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Down to Earth

Hazards to Public Health In City Life

By ASM Nurunnabi

Concentration of lead in Dhaka metropolitan city's air during the low-rain period has been reported to be one of the highest in the world. It has been revealed after a 17-month analysis carried out by some scientists of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC). The quantity of lead found in Dhaka's air during the months of November to January was 463 nanogram (billionth of a gram) per cubic metre, according to the analysis report. Second in the list is Mexico City with a concentration of 383 nanogram, while Bombay comes third with a count of 360 nanogram. Lead has long been recognised as a neurotoxin and it has adverse effects on brain development of children. Scientific evidence shows that lead retards the mental and physical growth of children, causing reading and learning disabilities, hearing loss, hyperactivity and reduced attention span even at low levels of exposure. Ingestion of lead is the main cause of poisoning in children, who represent the highest risk group due to their propensity to ingest significant quantities of contaminated dust and soil. Adults are also susceptible to lead exposure through inhalation. The main sources of human exposure to lead include leaded gasoline, industrial processes such as lead smelting and coal combustion, lead-based paints and leaden pipes or lead-based solder in water supply systems. Many countries have already banned use of many leaden products and have taken measures to control emissions. Vehicular traffic, however, remains the single largest source of environmental lead pollution in the city's urban area, accounting for about 90 per cent of all lead emissions into atmosphere. Besides posing an immediate health risk through inhalation, vehicular lead emissions also accumulate in the soil and enter the food chain, contributing to exposure through ingestion for long periods of time. High blood lead levels have been detected in urban areas where gasoline with high lead content is widely used, contributing to large public health costs. In Bangladesh, unlike many developing countries of the world, all vehicular fuels are leaded. During the medium rain-fall period (February-May) the concentration of lead in the air falls to 253 nanogram per cubic metre of air in Dhaka metropolitan city, according to the analysis of Bangladeshi scientists. The particulate masses are the lowest at 160 nanogram between June and August, when the rain-falls is the highest. Dhaka city people are reportedly more at risk from lead poisoning during low rain-fall period (November-January). Countries around the world are at various stages of tackling the problem of human exposure to traffic-related lead emissions. Public awareness of the impact on health of vehicular lead emissions coupled with strong political will to tackle the problem can play a decisive role in phasing out leaded gasoline in our country, which can get support from global funds in this behalf for the sake of public health and health environment. There is also vital question relating to water supply in Dhaka city. It is asked - is it safe? Both of Dhaka city's water supply is provided by deep tubewells which draw water from underground reservoirs. This is siphoned off to overhead storage tanks from where it is distributed through a reticulation of mains and service pipes to households or street taps or hydrants. In this arrangement, pollution can simply occur at every level of the distribution network. Although it is possible to kill bacteria and other toxins by the simple application of chlorine, the purification process is subject to setbacks for a good many reasons which call for lengthy elaboration. In one study on water supply by WASA to 12 areas of Dhaka city, none of the water samples examined were found to be excellent. Gross polluted samples were detected in Iskaton road, Old Dhaka, Kazipara, Mohakhali quarters, Kalabagan areas. Among the 5 areas from where water samples were drawn from overhead tanks, Salmullah Road and Eskaton were found to be grossly polluted. Lately apprehension has been expressed that the modernisation work of the country's only surface water plant at Chadnighat in the old part of the capital, though going on time, might not be able to supply safe drinking water. Local people are sceptic about the safety of drinking water from the Chadnighat plant, but adequacy of water rather than its quality is their immediate concern. Expressing concern about possible ground water arsenic contamination, the Department of Environment said that if there was any incident of ground water contamination, the possibility of surface water contamination could not be ruled out. The Chadnighat water treatment plant is close to Hazaribagh, the area known for leather industries. The Department of Environment are apprehensive that if the leather factories continue functioning without waste treatment plant for 5 to 6 years, not only the surface water but also the underground water would be at risk of chromium and other heavy chemical pollution.



Jemima Khan, wife of former Pakistan cricket hero Imran Khan, holds her baby, Sulaiman Isa, as they leave the Portland Hospital in London on Thursday. The boy was born on November 17.

Benazir blasts caretaker govt for 'dishonesty'

ISLAMABAD, Nov 22: Former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto Thursday lashed out at the caretaker government for arresting her political secretary and a former minister, hours after a superior court had quashed their detention orders, reports AFP. The court order was based on "justice," but the interim government led by caretaker Prime Minister Malik Meraj Khalid, has revealed its "dishonesty," by re-arresting them, a party official quoted her as saying. Benazir's political secretary Naeed Khan and her ex-minister Nawaz Khokar were arrested late Thursday, hours after their release from Adaya jail in nearby Rawalpindi city on Lahore High Court order, a spokesman for the deposed premier's party said. Khan has been kept at the police station for women in Rawalpindi, he said. Police source confirmed the arrest of the two Benazir associates but did not specify charges against them. Khokar who was minister for science and technology in Bhutto's cabinet was also whisked away by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) shortly after he came out of the jail, the spokesman said. Khokar was earlier arrested on Sunday and Khan was taken into custody two days later.

