

MAKING DHAKA LIVEABLE

Relocation of industries a must, among other steps

City of Dhaka, accommodating some 20 million people in a small zone, is suffering from severe air-water-noise pollution, unhealthy congestion of structures, unbearable traffic jam, and lack of quality civic amenities.

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THE number of industries in Dhaka is huge, and it is ever-increasing while causing serious pollution to water, air and land of the densely-populated capital. Although there are quite a few designated industrial areas in Dhaka, many industries have been set up in different other areas too, cashing in on loopholes of related laws and guidelines, muscle and money power, and political affiliation.

Behind the poor state of the megacity's environment and other menaces are the haphazard industrialisation, lapse of strict monitoring of compliance by the authorities concerned and absence of a comprehensive master plan.

Moreover, we see degrading environment also in the designated industrial areas situated around the city, namely Savar, Ashulia, Tongi, Gazipur and Narayanganj. The authorities concerned seem to have gone idle without ensuring whether the industries there are operating keeping the environment unharmed. However, the regulator does some enforcement activities against the polluters at those areas, but that are too inadequate to maintain or create a cleaner environment.

Even though a couple of years ago we had heard of a well-accepted detailed area plan (DAP) that entails reshuffle of the city's areas for different purposes and also shifting of industries and some other establishments out of the city, it is yet to see the light of the day -- thanks to some self-seeking businessmen, especially the realtors, who have been opposing the much-awaited blueprint, and insincere bureaucracy.

The context of demanding relocation of industries and decentralisation of commercial and government establishments is there for many years as city of Dhaka,

accommodating some 20 million people in a small zone, is suffering from severe air-water-noise pollution, unhealthy congestion of structures, unbearable traffic jam, and lack of quality civic amenities. These shortcomings have led to the city's being known and ranked as one of the least liveable of late. The city ranks at the bottom in terms of environment, too.

In Dhaka, serious air pollution -- thanks to the industries, smoke of diesel-fired vehicles and, heat of CNG-run ones, dust from construction sites and battered streets -- and water pollution -- all the rivers, canals, and lakes have been equally vitiated -- are enough to put the lives of thousands at risk of health hazards. The city dwellers are suffering from different respiratory skin, and waterborne diseases.

Because of poor management of the city's thousands of tonnes of waste and the waterbodies, the dwellers have been experiencing insufferable pain of airborne diseases, when the mosquito menace rises high too. There could be found hardly any canal or lake in the city suitable for a soothing boat ride. Bad odour from both solid and liquid waste in the heart of the country's capital is simply unbecoming of a sincere government, though anyone may argue by saying that similar instances are present in many other cities across the world. Yes, there are. But we are ashamed to be among those cities with shameful state of the environment.

We, unfortunately, see no concrete steps by the subsequent governments following any long-term and comprehensive plan to keep the city clean and liveable with the involvement of the city dwellers.

But we can see highly hazardous industriesgarments and dyeing units, plastic and polythene factories, steel mills,



Orthodox brick kilns vitiating Dhaka suburb air

tanneries and brickfields coming up in and around Dhaka city often under garb of "the government's assistance in industrialisation".

Even though the areas are designated for industries, the rules are hardly followed by businesses as they get assistance of the government officials without "legal hindrance".

Though we know that industrialisation is necessary for a country's faster growth, the possible environmental losses and threats should have been taken under consideration, too, and avoided as well. But here it is only one way traffic.

Meanwhile, the environment regulator is supposedly not having cooperation from the other government bodies -- ministries and agencies like the city corporation -- in going stricter against the violators of the existing environmental laws.

Had the successive governments been sincere enough towards the environment, they would not have allowed so large number of industries to be set up in the highly congested city, rather dispersed them to suitable areas.

And with the days passing, it is becoming impossible for any government to initiate relocation of the industries as the process

requires a huge amount of reinvestment and the authorities are unwilling to provide the business owners this money as compensation.

So far, we can see realistic efforts only in the case of shifting around 150 tanneries from the city's Hazaribagh to an industrial zone near Hemayetpur in Savar. However, it is still undecided what will happen to some 50 other tanneries still operating in Hazaribagh. Will they continue discharging seriously contaminated waste water to the Buriganga?

But what about the hundreds of garment industries though they are contributing significantly to the country's economy through exports and by employing millions of poor people? No answer is there but rhetorics of long-term plans to set up a garments industrial park somewhere else.

What will happen to the plastic and polythene factories operating overtly and covertly (because of ban on polythene production) in Old Dhaka and other parts of the capital? The governments only time and again try to assure people by pledging to set up a dedicated industrial zone for this sector too.

