

'Air pollution should be treated as national crisis'

UNB, Dhaka

Bad air quality is one index where Dhaka is consistently topping the global chart, posing serious health risks to residents.

Rampant operation of illegal brick kilns in suburban areas around the city, along with the staggering number of unfit vehicles plying city streets are major contributors to the capital's rapidly deteriorating air quality.

Add to that the construction work of various large-scale infrastructure projects, which are making matters worse for city dwellers. The air pollution situation is so severe that even trees are getting affected.

The High Court also issued a nine-point directive to this end.

This alarming situation has prompted the government to chalk out various measures to fight the menace and protect the environment, said Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Md Shahab Uddin.

The capital's air pollution level has reached an intolerable level, the minister admitted.

Smog from brick kilns, smoke from unfit



With thick smog enveloping this entire road, a man wearing a face mask pushes an oil drum on a cart in Uttara Kamalapur area. Air quality in Dhaka remains consistently unhealthy, posing serious threat to public health. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

projects. Kiln owners have already been directed to produce 10 percent block bricks, the minister said, adding that it will be increased to 100 percent and use of block bricks will gradually be made mandatory in private projects as well.

He said the Department of Environment (DoE) and the World Bank published a research report on the sources of air pollution in Bangladesh in March 2019. According to that, the three major sources are brick kilns, vehicle fumes and dust from construction sites.

Pointing out that dust particles are contributing to the city's worsening air pollution as construction works continue without taking appropriate measures, the minister underscored the need for taking effective steps to control Dhaka's air pollution by all government and private organisations.

Sixteen camps have been set up in Dhaka and district towns to assess the air quality. "Steps will be taken after getting the assessment reports," he said.

"There're many reasons for air pollution in Dhaka. There must be coordination in construction of public and private

infrastructures, and among the agencies working with utility services. A proper management of various projects, including the elevated expressway, must be ensured," he said.

Shahab Uddin said they have written to authorities of the metro rail project for protecting the environment during the construction work. It was recommended to spray water to stop dust from spreading and cover construction materials and sites, he said.

"The government is monitoring whether the authorities implementing various development projects are using mechanisms to protect the environment," he added.

Quoting Rakibul Amin, country representative of International Union for Conservation of Nature, the minister said, "Green belts should be set up at various locations of the city and waterbodies need to be conserved. A system should be in place to identify how people can live safely... Air pollution should be seen as an important national crisis."

On January 13, the HC issued a nine-point directive, following a writ petition by Human

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Not everything needs enactment of new law

PM tells JS about stopping evening courses at univs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday in parliament said there is no need to enact a new law to stop evening courses at public universities.

"The president has already talked about evening courses, and the government is taking appropriate measures in this regard. Not everything needs enactment of a new law. The university authorities and the UGC can take steps regarding this," she said in reply to a query from Jatiya Party MP Mujibul Haque.

Sheikh Hasina said there were once session jams in public universities, and for that reason the system of two shifts or evening courses were introduced.

She said it was found that many teachers of public universities showed more sincerity to take classes in private universities than in their own universities. "As a result, problems arose in their respective

educational institutions," she said.

In reply to a supplementary question from BNP MP Harunur Rashid, the premier criticised the mentality that only students of English medium schools are brilliant.

Harun said a couple of years back, the High Court gave a directive to reserve five percent seats in Buet and other public universities for English medium students. He also mentioned that the directive was yet to be followed at public universities.

"It seems from the question of the lawmaker that only those who study in English medium [schools] are brilliant... We came from Bangla medium; maybe we are not brilliant, but that does not mean that we are the worst," Sheikh Hasina said.

The PM questioned why seats should be reserved for English medium students. "I do not see any logic in that," she said.

In reply to a query from reserved seat lawmaker Aroma Dutta, the premier

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MAJOR SOURCES

- ▶ Brick kilns
- ▶ Vehicle fumes
- ▶ Construction sites

CURBING AIR POLLUTION

- ▶ Covering construction sites
- ▶ Setting up green belts
- ▶ Conserving waterbodies
- ▶ Phasing out use of burnt bricks
- ▶ Making use of block bricks mandatory

vehicles and dust generated from public and private constructions sites, including those of the mega projects, are the main sources, he said.

"Brick kilns are responsible for 58 percent of the air pollution in the capital. Plans have been taken to shut down [traditional] kilns. We're working to produce eco-friendly bricks," Shahab Uddin told the news agency.

He said the government plans to stop burning bricks at kilns by 2025 and use block bricks to construct buildings under government

Kanchan sues Shajahan Khan for Tk 100cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Road safety campaigner Ilias Kanchan yesterday filed a Tk 100 crore defamation case against former shipping minister Shajahan Khan.