6 tribunals

From Page 1 will cease to exist as soon as a gazette notification on formation of the six divisional election tribunals is made, the sources noted. A total of 63 complaints were lodged with the election tribunals following the June 12 general elections. Later, the traditional dance of Andhra Pradesh, Kuchipudi, based on life of Lord Sree Krishna, was presented by eminent dance couple Raja and Radha Reddy.



Finance Minister SAMS Kibria addressing the concluding function of a two-day workshop on 'Stock Exchange' organised by Investors' Forum, Sylhet, at the divisional headquarters yesterday.

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ATP service Barisal pourasava to sell 30 tickets of each flight

From Staff Correspondent BARISAL, Nov 22: The Barisal Pourasava has taken responsibility of selling 30 tickets out of 70 of every Bangladesh Biman flight operating in Dhaka-Barisal route. This was announced by Ahsan Habib Kamaal, Chairman of Barisal Pourasava, at a press conference here today. He bought 30 tickets today. The Pourasava chairman urged the Biman authorities to arrange once-a-day flight in the route instead of once-a-week schedule and to change the flight's time schedule from afternoon to morning, particularly in the winter season. After the inception of flight operation by Biman in this route on December 3 last year, the service became irregular for various reasons and lately, the flight was suspended showing the reason of passenger shortage. However, Biman is scheduled to resume its once-a-week Dhaka-Barisal-Dhaka ATP flight from Sunday next. Taking off from Dhaka at 2:20 pm, the Biman flight will reach Barisal's Rahmatpur Airport at 2:50 pm. It will leave Barisal at 3:52 pm for Dhaka every Sunday.

3 BCL activists held with arms in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent KHULNA, Nov 22: Three Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists were arrested here today on charges of keeping illegal arms.

India Festival begins in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Nov 22: A six-day long 'India Festival-96' began at the Engineers' Institution here today, reports BSS. Officials had earlier said she was taken into custody under a provincial law allowing preventive detention of people considered a threat to public security.

Russian Security chief meets Chechen leaders

MOSCOW, Nov 22: Russian Security Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin met with Chechen leaders today to make final preparations for a long-awaited meeting between the Russian and Chechen premiers, Interfax reported, says AFP. Rybkin, Moscow's head negotiator, planned to "complete preparations for the visit of Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and the head of the (Chechen) coalition government Aslan Maskhadov," a source close to Rybkin told Interfax.

Rao supporters

From Page 1 Mauraya, Devendra Dwivedi and Janardhana Poojary as party general secretaries. No reasons were given. Rao stepped down as the Congress chief after he was charged with cheating, bribery and forgery in three separate cases.

Attack on labourers in Jessore: 5 hurt

From Our Correspondent JESSORE, Nov 22: Five persons were injured, two of them seriously in a clash between two groups of people over taking of meat by some Muslim labourers at the house of a Hindu farmer at Ajmeherpur under Bagherpara thana in the district last night.

Suicide

From Page 1 Bashar, a teacher of the Department of Arabic and Persian Language of the Dhaka University, killed himself by hanging from a ceiling fan at a mess under Dhanmondi police station Thursday evening. Nazrul hailed from village Khabir Bari under Kotwali thana of Barisal.

Edn policy

From Page 1 ered educationists and economists on this specific issue saying the government is yet to take any decisions on this. Quoting from the Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission report, he said that there should be a committee to regulate the management of government educational institutions to ensure standard of education. The education minister admitted that teachers are not well paid. He expressed concern over the growing tendency of private tuition.

25 BNP supporters

From Page 1 mates including women. They also damaged and looted about 20 shops of the bazar. District BNP secretary Advocate Resoul Quader Talukder Duhul, MP, alleged that police had refused to receive a case filed by his partymen. AL, however, filed a case and police arrested three BNP workers. OC of Baraigram thana and district Police Super were not available for comments.

