

# Dust, toxic fumes pose serious health hazard

**SHAMEEM MAHMUD and AMINUL ISLAM**

As the winter sets in, dust-polluted air is posing an added health hazard to the city dwellers.

Throughout the city, the air is now turning dusty. Dust originates from dug up roads, construction sites, industrial waste, transportation of sand and earth uncovered and from brick kilns around the city.

Emission of toxic fumes from thousands of two-stroke three wheelers, faulty vehicles and about 3,000 brick kilns worsens the air pollution.

At times, dust and toxic fumes settle in the air restricting visibility to only around 200 yards in many areas of the city and exposing local people, especially children, to serious health hazards. These float in the air for long in the absence of rain in the usually dry season - winter.

"Such pollution of air causes cough, nausea, fatigue, headache, sneezing, skin rashes and some other ailments. It is the worst enemy of an asthma patient," a senior doctor said.

With the onset of the dry season, city hospitals and clinics are reporting a rise in asthma attacks due to dusty air.

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is unable to combat the 'dust pollution using sprinklers' because of a severe crisis of water during the dry season," DCC officials said.

When contacted, Chief Health Officer of the DCC Dr Muhammad Ashraf Uddin said that several years ago, they had some vehicles for spraying water on dusty roads. Those are now out of order.

"We have lack of manpower and funds to control dust and fumes in the city with a population of around one crore. About 6000 cleaners of the DCC usually clean the roads in the early morning", he said. He mentioned that transportation of construction materials including sand and earth uncovered is a major cause of the dust pollution.

He however stressed 'self-initiative by city dwellers' for resolving the problem.

Prof Shah Mohammad Ullah of the Department of Soil, Water and Environment at the Dhaka University said, "There are fine particles (diameter less than 10 micron) and they can float in the air even for months. When we inhale these particles while breathing, these accumulate in human lungs and create respiratory problems."

A shopkeeper in Mohakhali bus terminal area, Mohammad Salim, said, "Besides health hazards, dust is also harming our business. I use mask to prevent inhaling dust, but I cannot protect various essentials

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## Two killed in attacks by their rivals in Mymensingh

**UNB, Mymensingh**

Two people were killed in attacks by their rivals in the district yesterday.

The dead were identified as Jinnat Ali, 38, general secretary of Shandhara union BNP in Phoalpur upazila, and Aman Ullah, 60, of Gafargaon upazila.

Police said rivals hit Jinnat Ali with sharp weapons while he was trying to prevent one of them, Mujibur, from breaking fence on a disputed land at village Marigay in Phoalpur upazila in the morning.

He was rushed to Phoalpur upazila health complex where doctors declared him dead.

Police arrested Mujibur's wife, Shamsunnar, and his relative, Rashida, following the incident.

In another incident at village Namabashya in Gafargaon upazila later in the day left a villager, Aman Ullah, dead.

Police and witnesses said Aman was fatally wounded in an attack by his rivals and succumbed to his injuries on way to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

## Dhaka to have trade promotion centre in W Bengal soon

**SAKYASEN MITTRA, Kolkata**

Bangladesh will set up a trade promotion centre in West Bengal shortly, its Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmood Chowdhury said here yesterday.

Talks on the issue with West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya has been "very fruitful", he told newsmen at the office of Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner here.

The Bangladesh commerce minister is on a two-day visit to Kolkata.

"The West Bengal government has promised to provide us with land at Salt Lake, and the Trade Promotional Centre will be set up in a couple of months", he said.

Chowdhury also stated that a successful trade relation can help in solving political issues.

"At the moment, there has been a lot of discussions on issues other than trade. I believe if proper trading is carried on between India and Bangladesh, it will bring wealth for both the countries. A number of non-issues that has been bothering both the countries will be amicably settled," he said.

He also added that India should help Bangladesh in becoming a self-dependent country.

"Bangladesh expects special and preferential treatment in trade on non-reciprocal basis because India always enjoys a billion dollar surplus (in trade) with Bangladesh."

He also said avenues for opening inter-regional trade between Bangladesh and the North Eastern and Eastern part of India should be explored.

