**Pedal Away Smog**

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November 14, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns), [Newspaper](https://www.nation.com.pk/newspaper)

Pakistan is facing significant health challenges, particularly the alarmingly high prevalence of diabetes. According to the International Diabetes Federation’s 2022 data, a staggering 26.7% of adults in Pakistan, totalling approximately 32,964,500 cases, are affected by diabetes. This health concern contributes to a less favourable average life expectancy in Pakistan, standing at around 65 years, in stark contrast to the global average of approximately 73 years. Positioned at approximately 150th place in global life expectancy rankings among countries, Pakistan faces a critical disparity in lifespan compared to other nations. The Air Quality Index (AQI), measuring the concentration of fine particulate matter in the air, has consistently recorded around 243 for Pakistan as a whole and approximately 350 specifically for Lahore in recent days. It’s crucial to note that AQI levels considered satisfactory are typically at or below 100. The persistently elevated AQI levels observed in Lahore and other major cities in Pakistan indicate a substantial presence of particulate matter in the air, posing potential implications for respiratory health and raising concerns about overall air quality. Several studies have demonstrated a correlation between improving AQI levels and increased life expectancy. Air pollution is associated with various health issues, particularly respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. By reducing air pollution and enhancing air quality, the risk of these health problems decreases, contributing to an improvement in overall public health. Efforts to lower AQI levels, such as reducing emissions from industrial activities, promoting cleaner transportation, and implementing strict environmental regulations, can positively impact the health of the population. This, in turn, has the potential to lead to an increase in life expectancy and a higher quality of life for individuals in affected areas.

[At least 30 people killed in IIOJK bus crash](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Nov-2023/at-least-30-people-killed-in-iiojk-bus-crash)

Climate and environmental concerns seem to be overlooked in our list of priorities. Unlike other nations that allocate significant portions of their budgets to address environmental issues, we find ourselves heavily investing in activities that contribute to environmental degradation. In contrast to the global trend of adopting electric vehicles for cars, buses, and various transportation modes, we face challenges in meeting our domestic electricity demands. The emergence of numerous new vehicles, including the concerning prevalence of Qing Che vehicles notorious for significant smoke emissions, is exacerbating the issue. Furthermore, motorcycles, a widely favoured private mode of transport, significantly contribute to air pollution through smoke emissions. Despite economic challenges, public transport remains unpopular and underutilised, with private vehicle ownership taking precedence. Unfortunately, the status symbol associated with personal vehicles, particularly cars, deters people from opting for public transportation.

[Fog/smog likely to develop in plain areas of country:PMD](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Nov-2023/fog-smog-likely-to-develop-in-plain-areas-of-country-pmd)

In addition to a polluted environment, other contributors to health challenges and lower life expectancy include unhealthy lifestyle practices. One notable factor is the limited incorporation of activities like cycling and walking into daily routines. Cycling, in particular, has witnessed a decline in popularity and is often associated with individuals facing economic challenges. The middle class has largely shifted towards motorcycles. Even underage students can be seen riding bicycles without much regulation. Parents must take a proactive stance, encouraging their children to choose bicycles over motorcycles. Both private and public schools should play a role in promoting cycling among students, envisioning a scenario where students of all ages commute to their schools and colleges on bicycles, positively impacting their health and contributing significantly to reducing smog and fostering a cleaner environment.

The neglect of walking as a mode of transportation is another noteworthy issue. The prevailing mindset reflects a desire to use vehicles even for short distances, with some individuals aspiring to reach their bedrooms by vehicle. Marketplaces witness a trend where people prefer to be dropped directly at the shop doors, forsaking the simplicity of walking. Overlooking the development of city or town centres where strolling would be perceived as a luxurious alternative to vehicular transport is a crucial aspect. Creating such spaces could potentially shift the paradigm, encouraging a culture where walking is not just a necessity but a desirable and enjoyable activity. A more effective approach is to integrate walking into daily routines as a preventive measure against diseases, rather than initiating a walking regimen only after being diagnosed with conditions like diabetes. Proactively embracing walking for the maintenance of good health, rather than waiting for the onset of an illness before incorporating walking into lifestyles, is a wise strategy. In Europe and other developed countries, it’s common to observe people walking or even running as part of their daily routine. Contrastingly, in our context, choosing to walk may lead to offers for a lift and inquiries about potential unfortunate occurrences. Deciding to run might even lead to assumptions about one’s mental state. Initiating regular walking and cycling practices is essential to ward off diseases and maintain overall health. Moreover, embracing these activities can significantly benefit the environment by reducing pollution and minimising smog.

[Threat from sand and dust storms spreading: UN](https://www.nation.com.pk/16-Nov-2023/threat-from-sand-and-dust-storms-spreading-un)

While government involvement is crucial in promoting such practices, the community’s independent decision to adopt healthier habits often yields more effective and sustainable results. The collective effort of individuals in making these choices can create a positive impact on both personal well-being and environmental health.