Taliban down Dostam's jet as fighting continues

ISLAMABAD, Nov 22: The Taliban militia today shot down a jet belonging to Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam as fighting flared up between the two forces in the northwestern Afghan province of Badkhis. Taliban officials said, reports AFP. The Islamic militia brought down the jet with the help of a stinger missile while it was bombing their positions in Morghab district in Badkhis, a Taliban spokesman told the Pakistan based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP). No independent confirmation of the Taliban claim was immediately available. The portable stinger surface-to-air missiles were supplied to the Afghan guerrilla groups by western countries during their 1979-89 war against the Soviet Red Army in Afghanistan. Afghan sources said a Hezbollah faction commander, Hassan handed at least 19 shoulder-carried stingers to the Taliban when they overran former Afghan premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's key eastern base of Sarobi ahead of capturing Kabul in September. The Taliban today warned they had sufficient numbers of stinger missiles, the private news agency AIP said. It quoted Taliban officials in western Herat province as saying that the pilot of the jet, Najeebullah, had been arrested.

Car bomb blast in Kashmir: One killed, 16 hurt

SRINAGAR, Nov 22: A car bomb exploded near the police headquarters in Kashmir's capital city today, killing at least one person and injuring 16 others, witnesses and police said, reports AP. No one immediately claimed responsibility, but police blamed separatist militants campaigning for Kashmir's accession from India. The insurance claim has claimed 15,000 lives since 1989. Four of the wounded were policemen and the rest civilians, said a police officer. Police identified the fatality as Mohammad Ashraf Mir, 32, a local resident. The bomb failed to ignite a gasoline station about 100 meters (yards) away. Elections to the Jammu-Kashmir state government were held early last month, ending seven years of rule by the federal government. India had hoped the restoration of a popular government would help end the violence.

Tariff cuts

From Page 1 from such measures. During the recent visit of Foreign Minister Abhus Samad Azad to India, the Indian government had provided a definite timetable for the implementation of its decision on tariff reduction on 14 categories of Bangladesh exports. Referring to prevailing investment climate in Bangladesh Sami called upon Indian entrepreneurs to avail of the privileges and facilities being extended by Bangladesh to joint ventures and foreign investments in Bangladesh, he said, would enjoy the additional advantage of importing into India.

Queen Sophia

From Page 1 views on the importance of micro-credit in poverty alleviation. During her stay, the Queen will visit some Grameen Bank projects and meet with their members at Sonargaon in Narayanganj, Rajshahi and Sirajganj. She will also visit archeological site and historical places of interest at Sonargaon Folk Museum, Ahsan Manjil, Paharpur, Barind Museum and National Museum. Queen Sophia will leave Dhaka on Wednesday.

Singaporean investors

From Page 1 per cent increase over the same period in 1994/95. Tofael Ahmed met separately the exclusive group of American investors interested to invest in Bangladesh. The well-attended seminar was a clear manifestation of the Singaporean investors interest in Bangladesh, the message said. The one-to-one discussions on trade and investment between the investors and businessmen of Bangladesh and Singapore were held in a friendly and cordial atmosphere after the seminar. They discussed various joint venture projects and investment in Bangladesh. Tofael in his interview given to Singapore Television, Asian Business News (TV), Singapore Radio and The Strait Times highlighted the policy of the present government under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The success and the positive outcome of the seminar will bring in more investments from Singapore to Bangladesh and at the same time help improve the image of Bangladesh in Singapore, the message added. Singapore seminar is part of government's effort to increase foreign investment in the country through talks and discussions to persuade the investors to come to Bangladesh.

Miss World contest in Bangalore tonight

From Page 1 tival of Britain in 1951 by her husband Eric. She said the protests including threats of self-immolations and bombings were the 'most virulent ever'. We have never had these kinds anywhere. The girls... feel sad and concerned'. Bangalore police chief Sarat Chandra Burma said security was 'unprecedented' in this city of five million, adding that preventive arrests would be made to pre-empt violence. 'I will not say when we are going to start taking these people into custody but it is definitely on the cards,' he said. 'We have identified some individuals and groups. We are closely observing (them) and keeping a watch'. Visitors to the stadium are frisked thrice and have to pass through metal detectors. Tracker dogs and bomb squads periodically check the stadium, where fire extinguishers have been installed to guard against self-immolations. KN Shashikala, a virulent critic and the head of the Mahila Jagran (women's awakening) forum said she and 14 other colleagues would burn themselves to death to protest the 'obscenity and vulgarity the pageant will promote in the country'. Shashikala has spurned peace offers by Indian film legend Amitabh Bachchan, the owner of ABCL, to 'come and have a look at the show and whether we are doing anything immoral'. 'I am accessible all the time and ready for talks with the protesters,' he added. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has, meanwhile, said that only 'the organisers, the police and the contestants and not the people to Bangalore would fill the stadium'. The BJP, the main opposition party in Karnataka state, announced a 24-hour shutdown tomorrow. 'Nobody and nothing except