Giving an example, he said, "Today, when fruits are sent to the North East, 30 percent of it rot

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## Schoolboy murdered in Sylhet: 4 arrested

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet**

The body of a ten-year-old boy was recovered yesterday afternoon two days after he went missing from home in Sylhet.

Police arrested 16-year-old Kadir Ali for alleged involvement in the killing of Shahad Ahmed, two teenage accomplices and Kadir's mother Anwara Begum.

A student of class III in the Barnamala Primary School at Bagbari in the Sylhet town, Shahad had been missing since Wednesday morning, said police.

On information, Shahad's parents went to the house of Kadir, a neighbour, on Thursday to find their son.

Anwara told Shahad's mother Lolai Bibi that her son took Shahad to the house of his (Kadir's) maternal uncle at Srimangal.

Soon afterwards, Anwara went to

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DOWN TO EARTH

# Nocturnal traffic scenario needs improvement

**ASM NURUNNABI**

Dhaka City's dreadful traffic scenario is an everyday phenomenon characteristic of the metropolis, with one of its worst aspects occurring shortly after dusk and the other from midnight.

The staggering volume of rickshaws plying the city roads and creating traffic jams all over the city present a different kind of hazard at night as most of the rickshaws do not carry any light.

During pre-independence days, rickshawpullers used to hang a hurricane lamp from their vehicle's rear at night, but they no longer do so perhaps due to the increase in streetlights and a plethora of neon signs. Moreover, the traffic police also don't insist on it. This however increases accident hazards, particularly in areas without streetlights. The risk of accident is the most during periods of loadshedding.

The city's traffic scenario undergoes a dramatic change from midnight. As traffic police personnel end their duty at 11:00pm, the city roads become free for all since there is no one to control the midnight and early morning traffics.

There is an almost unending flow of cars, buses, and trucks passing through some of the city's main thoroughfares at around midnight. A view of the midnight traffic on Shahbagh Avenue from the top of any high-rise building can be mind-boggling in that it is anything but disciplined.

In the absence of traffic control, such roads, especially those connecting other districts, look more like racing tracks. The drivers of trucks, buses and pickups race through the same arterial roads like the Airport Road leading to Tongi and beyond, and the road to Aricha at breakneck speed without any care whatsoever for road safety.

Such reckless driving has caused many an accident often claiming valuable lives. It is utterly regrettable that no effective measures have been taken by the city's traffic authorities for regulating vehicle speed after midnight to ensure road safety.

It is important to expand the road network for smooth traffic flow, which in turn should minimise road hazards. And in the absence of a good road network and with an ever-increasing number of vehicles of all kinds, ensuring road security is a proposition very hard to achieve. Also, Dhaka's traffic situation is worst affected by the movement of both mechanised and non-mechanised vehicles through the same road.

Some observers also point to the lack of coordination between different authorities concerned with transportation affairs. In the existing complex system of road man-

agement, some responsibilities lie with the Roads and Highways Department and some with the Dhaka City Corporation. But it is alleged that these two bodies hardly agree on any issue of importance. Nevertheless, the issue of traffic management at midnight begs the attention of the proper authorities and needs to be addressed and solved.

In this context, it may be mentioned that construction of a good number of high-rise buildings is underway in some important areas such as the New Elephant Road and the Panthapath areas. It has been observed that heavy trucks start bringing in building materials

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Silt from three rivers down the Khasia-Jainta hills across the border has left thousands of acres of croplands barren in four upazilas in Sunamganj.

## Osman Bahini chief of Fatikchhari arrested?

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg**

Has the notorious ringleader of infamous Osman Bahini of crime prone Fatikchhari been arrested?

Police claimed that they have arrested Md. Osman, ringleader of Oslam Bahini and son of Zakir Hossain, hailing from Rangamatia in Khagrachhari hill district.

But the arrested person told police that he was not the person they were looking for.

He said his name is Osman but identified himself as the son of one Noor Mohammad of Pinedong union under Fatikchhari thana.

