

BIWTA drive goes on

57 illegal structures along the Buriganga, Turag knocked down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) yesterday knocked down 57 illegal structures in Keraniganj's Madyachar and Basila as part of the ongoing drive against illegal establishments along the Buriganga and the Turag.

A team, led by BIWTA Deputy Director AKM Arif Uddin, demolished five three-storey buildings, four two-storey buildings, 19 one-storey buildings, 22 semi-concrete structures and 21 boundary walls during the drive that started around 9:00am and continued till 4:00pm.

A total of 10.5 acres of land were recovered from land grabbers during the drive, said Arif, adding that he would resume the drive at 9:00am today.

Earlier, the BIWTA had identified 906 illegal structures along the bank of Buriganga, stretching from Sadarghat to Gabtoli.

They started a 13-day drive on January 29 to free the river from encroachers and demolished 1,721 illegal structures.

Arif said they would continue the drive for 12 workdays under the second phase to free the Buriganga and the Turag from encroachers.

"We will not bow down to anybody and will demolish every illegal structure as we are getting the support from the administration, the judiciary and the people," he said.

Under a new project, the government is going to set up some 12,000 demarcation pillars along the rivers around the capital to protect them from encroachment.

Tenders will be floated soon and the work might start within the next three months. The government has already appointed a consultant to implement the Tk 850 crore project.

Under the scheme, the government will build some 50km walkways, plant trees along the walkways and set up three eco-parks at Shinnirtek, Tongi and Ashulia.

Living in toxic air

FROM PAGE 1

Brick kilns and vehicles run on fuel with higher level of sulfur have been identified as the major sources of air pollution in the country.

But Md Ziaul Haque, director (air quality management) of the Department of Environment (DoE), said there was confusion in the report which placed Bangladesh at the top in the country category.

"The average air quality of Dhaka and the entire Bangladesh are different. The air in rural areas and other districts is much healthier than in Dhaka," he said.

According to the report, four of the five most polluted countries in the world are in South Asia. Bangladesh is followed by Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and Bahrain.

The quality of air in Iceland, Finland and Australia are among the healthiest, the report shows.

Delhi is the most polluted capital city while Dhaka is second in that category followed by Kabul,

Noida, and Bhiwadi come next in the category.

The city ranking shows Asian locations dominating the highest 100 average PM 2.5 during 2018, with cities in India, China, Pakistan and Bangladesh occupying the top 50 spots.

The report focuses on PM2.5 as a measurement of air pollution. PM2.5 refers to particulate matter (ambient airborne particles) which measure up to 2.5 microns in size, and has a range of chemical makeup and sources.

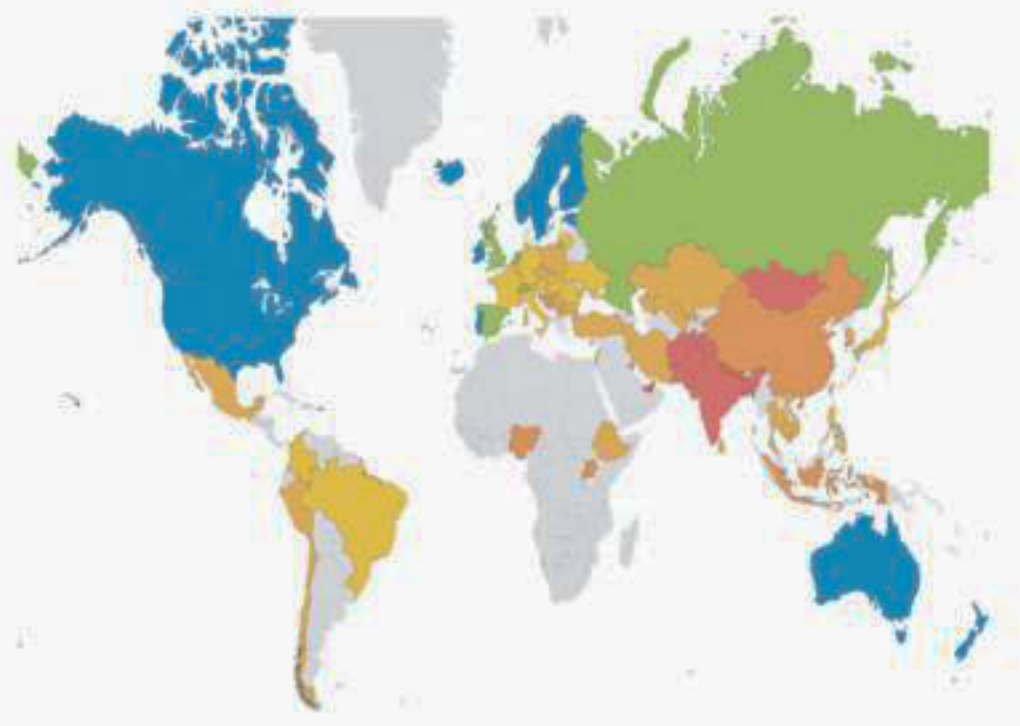
Due to its small size PM2.5 is able to penetrate deep into the human respiratory system and from there to the entire body, causing a wide range of short- and long-term health effects, the report said.