We are yet to know the fate of the steel mills emitting huge smoke into the air and

polluting the nearby land and water with the waste discharged.

The brick kilns were supposed to be on the most priority list of shifting or getting their technology changed into environment friendly ones. But, after years of research and publication of different survey reports elaborating the hazards from over 1,000 brickfields around the city -- Aminbazar, Basila and Ashulia -- the government is yet to finalise the technology viable for Bangladesh and ensure brick manufacturing in a cleaner way.

Even though the government in 2010 had declared that no brickfield would be allowed to operate in the traditional method after September 2012, we are yet to see any fruitful outcome. Possibly, like always, the deadline would keep on extending for the businessmen's sake.

It is observed that due to indifference of the authorities concerned in protecting the environment of the city's industrial areas, more industries are being set up and those existing are expanded indiscriminately caring a fig for existing laws. So far, what must be acknowledged is the enforcement drives by the environment regulator, though irregular and inadequate.

As many industrial units, other than those penalized and forced to suspend operations, are still functioning without abiding by laws and harming the environment unabated, it seems that the symbolic enforcement initiatives have not been effective in checking further contamination of the environment of the city and the surrounding areas.

It is also frustrating that the materialisation of DAP which could have eased much of the city's woes is stalled. It has become more of concern now since media reports say the plan is being revised. We are afraid it is happening only in the interest of vested quarters!

Patchy steps by different government agencies, environmental organisations and even by the people may bring some change to the current situation. But it would not be effectively sustainable without a realistic master plan.

The writer is a journalist.

Global warming: US experience Bats are vital to ecosystem

61 percent of land in the lower 48 states stretching from Nevada to South Carolina was experiencing drought. This is the highest percentage in the 12-year record of America's drought monitor.

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STRIKING changes in weather at places are an eye-opener for those who refuse to acknowledge effect of climate change because of global warming. For instance, people across the United States have been experiencing wild weather for the last one month or so. Unprecedented heat wave is passing through half of the United States with temperatures reaching 109 degrees Fahrenheit in Tennessee, 105 degrees in Indiana, 104 degrees in Montana, and 113 degrees in South Carolina while District of Columbia, Federal Capital, Maryland, Virginia experience around 100 degrees on an average. Incidentally, District of Columbia was severely hit recently by thunderstorm which knocked out power and kept the city roasting without air conditioning for days in 105 degrees Fahrenheit. Global warming appears to be real.

The national climate data centre gave the information that first six months of 2012 were the hottest ever recorded -- an amazing 4.5 degrees above the 20th century average. Therefore, denial of global warming makes no sense. In the words of columnist Eugene Robinson of the Washington Post, "then you are either in deep denial, or delirious from the heat" while atmospheric scientist Don Wuebbles has this to say: the scientific evidence is undeniable. There can be no longer any doubt; human induced climate change is affecting our weather. NASA's James Hansen, who established himself as best known scientist in the climate alarm camp and a leading advocate of aggressive measures to curb fossil fuel in energy use is of the opinion that

"extreme hot weather has become more frequent and affects a larger area of the world than was the case during the preceding 30 years". The present precarious atmospheric condition reminds of the criticism by the Republican minded critics, including Fox news channel network, against Al-Gore, former Vice-President under President Bill Clinton, who was awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for creating greater worldwide understanding of the measures that need to be adopted to combat global warming.

As a result of global warming drought has consistently been persisting in Colorado, Kansas, and Iowa leaving cornfields stunted and wilted in the heat wave. The same is the case in Oklahoma as has been gathered from Fakhruzzaman Chowdhury, a translator of repute and columnist, who is temporarily staying there with his younger daughter and wife, renowned actress Dilara Zaman. He said they were passing very difficult days as the temperature rose to 104 degrees at times. A part of Oklahoma was affected because of wild fire that caused damage to

more than 60 homes and threatened another 100 homes. Now, however, the fire is under control.

According to CNN report, 61 percent of land in the lower 48 states stretching from Nevada to South Carolina was experiencing drought. This is the highest percentage in the 12-year record of America's drought monitor. Perched conditions prevail in some areas as a result of record-setting heat wave. Price of corn and soybean oil is on rise as a result of damaged crops, affecting the people of low income category.

