

## **Noise pollution: A major concern of urban life**

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A few days ago a school-going toddler was killed by a Milk Vita Company-owned car in Mirpur. When the baby suddenly heard the sound of a bike, she ran and went under the wheels of the car. Her mother watched the accident happen in front of her eyes. She couldn't save the life of her dear daughter. The baby was killed on the spot.

As I was walking on the road at Nazirabazar, I was startled by the sound of a car coming from behind. Along with other types of pollution, harmful sound pollution also exists in Dhaka city. Among various kinds of sound pollutions, hydraulic horns of vehicles are the most harmful. No one can easily walk on the footpaths without hearing ceaseless honking of car horns all around.

Mahmud, a businessman said, "I couldn't sleep at night in a hotel which is located at Olankar in Chittagong, because of the blaring of horns by passing vehicles."

Like him, Mamun, whose residence is beside the North South Road in the city, also complained about deafening sounds of buses and trucks all night long.

Excessive noise pollution has become one of the major concerns of urban life. Although urbanisation, industrialisation and motorisation are essential for economic development, the urban people always long for a calm and quiet life, like that of the rural areas. For the physical and mental health of the urban people, particularly of the children, it is imperative for the decision-makers, leaders, planners and engineers to keep the noise level in the city within the acceptable limits. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is one of the noisiest cities in the world.

Despite low level of industrialisation and motorisation, the average noise level here remains far above the acceptable limits most of the time. With the economic development, the situation is expected to worsen further. Motor vehicle is the principal source of noise pollution in the city. It is observed that the average level of noise at the roadside in Dhaka exceeds the permissible limit by twenty per cent at all the locations and at sensitive points like hospitals, schools and parks, the figure is much higher than the acceptable level for those sensitive areas.

The unit of sound frequency is hertz. Human beings usually hear 15 to 20 kilohertz (KHz) frequency sound. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), generally 60 dB sounds can make a man deaf

temporarily and 100 dB sounds can cause complete deafness. But the noise of any busy on the street in Dhaka is estimated at a level between 60 dB and 80 dB, with the sound of vehicles being 95 dB, loudspeakers, 90 to 100 dB, mills and factories, 80 to 90 dB, restaurants and cinema halls, 75 to 90 dB, festivals, 85 to 90 dB, scooters or motorbikes, 87 to 92 dB and trucks and buses 92 to 94 dB. But the desired sound measure is 25 dB in the bedroom, 40 dB in the dining or drawing room, 35-40 dB in the office, 30-40 dB in the class room, 35-40 dB in the library, 20-35 dB in hospital, 40-60 dB in a restaurant and 45 dB in the city at night.

When the sound exceeds this limit, there is noise pollution. Noise pollution beyond a certain limit damages hearing organs and might even lead to the losing of one's mental balance. It also causes peevish temperament, affects lungs, hampers the intellect of the children and makes them apathetic towards their studies.

According to a survey of the Department of Environment (DoE), noise pollution causes mental and physical illness among the people. It causes high blood pressure, tachycardia, headache and indigestion, peptic ulcer, and also affects sound sleep. Anyone may become deaf for the time being if 100 dB or more noise pollution occurs for half an hour or more in any place. Working in an environment having loud noise for a long period can cause complete deafness to any person. Any sort of noise pollution seriously affects expecting

mothers. It has been observed that pregnant mothers living near big airports give birth to more crippled, deformed and immature children than those living in other places.

According to the DoE, the perfect sound condition for Bangladesh is 45 dB for the day-time and 35 dB for the night in peaceful areas, 50 dB for the day-time and 40 dB for the night in residential areas, 60 dB for the day-time and 50 dB for the night in mixed areas (residential, commercial and industrial localities), 70 dB for the day-time and 60 dB for the night in commercial areas and 75 dB for the day-time and 70 dB for the night in the industrial areas.

Another survey of DoE shows that noise pollution has increased in different parts of Dhaka City. It indicates that in and around Shaheen School area the noise level is 83 dB during daytime and 74 dB at night. In and around Motijheel Government High School area the noise level is 83 dB during day-time and 79 dB at night, in areas close to Dhanmondi Government Boys School it is 80 dB during daytime and 75 dB at night. The same is the case in most other areas. At Azimpur Girls' School and College it is 80 dB during daytime and 74 dB at night, at Tejgaon College, 75 dB during daytime and 67 dB at night, at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, 82 dB during day and 74 dB at night, at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, 80 dB during the day and 69 dB at night, at Mitford Hospital, 76 dB during the day and 73 dB at night and at Shishu Hospital, 72 dB during the day and 69 dB at night.

Noise pollution is a health hazard. But, in Bangladesh, very little has been done so far to reduce noise pollution. The authorities concerned must create awareness among the people so that in the long run people can eradicate noise pollution from the country once and for all.

The level of noise pollution is closely related to traffic volume, particularly with the number of heavy vehicles like trucks and buses as well as auto-rickshaws. Other factors influencing noise pollution include improper maintenance of the vehicles, bad road surface condition, and use of high pitch-horns and frequent use of horns. Several measures can be proposed to reduce the level of noise pollution in the city. These include increase of public consciousness through education, implementation of monitoring system and construction of noise barriers.

Many students reported that their studies are disrupted by the sounds of horns. Among the general population many are experiencing headaches; bad temper; difficulty in concentration and having trouble in sleeping. They experience hearing problems due to noise pollution. Drivers say they honk in traffic jams. The general public strongly supports any measure to reduce noise pollution, with the vast majority of them supporting effective arrangements for improved traffic control.

Music or song is heard being played in a high volume

on many occasions even at night. If a person cannot sleep peacefully at night, how can he/she work the following day? If a student cannot read and cannot sleep at night, how will he/she appear at examination? If a man has a heart condition and he cannot sleep at night, what may happen to him is anyone's guess.

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