed with patients complaining of various respiratory problems.

According to experts at the Air Quality Management Project (AQMP) in addition to toxicity, the city air is also polluted with huge amount of particulate matters generated by drought and also from industrial, such as the brick kiln wastes.

AQMP's Director Dr Mohammad Nasiruddin said that constant exposure to such high concentration of particulate matters can cause cancer, hypertension, lung and heart problem and related diseases.

The main causes for air pollutions are continuous emission from thousands of faulty diesel-run buses, trucks and other vehicles, the 4,000 brick kilns around the city and haphazard re-rolling mills, factories and tanneries have turned it into a virtual "gas chamber", enveloping the metropolis with thick smog.

World Bank (WB) sources said that recent conversion of the brick kiln chimneys into 120 feet tall chimneys has 'not at all helped' the city environment. The kilns use 'worst quality coal with high sulphur', vehicle tyres, fuel wood and even discarded polythene bags as fuel. Fumes from the kilns contain an extremely high count of sulphur dioxide and ash.

Deterioration of air quality has reached its peak in the current lean period with scarcity of rain. People of all ages are exposed to various health hazards due to the toxic haze hanging in the atmosphere, another Department of Environment (DoE) source said.

"There is no concerted effort to combat air pollution. To combat air pollution we need effort from several ministries like



Thousands of brick kilns around the city spew lethal gas into the atmosphere.

Communications Ministry, Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry, Environment and Forest Ministry, Housing and Public Works Ministry and Industries Ministry," said an official Department of Environment.

To measure the variation of air quality in the AQMP has recently set up five satellite stations in Razarbagh, Tejgaon, Lalbagh, Narayanganj and in Tongi. The results of the study show that among the five areas air quality is the worst in Lalbagh.

According to Bangladesh standards the permissible level of particulate matters (PM)10 in the city air is 150 microgram per cubic metre (mg/m3). But the study conducted by AQMP shows that in Lalbagh during the month of November the PM10 rose to 230 microgram per cubic meter. The PM 2.5 in Lalbagh reached to 160 microgram per cubic meter while the endurable air quality PM2.5 is 65 mg/m3.

Brick kilns, haphazard industries, unfit human haulers, foundries, polythene industries and diesel run launches are the worst polluters, said the sources.

During winter the concentration of particulate matters in the air is the highest due to climatic condition. Air pollution worsens from end of October and continues until the rains come.

"During the winter months, wind speed and velocity are reduced, for this reason, thermal pollution occurs and smog and fog appear," said an expert.

According to Environment Ministry officials, the then government without introducing any substitution of transport, banned the two stroke three wheelers auto rickshaws in 2003 and introduced limited number of CNG-run four stroke three wheelers from January, 2003 to improve the air quality of the city.

As a result a vacuum occurred for the city dwellers in transport sector and taking advantage of the situation unfit vehicles took to the streets.

"We have again returned to the same situation as prior to 2003," the official said.

Dr Noor Alam, registrar of Medicine, Sir Salimullah Medical College & Mitford Hospital urged city dwellers to use protective mask during winter to avoid dust, smoke and respiratory diseases.

# Caretaker govt fails to take decisions

TAWFIQUE ALI

The caretaker government has not yet taken any tangible actions to streamline the overwhelming aberrations and violation of rules in the urban development sector.

The interim government, which took over more than a month ago, is apparently indifferent to the raging deviations and anomalies in this sector, experts said.

"We will try to resolve these problems as far as we can within our tenure," said Dhiraj Kumar Nath, caretaker government adviser in charge of the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, replying to a question from this correspondent on November 26.

When this correspondent drew his attention to the blatant violations of laws particularly by the private housing development companies in and around the capital city and onslaughts on the urban governance, he preferred not to respond.

"We had great expectations of getting some important works done in the urban development sector during the caretaker government," said eminent urban expert and honorary chairman of Centre for Urban Study Prof Nazrul Islam. "We were particularly eager to get the National Urban Policy approved by the interim government."

This important document, though drafted in 2004, has been lying unapproved.

Prof Islam said that there are examples of getting some significant jobs done by the caretaker administration in the past. He cited examples of approval of the National Habitat Paper by the caretaker government of 1996.

The caretaker administration in 2001 also did commendable job in recovering the river Buriganga from the illegal encroachers.