In a statement, Yeb Sano, executive director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia, said, "Air pollution steals our livelihoods and our futures, but we can change that."

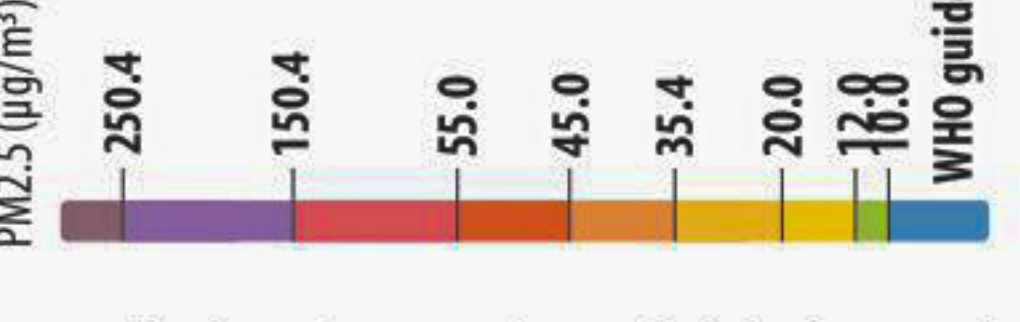
"In addition to human lives lost,

WORLD COUNTRY RANKING

BY ESTIMATED AVERAGE	PM2.5 concentration (µg/m³)
1 Bangladesh	97.1
2 Pakistan	74.3
3 India	72.5
12 China Mainland	41.2
18 Sri Lanka	32.0
23 Thailand	26.4
44 Brazil	16.3
54 Germany	13.0
55 Japan	12.0
58 Russia	11.4
65 USA	9.0
72 Finland	6.6



GLOBAL OVERVIEW



Manama and Ulaanbaatar of Mongolia, according to the report.

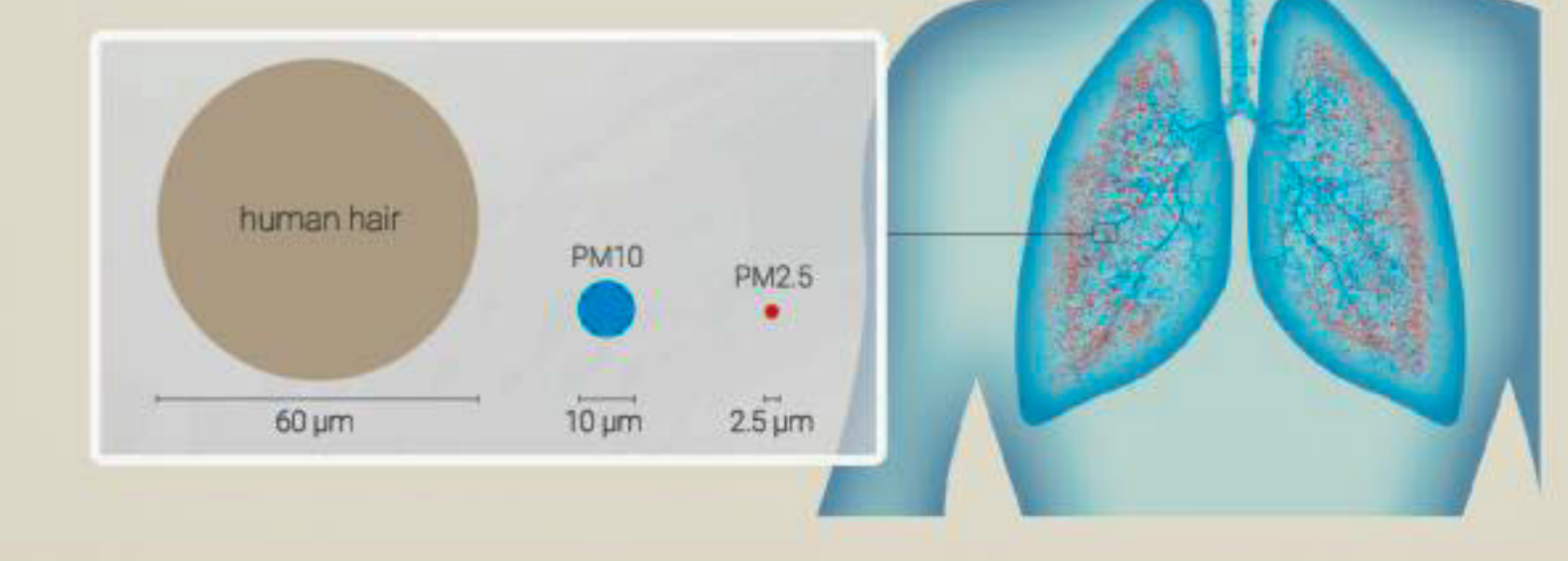
The report said seven of the top 10 most polluted cities in the world are in India. Gurugram is followed by Ghaziabad and Faisalabad (Pakistan). Indian cities of Faridabad,