The case was filed with the court of Dhaka's First Joint District Judge Ultpal Bhattacharjee. The court will deliberate whether it would accept the case today.

In his complaint, Ilias stated that Shajahan Khan, at a programme in Narayanganj on December 8 last year, said Ilias had accumulated a huge amount of money.

According to the case statement, Shajahan said he would make public how

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DHAKA TODAY

DISCUSSION

Marking the 99th anniversary of Prof Ahmed Sharif

Organiser: Swadesh Chinta Shanghya

Venue: RC Majumdar Auditorium, University of Dhaka

Time: 4pm

EXPOSITION

International Fire Safety and Security Expo

Organiser: ESSAB

Venue: BICC, Agargaon

Time: 10:30am

FESTIVAL

Kibria International Print Fair

Organiser: Kibria International Print Fair Organising Committee and Kibria Printmaking Studio

Venue: Faculty of Fine Art, University of Dhaka

Time: 5:30pm

WORKSHOP

Zine Making

The event will centre around self-publishing and magazines.

Organiser: Goethe-Institut and HerStory Foundation

Venue: Goethe-Institut, Dhanmondi Rd 9

Time: 10am

CULTURAL PROGRAMME

Celebrating Pohela Falgun

Organiser: University of Dhaka and EMK Center

Venue: Bottola, in front of Arts Faculty, University of Dhaka

Time: 10am

A fun way to raise fire safety awareness



A boy is determined to extinguish a virtual blaze while playing "3D Fire Simulation" at the stall of fire service in this year's Ekushey book fair.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Among the innumerable stalls and pavilions at this year's Amar Ekushey Grantha Mela, you might spot an unusual stall where individuals in uniform are giving instructions about what to do in case of burn injuries.

"People usually want to put ice cubes directly on the injured area to ease pain, and it might even instantly provide relief," said Sohag, an official of Fire Service and Civil Defence. "But in reality, doing so causes damage to your skin and slows down the healing process. Therefore, normal water will do the trick."

Sohag was informing about fire safety to those who were coming to their stall on Monday. For the first time at the fair, fire service has set up their own stall on Suhrawardy Udyan to raise awareness about fire safety measures and medical emergencies.

The stall is beside their camp (adjacent

to the children's corner), and from there they will monitor the premises for the entire month of February.

At the stall, they are selling books related to fire safety measures, earthquake awareness, safety during lightning and thunderstorm, and basic first aid and medical emergencies. Besides those, it also has technical books on chemicals and their different usage, search and rescue, and precautionary measures if a vessel catches fire -- all written by firefighters.

Eight books have been published, four for children and the rest for adults and professionals.

One of the authors, Mir Amirul Islam, also a fire service station officer, said, "I particularly wrote books for children to make them aware of dangers of fire and other hazardous elements. If we can teach children from now, they will be prepared for medical emergencies in future."

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Islamic party leaders criticise Hefajat chief Shafi

Issue two-month ultimatum for dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A section of Islamic party leaders at a press conference yesterday firmly criticised Hefajat-e-Islam Chief Shah Ahmad Shafi for his controversial remarks on some Islamic rituals and ideologies.

They asked Shafi to sit in an open debate with them to discuss the issues within two months, and urged the government to cooperate in this regard. Otherwise, they threatened to go for a tough movement.

Bangladesh Tariqat Federation (BTF) and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat Bangladesh, two Islamic parties, jointly organised the press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity in the capital.

In a written statement, the parties alleged that Shafi used derogatory terms to describe food [tabarruk] of Eid-e-Miladunnabi, forbade people from taking part in Urs (a kind of religious congregation) asked people not to worship any peer or mazar, and compared women to tamarind.

Speaking as chief guest at the event, BTF Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandy said Shafi is "misguiding" people by providing wrong explanation of Islam.

But the government forged an alliance with them, Hefajat-e-Islam, who consider the national anthem forbidden [haram], and don't even use the national flag, he said.

"The government may do politics of vote, but we will keep protesting these activities and remarks," said Nazibul.

"We are giving two months to engage in a dialogue to solve these issues. Otherwise, we will announce a tough movement," he added.

The chairman of BTF, an ally of the Awami League-led government, also said the situation is worsening gradually and moving towards violence, but they want a peaceful solution.

"If we don't get a solution from the government, we will have to think of an alternative," he added.

BTF Co-Chairman Abu Sufian Khan Abedi also criticised Shafi, calling him "impertinent."

BTF Secretary General Syed Rezaul Haque, Executive Secretary General Masud Hossain Al Quadri, and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat Executive Chairman Abdul Karim Siraj Nagari also spoke at the programme, among others.

Incepta congratulates Bangladesh U-19 cricket team for their World Cup victory

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