"We also expected to raise a good number of environmental issues with this government but find no scope for that," Islam said. "What can we expect when the advisers themselves are evidently sidelined in the administration."

A number of top officials of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) also expressed their frustrations seeing no prospect of streamlining the city development authorities now plagued with corruption and run by inefficient and politically-appointed staff.

A top Rajuk official requesting anonymity

said: "Rajuk must be rid of political appointees with eradication of corrupt elements."

There have been no actions against the private housing development companies though they have been violating a number of laws and Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) while developing many housing projects in and around Dhaka.

Many of these projects are being implemented without approval from the government and within the flood flow zones, wetlands and flood retention ponds earmarked in the DMDP, choking the capital city from all around.

Rajuk is badly in need of competent technical manpower to properly enforce the recently gazetted Bangladesh National Building Code, Building Construction Rules and carry out other day-to-day jobs, according to Rajuk sources.

"Rajuk needs at least 500 qualified town planners, architects and engineers to implement the Detail Area Plan and to monitor planning control and development control," according to the Rajuk official.

Rajuk requires one planner at each ward of Dhaka city, he observed.

At least 80 percent of Rajuk's existing manpower is non-technical and appointed on political consideration. Many of them are corrupt, according to sources. This is one of the major reasons behind the mess and inefficiency that has crippled Rajuk.

At present, Rajuk has around 100 technical hands including 30 to 35 graduate planners, architects and engineers and 50 diploma holders.

Jurisdiction of Rajuk covers 90 wards and around another 90 wards of five municipalities surrounding Dhaka city. There has to be designated officials for each particular responsibility to ensure accountability of Rajuk.

According to another Rajuk official, the Delhi Development Authority has 500 town planners and over 2,000 architects and engineers.

Adviser Dhiraj Kumar Nath said, "It is in our active consideration to reform the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha in terms of infrastructure and capacity building."

But regarding the overwhelming corruption Rajuk is plagued with, the adviser said, "It is difficult to eradicate corruption overnight."

# Beware, car thieves!

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Recent arrests of a number of carjackers have a little impact on the ongoing surge of such crimes as most of the criminals have already gone into hiding.

Although police officials claim a slide in carjacking incidents, regular incidents of the crime continue to take place on the streets. The sharp rise in carjacking has caused panic and insecurity among car owners in the city.

The Detective Branch (DB) of the police said that around 93 carjackers, including 20 gang leaders, were arrested and around 140 stolen cars were recovered by two special teams of the DB in the last six months.

"We have two special teams along with the regular teams working on leads to stolen cars and people responsible for the crime," said a DB official. "Carjacking incidents have reduced considerably since we are paying special attention to the issue."

According to police, an estimated 35 organised gangs of carjackers are operating in the city. Some 233 cars were stolen in the last six months while around 6,952 cars in the last five years. Statistics also reveal 1,059 incidents of car thefts took place in the first 11 months of 2005 and 1,161 incidents in 2004.

A gang of four armed criminals hijacked a white Toyota Corolla from Khilgaon earlier this year when its owner was parking the car in his garage. The hijackers took the car at gunpoint. Police are yet to recover the car.

Shafique Imam's white Toyota Premio was also hijacked from near Gulshan Circle-1 in January this year. The carjackers assaulted the driver while the car was parked on the roadside and sped away with the car before the driver could do anything.

A frustrated Imam questioned the police's role in retrieving the stolen cars. "A relative of mine had to bribe the Ramna police to recover his Carina that was hijacked from Bailey Road a few months back," he alleged.

"Carjackers prefer to steal cars parked in garages or along the road," said a DB official. "They take advantage of the distracted drivers and hijack the vehicles at gunpoint or by sedating the driver," he added.

The official told Star City that the prowling carjackers also tend to attack vehicles at traffic signals and take flight with the car in a fraction of a second.

"They also tend to hire taxicabs and sedate the driver before fleeing with the car," said the DB official. "Drivers who put up any resistance are usually beaten up badly, some are even killed," he added.

The stolen cars are then taken into unmarked garages and the culprits change the numbers of their chassis, engines and registration forms with assistance from some unscrupulous Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) employees before selling them to buyers unaware of the cars' origin.

