

| Today | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| High 36C Low 26C Very hot with clouds and sun. | High 31C Low 22C Heavy t-storms in the p.m. | High 34C Low 28C Very hot with clouds and sun. | High 34C Low 28C Some sun; very hot, humid. | High 36C Low 29C Mostly sunny; very hot, humid. | High 36C Low 28C Mostly sunny; very hot, humid. | High 36C Low 28C Sunny, very hot and humid. |

Steps soon to stop artificial ripening

Indiscriminate use of toxic chemicals in growing vegetables and ripening fruits causes serious health hazards

MIZANUR KHAN

The government has decided to frame a policy in six months to control the indiscriminate use of toxic chemicals in growing vegetables and ripening fruits.

Tainted with the chemicals, vegetables and fruits cause serious health hazards to consumers, health experts said.

The policy after formulation will be submitted to the ministries concerned for approval, according to a decision taken in a recent meeting of the agriculture ministry with State Minister for Agriculture Mirja Fakrul Islam Alamgir in the chair.

"An extensive report on the artificial process of ripening bananas has prompted the ministry to formulate the policy as quickly as possible," an agriculture ministry official said.

Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute (BARI) in its report said the use of toxic chemicals to enhance the look of fruits and vegetables was a case in point.

"Unscrupulous businessmen

use chemicals to lure consumers by buying their products," the report said.

Having talked to farmers and traders of Shakhipur and Ghatale in Tangail, BARI report stated that toxic chemicals were used to make a quick buck and without knowledge of how to use these chemicals scientifically.

"Farmers use 39 to 42.5 percent ethylene in Tangail for seasoning vegetables and ripening fruits. This practice puts public health at risk," the report said.

The agriculture ministry formed three committees to investigate into the malpractice, based on the report.

One committee will look into the farmers' awareness in using toxic chemicals and the second will survey places where the practice frequently occurs.

Members of the first committee include representatives of the Agricultural Extension Department (DAE), BARI, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) and Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR).

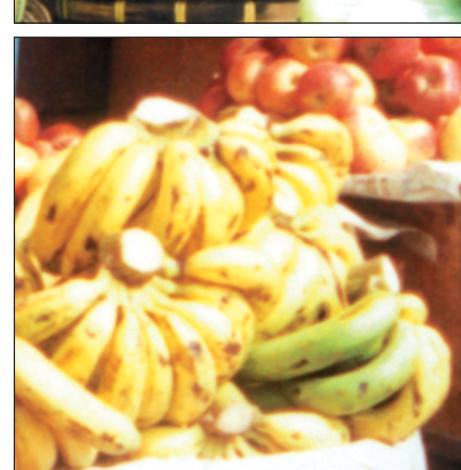
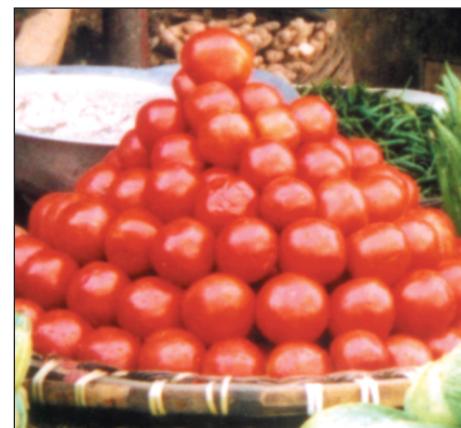
The second committee with two members – one each from the DAE and BARI – will carry out the survey.

The third will include representatives from DAE, BARI, BARC, BCSR, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University and agriculture ministry to make the final recommendations to frame the policy after evaluating the proposals from the other two committees.

Environment and health groups have demanded immediate intervention from the authorities to end the use of toxic elements in food.

The state minister for agriculture said: "As there is no proper instruction from the authorities, unscrupulous businessmen use hazardous chemicals in mangoes, melons, pineapples, guavas, papayas and tomatoes."

"It is already late. We should control the use of chemicals without any further delay as it has caused serious health hazards," he added.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Highly alluring but largely unsafe.

Illegal pumps add to water crisis in city



High-rises and illegal water pumps have become almost synonymous.

Use of such pumps in apartment buildings, high-rises, commercial and industrial structures is an open secret

SULTANA RAHMAN

Majority of homeowners, especially of high-rise buildings, have installed illegal water pumps causing serious disruption to Water and Sewerage Authority's (Wasa) distribution process and create acute scarcity during the dry season.

The use of pumps in apartment buildings, high-rises, commercial and industrial structures have become an open secret and some small houses have them for sucking water.

Sources claim that a number of dishonest officials and meter-readers at Wasa's different zones are responsible for this practice flourishing as they often turn a blind eye taking bribes from the owners of the buildings.

Officials say that as a massive quantity of the underground or surface water is pumped away into the reservoirs of the high-rises and apartments, the demand in the capital reaches crisis stages in summer. Wasa reportedly incurs a daily shortfall of nearly 15 crore litres.

According to Public Demands Recovery (PDR) Act, if any building owner is caught pumping water illegally, Wasa is empowered to disconnect the supply line temporarily or permanently. But residents suffering from shortage allege that the law is on paper only and is hardly ever applied.

"We have only one magistrate to implement the act for some 2.16 lakh consumers. Is it feasible to take action against almost the entire group of homeowners as 80 per cent of them have illegal pumps?" asked managing director of Wasa ANH Akhter Hossain.

"This situation has evolved over a long period. But now we are aware of it and planning to introduce a model to generate and distribute water under the mathematical equal system," said Hossain.

"Dhaka now holds hundreds of high-rises, apartments, commercial complexes etc. and the city is growing vertically everyday. More and more people are living or working at these places and building owners in their bid to satisfy the tenants have no option but to install water pumps which are illegally linked to the authorised water supply line of Wasa," said another senior official.

Many apartment owners also do not disagree.

"I am unable to cope with the water requirements of my tenants if I do not use the pump. Whatever I get from the Wasa line is consumed within an hour," claimed an apartment owner of Dhanmondi.

A Wasa official said that illegal pumps were one of the major reasons for the groundwater level dropping by around 24 meters since 1996.

Wasa estimates that approximately 2.16 lakh clients are buying water from it but the number should have been 3.50 lakh as per the holding list of Dhaka City Corporation

(DCC). The demand for water is 160 crore litres a day in Dhaka city but the Wasa is able to supply only 145 crore litres. It provides water to city dwellers through the Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant, three water treatment plants near Narayanganj and 412 deep tube wells, 230 of which have fixed generators.

"Many areas face severe shortage of water due to the erratic electricity supply. People in Mirpur, Gulshan and Barihara are the worst sufferers and their plight is compounded when most of the high-rise owners pump out huge volumes of water in the dry season," said a source at Wasa.

"The water supply woes worsen when electricity goes off for a long period of time. The introduction of the mathematical model and metered monitoring will improve the situation a lot," believed the managing director of Wasa.

He informed that Wasa would begin a survey to measure the uniformed and artificial pressure on different transmissions in the city. An independent consultant will be employed to conduct the survey and after it has been completed, all illegal connection and people involved in unauthorised pumping will be identified.

"We will go for action very soon against the householders who have illegal pumps," Akhter Hossain assured.

MAIDEN INTERNET FAIR



Visitors flock to the four-day internet fair being held at the Osmani Memorial Hall. Organised by the Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB), 44 Internet service providers, solution providers and telecom equipment vendors -- three from abroad -- put on display their ware and latest technology in 65 stalls. The fair concludes this evening. (See story on page 18)