

DOWN TO EARTH

Smoke Pollution Threatens City Life

By A S M Nurunnabi

The pollution caused by motor vehicles by their back smoke emissions has been steadily increasing in the city with the growing motor traffic on the city roads. Though the owners of mechanised transports know it well that such excessive exhaust beyond allowable limit is harmful to health, many of them do not generally take corrective steps in this regard.

According to sources in the Department of Environment, if we are to effectively control the smoke pollution from motor vehicles, the first requirement is to insist rigidly, before they are allowed on the roads, on their fitness certificate with particular reference to the fitness of their exhaust system. According to available statistics, about 60 thousand cars, jeeps and minibuses run at present on city roads. Of them only 21 thousand 982 have fitness certificate. Of 24 thousand buses and trucks, only 5 thousand 692 have such certificate; whereas out of a total of about 20 thousand tempos, mishuks and autorickshaws, only 8 thousand 518 have fitness certificate. According to a survey conducted by the Department of Environment, commercial vehicles are the worst offenders in this respect. The vast numbers of the vehicles, which have no fitness certificate, yet ply on the roads, give a clue to the enormity of the problem of smoke pollution facing the city. Competent observers are of the view that an effective way of dealing with the problem is for the police to play a predominant role in ensuring that no vehicle plies on the roads without the fitness certificate.

Knowledgeable quarters feel that the existing provisions of law do not act as adequate deterrent. The police take action against the defaulting vehicles under the Motor Vehicles Act and start a case which later goes to a Magistrate's court for decision. The penal provision of the law is not stringent enough in as much as the maximum penalty that can be imposed on the owner of a faulty vehicle is only Taka 200. Moreover, there are certain points which are said to be not covered by the law. For example, there is no definition of the offending black smoke. Also no equipment or laboratory is available for collection and examination of black smoke. Observers believe that the law should be suitably amended covering the lacunae and providing for stringent measures.

Recently a drive was launched by two mobile courts in the Dhaka city against vehicles with faulty exhaust system. It is open to doubt whether such steps which are irregular can improve things. According to source in the Department of Environment, drives to be successful should be carried on in a systematic and sustained manner. It is suggested by them that a mobile squad should be formed with representatives of Department of Environment, Metropolitan Police and BRTA. Such squad should undertake drives twice every week to haul up vehicles guilty of black smoke emissions. Repeated offenders should be dealt with by seizure of their vehicles.

Knowledgeable sources state that owners of vehicles

can stop emissions of offending exhaust fumes by incurring a small expenditure. The problem can, however, be tackled in a more effective way and with a little more cost if the vehicles could be fitted with catalytic converter, a mechanism for ensuring clean fumes. To adopt this system, it is necessary to ensure easy availability of that mechanism, either by import or by local manufacture.

Emission of black smoke from a vehicle takes place when there is incomplete burning of fuel on account of worn-off piston ring. It also takes place when adulterated fuel and lubricant are used. In a recent inter-ministerial meeting, it was recommended that a committee headed by an officer of the Petroleum Corporation be formed with representatives of the BRTA, Police, BSTI, Department of Environment and owners' association to look into the question of adulteration of fuels and lubricants.

The prime need of the hour is genuine desire of the owners of vehicles to extend their cooperation in the betterment of environment and in preservation of public health. It is futile to think that mere observance of environment weeks or undertaking of periodic drives against offending vehicles will be enough to maintain a healthy environment. What is needed is that everyone of us as well as the vehicle owners should be alive to the gravity of the situation and should be helpful and cooperative in ensuring a better environment for the present and for the future.



Yeltsin storms out

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voters to decide whether to allow private ownership of land, a pressing economic reform that the Communist-dominated Congress has balked at taking.

Parliamentary Speaker Russian Khasbulatov, Yeltsin's chief rival for power, announced that Congress would convene Saturday to debate the referendum, as well as simultaneous early elections for president and members of Congress. The Congress voted to place both items on the agenda.

Yeltsin told lawmakers before walking out that if they did not remove the power-limiting measures from the resolution, "I shall really be forced to think about additional measures to preserve the balance of powers in the country."