However, the Second Officer of Panchlaih thana, SI Ayub Ali, told The Daily Star that they had evidence to prove that the arrested person was the wanted criminal -- Md. Osman -- ringleader of Oslma Bahini. The SI said the arrested criminal was concealing his real identity.

Md. Osman, ringleader of Osman Bahini, is a listed criminal and is accused in as many as fifteen criminal cases.

The alleged ringleader was

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# Sorrows of Sunamganj

## Vast areas of cropland turn barren due to silt carried by three rivers

**IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet**

Over 80,000 acres of cropland have turned barren and greenery is withering in vast areas of four upazilas in Sunamganj due to deposit of silt carried by three rivers from Khasia-Jainta hills across the border.

It happened in the last few years, making the lands uncultivable, official sources and local people said.

The rivers -- Jadukata, Chalti and Khashiamara -- flowing through Sunamganj Sadar, Tahirpur, Doarabazar and Biswambarpur upazilas, have also become unnavigable at many points.

As the rivers are losing navigability, floodwater overflow the banks and silt deposit is spreading to more areas, they said.

During a recent visit to the affected areas, local people told this correspondent that trees become yellowish and die within months.

This correspondent saw vast croplands covered with silt and many dead trees in Badaghat in Tahirpur upazila, Chalti river basin in Sadar upazila, Kharchar haor area in Biswambarpur upazila and in areas along the eastern bank of Khashiamara river.

Bamboo clusters, banana, coconut, betel nut and jack fruit plants are more vulnerable.

Some villagers in Badaghat and Tahirpur areas said over 2,000 bamboo clusters withered in the last one year alone.

Officials and environmentalists say immediate dredging of the silted rivers to enable those carry floodwater is the only solution to the problem.

But nothing has been done despite repeated appeals by local people.

Sources at the Water Development Board office in the Sylhet said a Tk 38 crore project titled 'Chalti River Development Project' was prepared and sent to the ministry in 1997 for approval. This project could make 9800 hectares free of silt, but it is yet to be approved, they said.

Two other projects for dredging the other rivers were sent for approval, one in 1983 and the other in 1990.

## SFL shrimp export stalled as SB stops payment

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna**

Export of about Tk 3 crore worth of processed shrimp of the Southern Foods Limited (SFL) has been stalled as Sonali Bank (SB)'s corporate branch here has stopped payment to the SFL due to suspected involvement of SB-SFL employees in the Tk 80 lakh swindle case.

SFL managing director SM Abul Hossain said the bank has given the company verbal permission to resume export activities without giving any guarantee whether it would extend any further loan facility for the purchase of fish.

Meanwhile, there have been allegations that the investigation officer (IO) of the swindle case has been dilly-dallying with the investigation process. Although the court had granted a two-day remand of the four accused in the case last Saturday, the IO did not begin his investigation until Wednesday night when the accused were brought to the Khulna thana from the district jail.

Interrogation of the accused has so far provided no clue as to how exactly the money was swindled out of the bank or who are the actual

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 21		5-16 pm
Dec 22	6-37 am	

### Prayer Timings

Dec 21		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-21	5-27
Esha	7-30	7-45

*Source: Islamic Foundation*

## YOUNG STAR CLUSTER

This Chandra X-ray Observatory image obtained on Thursday shows a multi-wavelength composite of the young star cluster RCW 38. At a distance of 6,000 light years from Earth, the star cluster RCW 38 is a relatively close star-forming region. This image covers an area about 5 light years across, and contains thousands of hot, very young stars formed less than a million years ago.

**PHOTO: AFP**

## 5 Indian pirates held after gunfight with forest guards

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna**

Forest guards and Indian pirates traded gunfire for over two hours on Wednesday evening at Harindanga canal of the Sundarbans.

After the gunfight, forest guards captured five Indian pirates including their ringleader Kanai Mondol 42, with two firearms.

The pirates belonging to 'Kanai Bahini' were identified as Kanai Mondol, Shubhash Mondol, Shukumar, Uttam Mistry and Ashoke Mondol.

They all hail from 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. The forest guards also rescued four Bangladeshi fishermen who were kidnapped by the pirates on December 17 from Harindanga canal for ransom.

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