



VISUAL: TEENI AND TUNI

Choose books, not bans



Mahrukh Mohiuddin is the managing director of The University Press Limited (UPL).

MAHRUKH MOHIUDDIN

There are a few things to be noted regarding this year's Amar Ekushey Boi Mela, one of which is the expectation that this would be the year of recovery. After two years of writers, publishers, and publications being held hostage by the pandemic, last year's Boi Mela was able to exude a sense of normalcy. But then, of course, a national economic crisis hit soon afterwards.

One key issue that must be highlighted as it has been significantly affecting this sector, is the increase of paper price. The price hike of paper has been a major hurdle, but was not addressed with the seriousness it deserved. The price of paper has been an issue for our sector for a long time, but the situation escalated unusually last year, and therefore drew the attention of the media as well as the policymakers. What is most regrettable is that, even after paying high prices for locally produced paper, publishers are not receiving goods of their desired quality. This is something that needs to be highlighted throughout the year, and not only during the book fair season. If a state deems it important to move towards a knowledge economy, the price of paper – an essential item for knowledge products – have to be taken into serious consideration.

While producing new books was a challenge this year, publishing houses have tried hard to keep the promises made to authors and readers. We need to bear in mind that the publication industry supports the livelihoods of many people.

As for the quality control of books and publishers showcased at Boi Mela, the Bangla Academy certainly has a role to play. As publishers, we

Aalo clinics are designed to provide comprehensive primary healthcare services. The design of this model draws inspiration from Delhi's mohalla clinics, UK's general practitioner (GP) system and a few other countries' primary healthcare systems. The model also addresses the challenges that the existing primary healthcare facilities face.

also want the academy to play this role constructively and host the book fair as a non-partisan entity. However, I believe that there is a scope for the book fair policies to be reviewed. One may have disagreement with what a book may be condoning, but that should be addressed with a counter-argument made in another book, and not by means of undue censorship.

We believe that the freedom of expression of writers and publishers must be preserved. The Bangla Academy and our cultural affairs ministry is tasked with upholding the interests and rights of publishers and writers. For these institutions to instead become a barrier to our freedom of expression can only be described as tragic. I hope these

institutions that we respect deeply also realise that irrational embargoes can only make way for situations that come back to haunt those who impose these restrictions.

The least we can say is that the policies should be applied across the board with the rights of readers, writers, publishers and other stakeholders in mind, and not to serve the interest of a coterie of publishers with privileged access to policymakers, and particularly not at a time of deep financial crisis.

Publishers nowadays are having to work through a lot of challenges, but one hopes that some scope for discussions and dialogue will open up. I believe that the current policies in place at Boi Mela are somewhat well thought out, but I am not sure if the policies are uniformly applied in order to maintain the quality of books showcased at the fair, or to sufficiently prevent pirated books being displayed, or to offer some level of fairness for publishers of all capacities.

We have no option but to remain hopeful that the institutions tasked with regulating Boi Mela will open up space for dialogue. When these regulations are reviewed in the future, we hope that active participation of all stakeholders will be sought. After all, Amar Ekushey Boi Mela does not just belong to the Bangla Academy; it belongs to the publishers, writers and readers as well.



Lastly, we hope that our freedom of expression – which we believe is our constitutional right in a free country – will be ensured, and that the relevant government organisations will play the most significant role in upholding our rights.

Transcribed and translated by Afia Jahin.

Will the new air pollution control rules save us?



Md Masud Rana is an air quality consultant who works with the Department of Environment of Bangladesh, European Union, World Bank and other relevant organisations on air quality issues.

MD MASUD RANA

AFTER a long wait, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change recently published the Air Pollution (Control) Rules (APCR), 2022 as a gazette notification, aiming to curb the harsh air pollution in Bangladesh. Although the document was first drafted as an act in 2019, it was issued as a set of rules under the Environment Conservation Act (ECA), 1995, keeping most of the points of the original document.

Now, a question has been raised as to whether the rules would be stringent enough to control air pollution, and whether the relevant authorities would be liable enough. It is also imperative to review the strength of the authorities concerned and the coordination mechanism among the relevant organisations. It should be noted

problems, diabetes, etc. Almost the entire population of the country now lives in polluted air heavy with the level of fine particulate matter greater than deemed safe by the World Health Organization (WHO). Data from the Department of Environment (DoE) shows that the middle part of the country (Dhaka, Gazipur, Narayanganj) is the most polluted region, while the northeastern part (Sylhet division) is comparatively less polluted.

The level of fine particulate matter in Dhaka is more than double the first interim target set by WHO, and about 15 times greater than the final target it suggests. The city is one of the top 20 most (air) polluted cities in the world, and is just behind Delhi in the list of the top most polluted capital cities. The cost of this pollution is enormous: more than 200,000 people died

decades even within its expanding investment and control over the air quality improvement programmes, which has improved its air quality by about 50 percent. This achievement is the result of a cost-effective strategy with determined implementation.