there is an estimated global cost of \$225 billion in lost labour, and trillions in medical costs. This has enormous impacts on our health and on our wallet."

Talking To The Daily Star, DoE Director Ziaul said in Bangladesh,

WHY PM2.5?

The report focuses on PM2.5 as a representative measure of air pollution. PM2.5 refers to particulate matter (ambient airborne particles) which measure up to 2.5 microns in size, and has a range of chemical makeup and sources. PM2.5 is widely regarded as the pollutant with the most health impact of all commonly measured air pollutants. Due to its small size PM2.5 is able to penetrate deep into the human respiratory system and from there to the entire body, causing a wide range of short- and long-term health effects. Particulate matter is also the pollutant group which affects the most people globally. It can come from a range of natural as well as man-made sources. Common sources of PM include combustion (from vehicle engines, industry, wood and coal burning), as well as through other pollutants reacting in the atmosphere.



brick kilns were the major source of air pollution followed by construction work.

He claimed that the government has taken various steps to reduce emission of harmful smoke from brick kilns, including promoting cement blocks for construction work.

In a report by US-based Environmental Protection Index (EPI) on the environment performance by the government of 180 countries, Bangladesh ranked 179, having slipped down by 40 places from the year 2010 to 2018. The report was published in September last year.

According to the DoE and the World Bank, brick kilns make up 56 percent of the country's air pollution.

The government had enacted a law in 2018 to make these kilns environment friendly, but a recent report indicated that of the 7,772 brick kilns in the country, 2,123 have not converted to the required modern and environment-friendly technology.

Meanwhile on Monday, David

Boyd, special rapporteur on human rights and the environment, insisted that air pollution was a "silent, sometimes invisible, prolific killer" which affected women and girls more than men.

"Air pollutants are everywhere, largely caused by burning fossil fuels for electricity, transportation and heating, as well as from industrial activities, poor waste management and agricultural practices," he said at the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Air pollution is present both inside homes and outside and is responsible for the premature death of seven million people each year, including 600,000 children, according to the special rapporteur's UN environmental annual report.

"Every hour, 800 people are dying, many after years of suffering, from cancer, respiratory illnesses or heart disease directly caused by breathing polluted air," he said, before highlighting that effective measures could have prevented those deaths.

EU to continue working with Bangladesh

Envoy tells PM

UNB, Dhaka

European Union Ambassador to Bangladesh Rense Teerink yesterday said the EU wanted to continue working with Bangladesh.

Teerink said this when she met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her Jatiya Sangsad office.

PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters after the meeting.

He told the journalists that the EU ambassador said the EU was the biggest export destination for Bangladesh and she advocated for enhancing trade between Bangladesh and EU member countries.

Teerink said the EU was a big development partner for Bangladesh, especially in the education sector.

German Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Fahrenholtz, who was accompanying the EU Ambassador, highly appreciated the development of Bangladesh under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"Bangladesh has been moving on to become a mid-income country [despite] facing so many challenges with peace, security and stability," he added.

Hasina mentioned that the development challenges for Bangladesh were

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Assam border gets smart fencing system

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh yesterday inaugurated an advanced electronic surveillance "smart fencing" system along a geographically-tough 61-km stretch of Assam's border with Bangladesh to tackle cross-border crimes and provide respite to BSF personnel from round-the-clock patrolling.

Interacting with the media in Dhubri after inaugurating the project, Singh said the smart fencing, under Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), will equip the unfenced areas along the riverine border with sensors, enabling the Indian troops to take prompt action against intrusion and other forms of cross-border crime.

"The Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique (BOLD QIT) project will cover the entire span of river Brahmaputra in Dhubri with data network generated by microwave communication, optical fibre cables, day and night surveillance cameras and intrusion-detection system," he said after inaugurating the project.

"These modern gadgets provide feeds to the BSF control rooms along the border and enable the paramilitary force's quick reaction teams to thwart any possibility of illegal border crossing and crimes," Singh added.

Asked if the electronic surveillance facility will be extended along the entire India-Bangladesh border, Singh said "it will take time but a system such as BOLD-QIT system should be adopted along the India-Bangladesh border as well as the de facto border with Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir."

To a query on National Register of Citizens, the draft of which was published last year, the home minister said "work on updating the NRC is progressing well and the register will be published on July 31."

Noting that the Border Security Force (BSF) is responsible for safeguarding of the 4,096-km-long international border with Bangladesh, he said "at places where it is not possible to erect a border fence due to the geographical barriers, this BOLD-QIT will prove effective."

"The implementation of this project will not just help the BSF crack a whip on cross-border crimes but provide respite to the troops from round-the-clock human surveillance," he said.

The 61-km border in Dhubri district, where river Brahmaputra enters Bangladesh, comprises vast stretches of sand bank and innumerable river channels, making vigilance a daunting task for the BSF, especially during the rainy season.

Talking about a border project in West Bengal, the minister said "the state government there had assured us about a year back that it would acquire land. But that has not happened so far and work got delayed."

A statement issued by the home ministry said the decks are cleared now for taking up stage-II and stage-III the project covering about 1,955 kms of the border which cannot be physically fenced.

CIBMS involves deployment of a range of state-of-the-art surveillance technologies — thermal imagers, infrared and laser-based intruder alarms, aerostats for aerial surveillance, unattended ground sensors that can help detect intrusion bids, radars, sonar systems to secure riverine borders, fibre-optic sensors and a command and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

A never-ending probe

FROM PAGE 1

Ziaul Ahsan is now a brigadier general and director of National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre. He said he is not aware of the updates as he is no longer in the Rab.

"Investigation was going on as long as I was serving in the Rab," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Contacted, Rab-11 Commanding Officer Lt Col Kazi Shamsher Uddin on Monday said, "Taqi murder case is a sensational one. Investigation is still going on. It is difficult to say when the probe report will be submitted but it will take time."

He "cannot comment" on the latest state of the probe before it ends. Replying to a query, he also said there is no pressure on them and they were working in their own way.

Taqi's father Rafiur Rabbi told The Daily Star yesterday that there was no progress in the case as the killers are "linked to different wings of the state and the government".

Ajmeri is the son of late Jatiya Party MP Nasim Osman and nephew of ruling Awami League MP Shamim Osman.

Referring to the killing of journalist couple Sagar and Runi and collegegirl Tonu, he said the cases remain stalled as they are yet to be solved.

But the Taqi murder case is quite the opposite. "The Taqi murder case has been stalled because law enforcers already cracked it," said Rabbi, a prominent cultural personality of Narayanganj.

Rabbi claimed it has been five years since Rab cracked the case but they did not submit the charge sheet before the court.

"A state cannot be called civilised when it sides with a killer or offender," he added.

Last year, Rabbi told this newspaper, "Sometimes I call the Rab officers who are investigating the case. They tell me that the investigation is going on. That's all."

Taqi, 17, went missing after leaving his Shaista Khan Road home for Sudhijon Pathagar, a local library, around 4:00pm on March 6, 2013.

His A-level results were out the next day and he emerged as the highest scorer in the world in physics obtaining 297 out of 300 marks.