Although he did not spell to the deputies what measures he would take, aides said he would press for the national plebiscite on April 25.

"It's much better to go to polling places than to take to the streets," Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai told reporters.

In addition, it is presumed elections would be held early for both the president and parliament.

Legislative speaker Russian Khasbulatov, Yeltsin's main rival for power, is seeking simultaneous elections. Currently, presidential elections are scheduled for 1996 and parliamentary elections for 1995.

US officials said in Washington on Thursday that Yeltsin was weighing the dissolution of congress and emergency rule, but First Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Shumetko told reporters not to expect such a sensation.

Nevertheless, Yeltsin told the deputies he had reached his limit.

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Awami League Chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina flanked by the Japanese Ambassador Toshio Saiki (left) and the Canadian High Commissioner Emile Gauvreau (right) at an iftar party hosted by Hasina at her Minto Road official residence yesterday. Also seen in the picture is Awami League leader Abdus Samad Azad (far right). — Star photo

Bombay: 200 killed

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ters in Nariman Point among a cluster of high-rise commercial buildings.

An employee of Singapore Airlines who didn't give his name said he saw a vehicle go up in flames in the driveway outside the entrance to an underground parking lot. A yellow sign read, "Entry for authorized vehicles only."

The Bank of Oman, which leased space on the street level, was destroyed. Tajdar Haider, bloodied from deep gashes in his face, said the bank was suddenly obscured by thick smoke.

"There was a total blackout. I opened my eyes and there was nothing in front of me," he said.

At the fashionable shopping district of Century Bazar, about 6 miles (10 kms) from the stock exchange, a device that exploded near a waiting bus blew a 10-foot-by-8-foot crater in the street. A tree set among the tall buildings was blackened, and the street was littered with human and material debris.

"It was a bed of broken glass and hands, legs and bodies," said Meena Menon, an Indian reporter. "Some passengers flew in all direction. The driver's body fell on a building 100 feet away."

A bomb exploded on the ninth floor of the luxury Searock Hotel in north Bombay where an English team was staying for a five-nation field hockey competition. Three people were cut by glass.

The tournament, also to be attended by France, Poland and Russia, was postponed in January because of the riots. It was likely to be called off for a second time.

One bomb exploded near the offices of the Shiv Sena, an extremist Hindu group that was held responsible for inciting the January riots.

In a country that has witnessed all manner of ethnic, religious and nationalist violence in 46 years of independence, the devastating car bomb assault was a new experience that sent terror through the city.

"There is panic in the whole of Bombay," said stock

DPRK

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the nuclear issue and also because of joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises that are usually held on an annual basis.

"The withdrawal from the NPT (Nuclear Proliferation Treaty) is a well-judged self-defensive measure against the nuclear war maneuvers of the United States and the unjust act of the officials of the secretariat of the International Atomic Energy Agency," said the agency report, monitored in Tokyo.

The decision was made Friday by North Korea's Central People's Committee, its equivalent of a Cabinet, the agency reported.

North Korea, one of the last hard line Communist nations, earlier had rejected a February 25 ultimatum from the Vienna-based IAEA giving it one month to accept a special inspection of two sites suspected of being nuclear waste dumps.

North Korea insists that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes only.

The IAEA made the request after its inspectors were denied access early in February to two buildings at Yongbyon, the site of what is thought to be the North's main nuclear complex. The agency also was seeking explanations about materials shown to inspectors by North Korea.

South Korea warned rival North Korea Friday that it is prepared to cope militarily with provocations resulting from the North's withdrawal from a nuclear control treaty.

The warning came as world leaders reacted with shock to North Korea's decision to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. They said the withdrawal would have grave security repercussions for the Asian region and the world.

Anjuman buries Shefali

By Staff Correspondent

As no one claimed the body of Shefali, she was buried at the Adampur graveyard by Anjuman-e-Mafulul Islam Friday.

Earlier autopsy of the body was done at the Forensic Department of Dhaka Medical College. But the investigating agency is yet to receive the report.