The AQIP and NAQMS will, thus, be prepared based on scientific and economic analyses, social awareness, coordination, logistics, etc. For example, to enforce the standard of 35 microgram per cubic metre (set by the APCR for fine particulate matter) in Dhaka, the maximum tolerable amount of fine particulate matter within the city's airshed needs to be calculated first. To do so, we need to figure out the types and number of sources (including those outside the city) and their contributions to the total amount of fine particulate matter. The cost-benefit analysis of the available control options for the sources will help us plan the enforcement mechanism.

For policy considerations, we may initially enforce firmly on the less important but big contributing sources (like dust), while we may focus on limiting emissions from the important sources (like exporting industries) by improving management and retrofits of the



Dhaka has consistently been one of the most air-polluted capital cities in the world for the last several years.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

that the earlier ambient air quality standards and vehicular emission standards, which were set by another set of rules under the ECA, could not be met in more than one and half decade. In these circumstances, a possible way forward needs to be devised and implemented systematically to meet the target set in the APCR. But before discussing that, let us first look at our air quality scenario.

Air pollution in Bangladesh has been worsening with the increasing level of fine particulate matter (particulate matter with diameter less than 2.5 microns), which is greatly responsible for many serious

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prematurely in Bangladesh in 2019 due to air pollution, according to the State of Global Air report published by the US-based Health Effect Institute. The World Bank (WB) estimated Bangladesh's economic loss due to air pollution to be equivalent to about four percent of the GDP in 2019, which is concerning.

There are different scientific data regarding the contributing sources to Dhaka's air pollution. While some studies point to brick kiln emissions as the main sources, some point to dust sources, and others to vehicular emissions. The latest report published by the World Bank (2022) attributed 85 percent of the fine particulate matter in Dhaka's air to long-range sources. Among the sources, industries are responsible for 35 percent of the pollution in Dhaka (including 14 percent from brick kilns), and household sources (cooking, generator, etc) for 28 percent of the pollution. Although it is hard to believe that only 10 percent of the anthropogenic pollution is generated within the city (according to the World Bank), we must agree that a substantial amount of fine particulate matter during the dry season in Dhaka comes from long-range sources. Thus, The APCR will face great challenges in devising and implementing cost-effective solutions for sustainable improvement in air quality.

According to the rules, the DoE will monitor the countrywide air quality continuously and tag a region as "degraded airshed" if it does not satisfy the national standards. The DoE will prepare air quality improvement plans (AQIP) for each of the degraded airsheds; a national air quality management strategy (NAQMS) will also be prepared. These tasks are highly important, but will require laborious, systematic and coordinated approaches with skilled manpower. While in-depth scientific work (monitoring, modelling and analyses) to identify the real causes of air pollution are required, economic analyses are needed to find cost-effective control measures. Beijing, known for its air pollution, has been able to maintain steady GDP growth for the last three

outdated instruments. We may also be stringent on the sources that emit very harmful pollutants like lead, chromium, persistent organic pollutants, etc. In some cases, based on analyses of air quality data, topography, socio-economic features, etc, we may need to set time variation for the operation of particular sources, and sometimes may need to relocate sources.

As per the APCR, a high-level national committee with the cabinet secretary as president, and with 26 members from the relevant ministries, departments, authorities, city corporations, and educational institutions may be formed. This committee will oversee the implementation of AQIP and NAQMS, function as the centre of coordination among relevant organisations, and advise the government on air quality improvement issues. The APCR has also provided guidance and directives to the industries, local government institutions, and other government and non-government organisations on how to limit emissions from their facilities or constructions. However, if any party does not comply with the emission guidelines or the directives outlined in the APCR, they could be punished with up to two years of imprisonment.

The APCR could be an effective tool to control the continued harsh air pollution in Bangladesh. But its sustainable success will depend on the factual preparation of AQIP and NAQMS and their persistent implementation. The DoE and local government institutes have to play major roles here. The DoE may also arrange to broadcast real-time air quality status and the forecasts of air quality for other responsible authorities as well as the general public. This may prove to be a challenging job that requires extensive resources, it may lessen the harsh impacts on public health and agriculture through informed preparations. The DoE is now expected to make the necessary arrangements immediately to initiate the tasks outlined in the APCR, and enforce it accordingly to ensure a healthy life and environment.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Unduly severe

6 Separate

11 Not obtuse

12 Juliet's love

13 Aquarium fish

14 Fudd of cartoons

15 Bear in the stars

17 Bullfight cry

18 Window covers

22 Milk buy

23 Marionette's kin

27 Peruvian peaks

29 Fielder's aid

30 Put away

32 Takes advantage of

33 Mimics Porky Pig

35 Rockies tree

38 Italy's shape

39 Fragrance

41 Car type

45 Subject

46 Packing box

47 Be furtive

48 To this point

DOWN

1 Bowler or boater

2 Top card

3 Deep groove

4 Peacocks, notably

5 Body pump

6 Partial floor cover

7 Campaign pro

8 Clip contents

9 Lively folk dance

10 Ripped

16 Fall mo.

18 Relaxing resorts

19 Intimation

20 Edit menu choice

21 Speaks falteringly

24 Do some modeling

25 At any time

26 Dick Tracy's love

28 Reversal

31 Twosome

34 Puccini opera

35 Music's Waller

36 Steel ingredient

37 Lasso

40 Farrow of film

42 Week part

43 Noshed

44 Tennis need

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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