

# ‘Brickfield a hazard for students’

*It poses environmental risks for the school kids*

MD AMINUL ISLAM with ANDREW EAGLE

For the last fifteen years an illegal brickfield in Dewaniapara of Mymensingh's Trishal upazila has been a nuisance to contend with for residents.

Adjacent to Dewaniapara Government Primary School and Dewaniapara Emdadul Ulum Hafezia Madrasa, the Farazi Bricks enterprise is a health hazard in particular for the 340 students of those institutions.

“The burning of wood logs by the brickfield emits huge amounts of smoke,” says one madrasa teacher, who adds that staff members of the establishments suffer along with the students. Locals have requested the concerned authorities to take action on several occasions but as yet nothing has been done, the teacher says.

More recently residents lodged a complaint with directorate of the environment in Dhaka, in response to which an additional director general from the directorate, Kazi Sarwar Imtiaz Hashmi, visited the site on 26 October 2016. According to official sources, he requested the department of environment to investigate and take necessary action.

Subsequently on 1 November an inspector from the department Md Abdur Razzaq visited the site to discover the brickfield operates without a licence or an environment certificate.

According to sources, on 8 November Mohammad Mohsin Uddin, deputy director at the department, issued a letter requesting the owner of Farazi Bricks, Abdus Salam Khokon, to cease all brickfield activities immediately.

“The brickfield is situated on farmland and within a quarter kilometre of a school and hafezia madrasa which contravenes environment rules,” says Mohsin Uddin when contacted. “The brickfield has no environment certificate or licence and bricks are being burnt using wood, which is totally banned by the department.”

He further notes that the use of wood for fuel in baking bricks is a serious threat not only to the environment but to public health. “We sent a report to the directorate's enforcement wing to take action against Farazi Bricks. Immediate steps will be taken,” he says.

Despite the official request not to do so, Abdus Salam Khokon has allegedly started to burn bricks, from 16 December and is once again doing brisk business this season. He could not be contacted by The Daily Star as his mobile phone was found to be switched off.

According to Mohsin Uddin approximately 128 brickfields in Mymensingh district have taken environment certificates since 2013, with a further 100 brickfields running illegally. “We are issuing letters to the illegal brickfields asking them to contact us and apply for department of environment certificates for their operations,” he says.

Staff shortages at the department make it difficult to ensure strict monitoring of the industry, a department source informed The Daily Star.

Trishal's upazila nirbahi officer Abu Jafar Ripon meanwhile says he will visit the area soon.