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Front Page

## Rising noise pollution falls on deaf ears



AREAS	PERMISSIBLE SOUND LEVEL SOUND LEVEL UNIT (DB)	
	DAY	NIGHT
Silent zones	50	40
Residential areas	55	45
Mixed areas	60	50
Commercial areas	70	60
Industrial areas	75	70

Helemul Alam

Dhaka city remains exposed to serious sound pollution due to lax enforcement of the law.

The pollution is caused by construction work using brick crushers and mixing machines, use of heavy equipment in factories and loudspeakers in and around the capital. Needless honking by motorists also largely contributes to the pollution.

The sound level in Dhaka city in April-May was beyond the permissible limit, more than double the limit in some cases, according to a survey by the Department of Environment (DoE).

The Noise Pollution (Control) Rules, 2006, prohibit honking in a 100-metre radius of hospitals, educational institutes and offices. The rules do not allow use of brick crushers within a 500-metre radius of a residential area. Taking prior permission is mandatory for using loudspeakers.

The law has provisions for punishing the first-time offender by a maximum of one month's jail or Tk 5,000 in fine or both. The punishment for a second-time rule breaker is six months in jail at most or Tk 10,000 in fine or both.

But thanks to a slack enforcement of the law, offenders are rarely brought to book.

According to the noise control guidelines, the permissible level in the silent zones (100 metres around hospitals, educational institutions, courts and offices) is 40 decibels at night and 50 decibels during daytime. It is 45 decibels at night and 55 decibels during the day in residential areas and 50 and 60 decibels respectively in mixed areas.

In commercial areas, the limit is 60 decibels at night and 70 decibels during the day and 70 and 75 for industrial areas.

The DoE survey -- done at 12 major points between 11:00am and 1:00pm -- found the maximum sound level at 90 decibels while the minimum was at 77 decibels.

The areas covered in the survey are Mirpur-10, Farmgate, Bijoy Sarani, the road in front of the Prime Minister's Office, Mohakhali, Kuril Biswa Road, Biman Bandar Rail Station, Banani, Kanchpur Bridge, Gulistan, Sayedabad and Jatrabari.

Medical experts say noise pollution causes headache and irritation that in turn make people suffer from depression and anxiety. Excessive sound also interferes with attention. Continuous exposure to sound pollution increases the pace of heartbeats and the risk of cardiac arrest.

Lelin Chowdhury, chairman of Health and Hope Hospital, says sound pollution in the long term reduces hearing ability and increases secretion of stress hormone, which leads to a rise in blood pressure.

In addition, it makes people intolerant, making them vulnerable to psychological disorders.

Children suffer the most from hearing losses due to noise pollution and their mental development gets hampered. Noise pollution can also cause miscarriages and premature births.

"There is no count of the affected people, but the number is rising day by day," said Lelin, a specialist in preventive medicine.

Work for Better Bangladesh (WBB) Trust, an environmental organisation, in a survey between March and April last year found the maximum sound level in the capital's silent zones to be 104 decibels.

According to the trust, the maximum sound level in front of Square Hospital at Panthapath was 104 decibels between 9:50am and 9:55am on April 21. It was 103 near New Model University College between 12:00noon and 12:05pm on the same day.



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So far this year, the DoE has conducted about 60 drives against sound polluters and realised more than Tk 1 crore in fine, but could hardly bring about any change.

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Improving the situation requires more drives but the department cannot do so owing to lack of manpower, says DoE (enforcement) Director Munir Chowdhury.

It is also the duty of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and the traffic police to check noise pollution by drivers, he adds.

In 2005, the WBB Trust conducted a survey among 1,000 Dhaka city students, only to find 60 to 70 percent of them had difficulties concentrating and suffered from headaches because of noise pollution.

Ninety percent of them said their studies were disrupted by a blaring of horns.

Seven years have passed since. The magnitude of the pollution must have increased manifold by now as both construction work and number of vehicles have increased, medical experts say.

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