In chemistry, he got 294 out of 300, the highest score to be obtained in the subject by anyone in the country. He was a student of ABC International School.

On the morning of March 8, his body was found floating on the Shitalakhyar river.

Rabbi filed a murder case with Narayanganj Kotwali Police Station the same day. He also submitted a complaint to the superintendent of police on March 18, accusing seven persons by name, including Shamim Osman, and 8-10 unnamed others.

On March 10, 2013, then Narayanganj-4 lawmaker Sarah Begum Kabari and Rabbi blamed a vested quarter for the murder of Taqi.

On March 15, during a rally at Chashara Shaheed Minar, Narayanganj City Corporation Mayor Selina Hayat Ivy and Rabbi directly blamed Shamim Osman for the killing.

The next day Shamim Osman at a press conference denied his involvement in the murder and said Ivy and others are blaming him as part of a conspiracy. At night, Shamim filed a general diary against Ivy.

On March 17, 201-member "Santrash Nirmul Taqi Mancha" was formed with Rabbi as its convener to press for the arrest and punishment to the killers.

People raising voice demanding justice for Taqi came under attack twice. Unidentified miscreants swooped on candlelight vigils at Chashara Shaheed Minar on March 8, 2016 and February 8, 2017.

SEVEN NAMED IN THE COMPLIANT

The complaint submitted to the then Narayanganj SP named Shamim Osman, his son Ayon Osman, Jubo League leader Zahirul Islam Bhuiyan Parvez, district Chhatra League vice-president Rajib Das, general secretary Mizanur Rahman, Saleh Rahman Simanta and Rifat bin Osman.

On March 24, 2013, Shamim at a press briefing claimed that he and his son were out of the country when Taqi went missing and his body was recovered.

Ayon now lives in Dhaka.

Rajib is in India while Mizanur is in Narayanganj. Simanta, son of expelled Jatiya Party leader Bazlur Rahman Ripon, and Rifat are now in the town after they came out of jail on bail.

The whereabouts of Parvez, who has been expelled from Jubo League, is not known. He had attacked a programme organised by Taqi Mancha at Chashara Shaheed Minar on April 28, 2013.

Family members say Parvez has been missing since he was picked up by some armed men identifying themselves as DB members from Gulshan on July 6 that year.

The Daily Star could not get any comment from Shamim, now lawmaker from Narayanganj-4.

Contacted by one of these correspondents for his version on Taqi murder around noon yesterday, the lawmaker said he would not make any comment over phone.

Rather, he intended to have a face-to-face conversation a couple of hours later. Accordingly, the correspondent called him several times and even sent a text message but got no reply.

CASE HANDED OVER TO RAB

After the murder case was filed by Rabbi, the then officer-in-charge of Sadar Model Police Station started investigation. Rifat bin Osman was

arrested and interrogated on remand.

The home ministry on June 20, 2013 handed over the case to Rab upon a High Court order following an appeal by Rabbi.

Lt Col Tareque Sayeed was the commanding officer of Rab-11 at the time. Major Arif Hossain and Lt Commander SM Rana were serving in the battalion as company commanders.

All sent into retirement from the defence service, the trio have been sentenced to death for the 2013 seven-murder.

On August 7 in 2013, Arif, Rana and some other Rab members raided Ajmeri's "Winner Fashion" office on Allama Iqbal Road in the town and seized a pair of blood-stained jeans, a pistol butt and equipment for yaba consumption. Officials also found numerous bullet marks on the walls, almirah and sofa.

This "Winner Fashion" was one of the six "torture cells" detected by Taqi Mancha. Rafiur Rabbi had alleged that Taqi was tortured to death inside the office.

On March 6, 2014, the then additional director general of Rab Col Ziaul Ahsan told the media that Rab found evidence against 11 persons, including Ajmeri.

Others involved as mentioned in the draft charge-sheet are Rajib, Kalam Shikder, Mamun, Apu, Kajol, Shipon, Jamshed Hossain, Yusuf Hossain Liton, Sultan Shawkat alias Bhromor and Tayebuddin alias Jacky.

Ziaul Ahsan had also said that involvement of Shamim Osman's son Ayon and his two accomplices Saleh Rahman alias Simanta and Rifat bin Osman were not found.