Shefali, 15, a maid-servant in the house of an air-hostess Ummu Salma Islam, at Mirpur was murdered early Tuesday. Salma indicted for the murder was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail after she had made a confessional statement before a Metropolitan Magistrate Thursday.

Meanwhile, Shefali's parentage is yet to be known. As per the provision, the medical authority handed over the body of the maid to the Unjuman-e-Mafulul Islam after a 72 hours yesterday afternoon, a medical source said.

A senior officer in the Dhaka Central Jail told The Daily Star last night that they were yet to receive the suspension order served by Biman to Ummu Salma Islam until yesterday.

However, concerned authority of Biman Bangladesh Airlines sent the order to the Detective Branch of Police Thursday night.

Lawyers may move a bail petition on behalf of the accused before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate today (Saturday).

Student stabbed, robbed at Keraniganj

By DMCH Correspondent

A college student, Ujjal, 23, was stabbed and robbed of his cash and other belongings at Keraniganj on the outskirts of the capital Friday morning.

Ujjal, a student of BA (Hons) class of Jagannath University College, was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) with several stab injuries yesterday.

When he was at a market at Keraniganj, a group of muggers attacked him and snatched Taka 13,140, a wrist-watch and a gold chain at around 10 am yesterday, said Ujjal.

Hasina hosts iftar for diplomats, editors

Chief Minister Sharad Pawar, the highest elected official of Maharashtra state, summoned reinforcements of paramilitary troops, fearing another round of communal trouble.

Shortly after the blasts, scattered Hindu-Muslim violence erupted in several parts of the city. Witnesses saw mobs burning cars, looting shops and throwing stones.

There was no evidence to suggest that the bombs were related to the Hindu-Muslim violence that swept India in December and January. But in this edgy city, any incident could reignite the trouble.

The riots began after Hindu zealots demolished a Muslim shrine in the northern town of Ayodhya. They subsided after three weeks, but suddenly erupted again in Bombay in January. The official death toll nationwide was 1,940 in two months.

Pawar refused to say whom he suspected for the bombing wave, but said it was apparent an attempt to undermine efforts to bring harmony back to Bombay or to disrupt India's economy by striking at its financial heart.

"There has to be perfect planning" for this kind of action, Pawar told reporters.

He advised Bombay's 12 million residents to be on alert for more bombs, to lock their cars and check the basements of tall buildings. The city, like India, is about 82 per cent Hindu and 12 per cent Muslim.

Teams of explosives experts from the Research and Intelligence Wing, which is India's foreign intelligence branch, and the domestic agency, the Intelligence Bureau, were rushed to Bombay.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao pledged today to catch and punish the bombers.

Rao, 71, expressed shock and sorrow at the blasts and urged people to maintain the peace and not allow themselves to be swayed by rumours.

In a statement almost seven hours after the first of the explosions rocked the Bombay stock exchange, the Premier described the blasts as inhuman and criminal.

IJP leader, L K Advani, felt the tragedy involving today's bomb explosions was a handiwork of a country inimical to India and said Pakistan's Inter-State Intelligence (ISI) may have been involved.

The needle of suspicion of clearly points to the ISI. This is not a communal problem, but an international one," Mr Advani said in a statement here tonight.

Bosnia

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to any killings.

Neither entered pleas to the charges on Friday.

Meanwhile, a report from Tuzla adds: British soldiers hoping to evacuate sick and wounded from an eastern Bosnian enclave were trapped Friday by desperate Muslim women and children and their Serb besiegers.

Equally beleaguered, Bosnia's Muslim-led government said it would accept an international peace plan with some reservations and urged the immediate resumption of peace talks. Serbia's hard-line president agreed to press Bosnian Serbs to attend.

As many as 2,000 Muslim women and children blocked the Britons' road out of Konjevic Polje, protesting Serb demands that no men leave and wounded Muslim soldiers be treated at Serbian hospitals, said Peter Kessler, UNHCR spokesman in Zagreb.

Gallego said the desperate Muslims also demanded an immediate cease fire and the permanent deployment of UN military observers in the war-torn area.

Gallego said Serb forces besieging Konjevic Polje also set new demands, that future UN aid convoys have no military escort, and that all Serb civilians and wounded soldiers be evacuated from Sarajevo.

