

**CURBING AIR POLLUTION**

# Govt keeps going back on its decisions

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

When it comes to reducing air pollution, the government seems to be backtracking on its decisions.

In 2019, the environment ministry made a plan to phase out clay bricks by 2025. But the government is now revising the plan, and may push back the target to 2028.

In August 2023, the government chose not to implement its decision to cap the economic life of buses at 20 years and trucks at 25. This means tens of thousands of old and run-down vehicles, a major source of pollution, may remain on roads.

Experts say the air quality is worsening, and by not implementing its decisions, the authorities are aggravating the situation.

A key indicator of air quality is the amount of PM2.5 in the air. PM stands for particulate matter and 2.5 refers to size.

According to the Department of Environment, since 2018, the annual average concentration of PM 2.5 in air has been between 83.24 and 104.20 micrograms per cubic metre.

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 issues.

Contacted, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, minister for environment, forests, and climate change, said, "We took some measures to curb the air pollution, but there was a gap in implementation."

The government will soon launch a 100-day programme to identify the sources of air pollution and make plans to combat it, he said.

According to the Air Quality Life Index 2023, released by the University of Chicago recently, the people of Bangladesh, where average PM2.5 level is 74 micrograms per cubic metre, would gain 6.8 years of life if the level was brought down to 5 micrograms per cubic metre, recommended by the WHO.

Rapid urbanisation, brick kilns, biomass burning, unregulated construction, old vehicles, use of poor quality fossil fuel, and transboundary air quality are the main causes of poor air quality in Bangladesh, experts say.

"We all know the sources of emission, but we don't do anything about it. That's why the situation is worsening day by day. The time has come to take decisive action," said Abdus Salam, a professor of chemistry at Dhaka University.

The situation will not improve unless the government takes a well-planned approach, he added.

DoE officials said air quality improves when it rains, but there was less rain last year.

Between 2017 and 2021, Bangladesh received \$2.3 billion to combat air pollution. The country was the third top recipient of international funds to curb air pollution after China and the Philippines, according to The State of Global Air Quality Funding 2023.

Experts say funding is not a problem for Bangladesh. Rather, lack of proper action is the issue.

Ziaul Haque, DoE director (air quality), said, "We have taken several steps. But the problem is that no one abides by our directives."

The DoE has taken several long-term programmes. It will take some time for them to yield results, he said.

There are over 7,500 brick kilns in the country. If the number is brought down to 2,000, the situation will improve, he said.

"Run-down vehicles should not be on roads. Also, different government agencies must work in a coordinated way because dust is a key source of pollution," he said.

Four South Asian countries – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan – have agreed to drastically bring down the annual average PM2.5 to 35

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Brick kilns, set up encroaching upon the Dhaleshwari, are polluting the air in Munshiganj's Nimtala area. Sand traders have also occupied a part of the river bank. Such grabbing of river land has reduced the width of the water body significantly. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Port city reels from abrupt gas outage

Businesses, households starved of gas for over 24hrs after glitch at floating LNG terminal; supply may resume today

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Chattogram

Gas supply to Chattogram city remains halted for more than 24 hours from Thursday night due to a technical glitch at a floating LNG terminal in Moheshkhali of Cox's Bazar, causing profound suffering to the residents, businesses and industries.

The glitch occurred during recommissioning of the LNG terminal which had been under maintenance for about two and a half months, according to sources in Petrobangla.

Officials concerned said the supply is likely to resume by noon today.

Two floating liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in Moheshkhali, having a capacity of 500 mmcf/d each, are run by Summit Group and Excelerate Energy of the United States.

Gas was being supplied to Chattogram city and its adjoining areas from the floating terminal operated by Summit Group since November 1 last year when maintenance work of the other terminal began. This led to reduction in supply, leaving the city dwellers in dismay.

Mumu Ghosh, a resident of Askar Dighir Par area, was at a loss as to how she would cook food for her three-year-old baby on Thursday night.

She waited till midnight hoping the gas supply would resume.

"As my baby started crying with hunger, my husband went out to buy food. But all the restaurants nearby were shut by then," Mumu said.

**"A technical glitch may occur any time but there should be a backup arrangement to deal with an emergency situation."**

Prof Sanaul Rabbi  
Head of the Department of Petroleum and Mining Engineering of CUET

They fed their child around 1:00am only after Mumu's mother, a resident of Jamal Khan area, cooked food using an induction cooker and sent it.

Mumu said they have been suffering from a shortage of gas supply since mid-October.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Israel, US split on 2-state solution

Netanyahu publicly opposes creation of Palestinian state

AGENCIES

Israel southern Gaza yesterday after it publicly sparred with its main ally the United States over the creation of a Palestinian state, a step which Washington sees as the only pathway to a lasting peace.

Witnesses reported gunfire and air strikes early yesterday in Khan Yunis, the main city in the south of the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Red Crescent reported "intense" artillery fire near the Al-Amal hospital, while Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry said 142 people were killed and dozens injured in the last 24 hours.

Near-total telecommunications blackout in the Gaza Strip entered its seventh day yesterday, making it difficult for information to get out of the enclave amid constant Israeli attacks.

The Israeli military said its Givati Brigade was fighting as far south as its troops had reached so far in the campaign.

Since October 7, Israel's offensive on Gaza killed at least 24,762 Palestinians, around 70 percent of them women, children and adolescents, according to latest figures from the Gaza health ministry.

"We will not be satisfied with anything less than total

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

- Israeli strikes kill 142 more in Gaza
- Gaza internet blackout passes one-week mark: monitor



CNG-run autorickshaws wait for gas in front of a filling station in the City Gate area of Chattogram yesterday. Inset, city dwellers through a restaurant in the Panchlaish area for collecting food parcels. People suffered as gas supply to the port city remained suspended since Thursday night due to a technical glitch at the floating LNG terminal in Moheshkhali.

PHOTO: PROTHOM ALO/RAJIB RAIHAN

## UN chief, 8 more nations congratulate Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and leaders of eight more countries have congratulated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on her re-election as prime minister of Bangladesh for the fourth straight term.

The countries are the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, Luxemburg, Turkey, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brazil, said the PM's Press Wing yesterday.

"The United Nations remains committed to working with your government, including through the United Nations Country Team, for the benefit of the people of Bangladesh," the UN chief said in a letter to PM Hasina on Thursday.

The United Nations deeply values its partnership with Bangladesh, including its major contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, the generosity

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

WE DEEPLY MOURN



**Tarique Ahmed**  
(1966-2024)

M&J Group, Dhaka announces with deep grief about the sudden demise of its Director Mr. Tarique Ahmed on the morning of Thursday, the 18th January, 2024.

We are deeply saddened by his sudden death at such a young age. He was the most loveable person for all of us. We suffer and we mourn his death. The loss of such a soul characterized by refinement or accomplishment is something that can never be recovered.

With teardrops running down our faces, we can't say adieu to him. We request you all to pray for his departed soul to rest in eternal peace in Heaven.