CONFESSONAL STATEMENT

Law enforcers so far arrested five people -- Yusuf Hossain Liton, Rifat, Sultan Shawkat, Tayebuddin and Simanta -- in connection with the murder.

Two of them -- Yousuf and Sultan -- gave confessional statements before the magistrate.

In his statement on November 12, 2013, Sultan said Ajmeri Osman led the killing of Taqi. Sixteen days later, he appealed to the magistrate seeking withdrawal of his statement.

Sultan fled the country, coming out of jail on bail on March 20, 2014. A Narayanganj court issued warrant against him. The four others are now out of jail on bail.

Prosecution lawyer Pradip Ghosh Babu told The Daily Star on Monday that he had appealed to the court seeking directives to arrest those whose names appeared in the confessional statements of Yusuf and Sultan.

In the appeal, the lawyer also sought directives to find out the people involved in the murder and dumping of the body. Chief Judicial Magistrate in Narayanganj rejected the appeal in February 2017.



Celebrated Indian author Arundhati Roy enters the auditorium of MIDAS Centre in the city's Dhanmondi to address an event marking Chobi Mela X, an international photography festival.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Not a supporter

FROM PAGE 1

session titled "Utmost everything, Arundhati Roy in conversation with Shahidul Alam," which began around 6:45pm and ended around 9:10pm.

The conversation between Arundhati and Shahidul, a Booker Prize Award winner and an award-winning photo-journalist and social activist respectively, was about democracy, freedom of expression, human rights, nationalism, development, art, regional politics and the essays and books Arundhati has written over the last 20 years.

"Somehow, artists and writers have been led to believe that their place is in the marketplace, between best seller lists, literature festivals and film festivals," Arundhati said, while talking about how it is always important for writers and artists to speak out and do the right thing.

She also spoke about the long history of writers, artists and poets facing obstacles from the authorities for speaking out the truth.

"Why are you here?" joked Shahidul Alam, to which Roy replied, "Because of you Shahidul, and also because of all of you!" pointing to the audience.

Arundhati Roy, whose father is from Barisal, was among the scores of scholars, writers, rights activists and Nobel laureates who demanded the release of Shahidul, also the founder of Chhobi

Mela. He was hauled up from his home last year, hours after his interview with Al Jazeera which was critical of the government and jailed for about three months.

Shahidul is now on bail, and has recently challenged the legality of his arrest.

"I am not a big supporter of art made for propaganda, but at the same time, art that is not cognitive means nothing to me either," she said.

Artists have been made less dangerous, often not by denying regime but by placing themselves in the marketplace and making themselves commercially viable, she added.

"That has been more seductive than any kind of ruthlessness or censorship."

The audience included rights activists Khushi Kabir, Shireen Huq, founder of Gonoshasthaya Kendra Zafrullah Chowdhury, Prof Anu Muhammad and writer Anisul Hoque.

Besides discussing various issues, showing videos and sharing anecdotes, Arundhati read certain paragraphs from her novels and essays.

After a brief question and answer session, she read the first few lines from her latest fiction, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, which came 20 years after her award-winning novel "The God of Small Things".

Teeny tiny

FROM PAGE 16

Jacquemus has sold "tens of thousands" of Le Chiquito bags in the last year, according to Cosmopolitan magazine, with fashionistas so desperate to get their fingers on them that there are lengthy waiting lists for some colours.

Although the brand told AFP that they have yet to set a price for Le Mini Chiquito, if the reaction on Instagram and Twitter is anything to go by, demand could be equally brisk.

Fashion insiders have been laughing at themselves as they lap up the latest Lilliputian trend.

The hip style magazine Dazed declared "Jacquemus, your tiny bags are getting kind of ridiculous but we love them!"

Elle magazine headlined it as the "New It Bag" before quickly admitting that it can only hold an

AirPod earphone.

One fashion editor tweeted five uses for the bag including carrying "loose floss, a spare acrylic nail or a singular lock of curled hair retrieved from the head of Jude Law" circa 1999.

Another said it was "the perfect size to put probiotics and digestive enzymes", while a third thought it would be a snug fit for "Donald Trump's conscience".

The bag has unleashed the imagination of Twitter and Instagram users.

Some saw hidden depths in its tiny interior, saying it was a dreamcatcher into which you have to "whisper a secret" while another said it "represents the compartmentalised trauma we carry with us each day."