"They sell the stolen cars mostly to innocent people at much lower prices, assuring the buyers that the necessary documents would be completed within a short time," said another DB officer. "After selling the car, they go into hiding."

ADB officer told this correspondent that the alteration of physical features and identification information of the cars by the carjackers make it difficult for the police to verify the stolen vehicles properly.

The carjackers change the colour and other physical features of the stolen vehicles at small roadside automobile workshops scattered across the city.

"But a bulk of the cars are modified with different chassis and engine, making it difficult for us to verify the rightful owners," he added.

While some of the cars are sold with modified chassis or registration information, others are ripped into parts that are later sold secretly.

Parvez Mohammad, a resident of Mohammadpur had to repurchase parts of his own car at prices three times higher than usual. The parts were stolen from his car parked in the garage and surprisingly turned up later in the market.

Parvez went to Dholaikhal the next day and found the parts matching his car. "I was certain that those were the identical parts stolen from my car, but I was forced to buy them back at high prices," Parvez said.

"Initially they demanded Tk 1.20 lakh for the replacements. After several rounds of haggling through brokers, they settled on Tk 80,000," he added.

# A stadium sporting addicts and squatters

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Authorities' negligence has put Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamapur in a woeful state as poor maintenance along with illegal occupancy and antisocial activities continue to taint the stadium premises.

Situated in Kamalapur of the capital city, Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal stadium represents not only the small number of sport venues situated within the city, but also the irregularities of the authorities that taint the sporting segment of the city.

Shabby facilities, murky interiors including grubby dressing rooms, messy piles of debris and bottles of neurotics scattered all over the place along with floating residents illegally living in the unprotected shops reflect the lamentable state of the ground.

"It has been months since the playground has hosted any matches," said an official. "And it won't be for another half a year before the ground is able to host any new matches even if they start refurbishing the ground now," he added.

Ground supervising officials alleged that the Tk 30.54-crore stadium was completed in a haste and had a fair amount of construction work left undone when it was inaugurated earlier during 2003.

"Bulk of the allotted money was pocketed by some officials while the rest was used to meet the deadline," alleged an official.

The official told the correspondent that some of the galleries were unfin-

ished when the stadium was inaugurated and still require a fair amount of construction work while the rest have deteriorated and requires renovation. "Even bulk of the shops are yet to be finished although most of them have already been allotted," he added.

Hundreds of floating families were seen living in the poorly maintained and isolated shop stalls throughout the stadium. The rear end of the ground had the worst picture with scenes identical to any slum areas.

"They (floating people) have been evicted number of times but they always tend to come back later," said an administrator. "They won't leave the stadium until the shop owners claim their allotted shops, which is something we can't force them to do," he added.

Another official who was seen supervising a number of people as they watered the few dying plants that managed to survive the odds. The official pointed at the trash littering the ground and grudgingly blamed the authorities for not paying heed to the stadium's poor conditions.

"Even engaging some people to water these plants took a fair bit of effort, which is supposed to be a routine work; you can guess at the rest of the picture," said the official. "I have been with this stadium since its earlier days and it really hurts to see it like this," he added.

About the shabby condition of the stadium, Jahangir Alam, the regional officer of National Sports Council and the in-charge of the stadium told the correspondent that he had inspected the site about two weeks ago and as far as he is concerned the stadium is in a fairly good



Squatters and addicts occupy the Bir Shreshtha Mostafa Kamal stadium

shape.

"Some facilities might require some renovation work but they are not anything serious," he added. Alam said that they do not have any immediate plans to renovate or refurbish the stadium.

Mostafizur Rahman, the grounds man pointed out that the playground lay about one and a half feet below the drainage system; apparently the land within the ground subsided due to the sand

beneath the whole stadium. "We need to elevate the whole ground with two feet of soil before planting new grass to make it usable," he added.

The stadium was built over a ground that was previously used as a garbage-dumping site by Dhaka City Corporation. The authorities filled the dumping ground with sand before constructing the stadium, which does not help the conditions within the ground.

About the bottles of Phencydyls scattered around the ground interiors the officials told the correspondent that they are helpless against these gangs.

"Although RAB officers conduct frequent raids in the premises, they always come back later," said an official. "And police won't do anything as they are easily bribed and put a blind eye to the situation," he added.

STAR PHOTO