One has been watching since 1992 the issue of global warming being dealt with by the United Nations; also participated in two conferences under the United Nations Framework Convention on climate change in Bonn in 1997 while serving as a diplomat in Bangladesh embassy. Although these conferences have generated hope that world leaders understand the consequences of the devastating effects of climate change, but the dream that was generated at Earth summit in 1992 or at Johannesburg in 2003 have faded. Today's planet earth would have been a safer place if recommendations got implemented by now. An all out movement on global warming and climate change has now become imperative because negligence made by industrialist countries to mitigate the crisis is deteriorating the situation.

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The US experiences worst drought in decades

Despite their ecological importance bats are threatened worldwide, and their colonies and habitats are destroyed - both intentionally and inadvertently - because of myths, misinformation and lack of scientific knowledge and understanding.

SOURAV MAHMUD

OUR planet contains an amazing diversity of plants, approximately a quarter of a million species. They provide essential food and shelter, without which we and most other animals would quickly die. In turn, many plants cannot survive without animals to pollinate their flowers and disperse their seeds. Each plant has its own unique needs, some relying on many kinds of animals, others on just a few or even one. Butterflies, bees, bats and birds each pollinate plants that others cannot. From deserts to rain forests, flowering plants have developed a wide range of colors, shapes, sizes and forms, all designed to guarantee that a particular pollinator spreads pollen from plant to plant, ensuring the production of new seeds.

Bats have gotten a bad reputation. In myth and fairytale, bats are often portrayed as blood-sucking fiends. However, there are only three species of vampire bats out of more than a thousand species and they do not really suck blood.

Actually, bats play vital ecological roles as insect predators, pollinators, and seed dispersers. Many bats migrate seasonally, helping to sustain the ecosystems they depend on. The world has more than 1,100 species of bats, most of which live in the tropics. Total 28 species of bats were recorded from Bangladesh. They are - Domer's bat, Harlequin bat, Greater Asiatic Yellow House bat, Lesser Asiatic Yellow bat, Indian Pygmy bat, Little Indian bat, Kelaart Pipistrelle, Savi's Pipistrelle, Tickel's bat, Thick-eared Bat, Hodgdon's bat, Painted Woolly bat, Egyptian Free-tailed bat, Black-beard Tomb bat, Long-winged Tomb bat, Pouch-bearing Tomb bat, Greater Mouse-tailed bat, Lesser Mouse-tailed bat, Greater False Vampire, Horsfield's Leaf-nosed bat, Cantor's Leaf-nosed bat (VU), Tail-less Leaf-nosed bat, Little Nepalese Horseshoe



Indian Flying Fox

bat, Pearson's Horseshoe bat, Horseshoe bat, Fulvous Fruit bat, Indian Flying Fox and Short-nosed Fruit bat. All like to emerge just before dark.

In Bangladesh, most bats eat insects. Being insectivorous bats play a crucial role in checking the population of insect pests. Each night, they consume insects, including such forest pests as gypsy moth and spruce budworm moth. They help control corn earworm moth. Many bats migrate seasonally, including that feed on nectar. In Bangladesh the short-nosed fruit bats are important dispersers of date palm seed and pollinate many night blooming flowers. Indian Flying fox is an important pollinator and plays a role in seed dispersal along with other species. Domer's bat is globally a least concerned species. This species plays an active role in managing harmful insect populations such as termites, various polyphagous grasshoppers. Pearson's Horseshoe Bat is an insectivore and may become a factor in the control of insect's population. Flying fox may also be responsible for spreading diseases, particularly Nipa virus.

Bats with very long noses and tongues use special adaptations to more

efficiently obtain nectar. They, and the plants that rely them, live throughout the world's tropical and subtropical areas, sometimes so well adapted to each other that neither can survive alone.

Bats pollinate plants as they go. Many bats feed on nectar and pollinate countless important plants. Others eat fruit, playing a pivotal role in seed dispersal. Bat-dependent plants include banana,

guava, papaya, nut, mango, dates, and figs. Many medicinal plants also rely on bats. Fruit bats are also valuable allies in combating deforestation, a major element in climate change. Many of acres of forest are cleared each year, and the first step in reforestation is the emergence of fast-growing, heat-tolerant pioneer plants in clearings. Tropical fruit bats, which favor the fruit of pioneer plants, are major dispersers of their seeds. As primary predators of night-flying insects, bats consume enormous quantities of agricultural pests and reduce the need for chemical pesticides.

Despite their ecological importance bats are threatened worldwide, and their colonies and habitats are destroyed - both intentionally and inadvertently - because of myths, misinformation and lack of scientific knowledge and understanding. Bats are vital to the health of ecosystems and human economies world wide. We need to conserve this amazing dark dweller to maintain our ecosystem balance and for forest regeneration.

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