The Midnight File

OIC proposes observers for Afghan peace

MANAMA, Mar 12: The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) today proposed an Islamic observer force to supervise a ceasefire in Afghanistan, an OIC official said. OIC Secretary General Hamid Al Ghabid made the offer to rival Afghan leaders who earlier today signed a peace deal in Islam's holiest city, Mecca in western Saudi Arabia, reports AFP.

Clinton plays down Russian crisis

WASHINGTON, Mar 12: President Clinton on Friday played down the crisis in Russia as a parliamentary dispute and voiced fresh support for embattled President Boris Yeltsin and his economic and political reforms. "I support democracy in Russia and the movement to a market economy, and Boris Yeltsin is the elected president of Russia," Clinton said. "He represents that reform," reports AP.

Palestinians await deportee solution before peace talks

TUNIS, Mar 12: Israel's failure to bring home some 400 Palestinians deported to southern Lebanon motivated the refusal of Palestinian negotiators to accept an invitation to a new round of Middle East peace talks, the PLO reported Friday. The Palestine Liberation Organisation news agency Wafa cited a PLO official as saying that the Palestinians are awaiting an answer from US Secretary of State Warren Christopher to their demand that the deportees be brought home, reports AP.

DPRK special envoy's Dhaka tour postponed

The visit of North Korean Vice-President to Bangladesh, scheduled for March 14-17, has been postponed because of domestic compulsions.

Official sources here yesterday said the visit of Vice-President Li Jong Ok was postponed by the DPRK Government following certain developments in North Korea.

The North Korean Vice-President was to visit Bangladesh as Special Envoy of President Kim Il Sung.

ALWC

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are committing murder, hijacking and extorting money at the very nose of the law enforcing agencies, a resolution of the meeting said.

The government is not applying the Anti-Terrorism Act against terrorists and anti-social elements, the resolution said, adding that the law is being abused against political opponents of the ruling party.

In a separate resolution, the meeting expressed deep concern at the price-hike of fertilizer in northern districts. With the rise in prices of fertilizer the prices of other agricultural inputs also increased several times, it observed.

The meeting also condemned the government for failing to combat diarrhoea in the country's southern region and districts of Chandpur and Laxmipur. It called for taking urgent steps to combat the virus which had already taken an epidemic form.

Another resolution of the meeting protested alleged corruption, irregularities and wastage of money by the people in power. Like the past autocrat, the present "neocracy" has also resorted to corruption and nepotism.

The meeting referred to "illegal" payment of taka 56 crore to Italian construction firm Saipem for construction of the North-South Pipeline and wastage of crores of taka in construction of the building at 30, Hare Road.

It also alleged that the government has concealed the report on "corruption" in Sonali Bank. The meeting called for publication of reports of different parliamentary committees immediately and urged the people to raise their voice against corrupt ministers and officials.

MMC

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sure at its meeting at 9 am and asked the students to vacate halls by 10 am. Police guards have been posted to avoid further clash.

According to sources a girl student of the college was harassed allegedly by a BCL activist on the campus yesterday. At that moment, a JCD activist, Anjad Hossain Faruk protested it who was later beaten up by BCL activists at Baghmara Hostel.

In the afternoon, a group of JCD activists came to the Baghmara Hostel to protest the manhandling of Faruk. But soon it turned into series of clashes chases and counter chases between the two groups.

In the clash, three activists of JCD — Azad, Siddique and Masud were injured.

Later, at around 10 pm, a number of cracker blasts rocked the campus and unidentified groups ransacked five rooms of Baghmara Hostel. The belongings of the rooms were also set on fire.

Following the skirmishes, the college was closed since die today three days ahead of the scheduled ramzan vacation.

Magura

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Master, Anwar Hossain, Kudrat Ali, Janab Ali and Abul Kalam. Of the injured, Ayub Mollah, Shahadat Mollah, Majid Mollah, Jarina Khatun, Shada Khatun and Madhu Mollah were admitted to local health complexes with serious injuries.

About 30 policemen have been deployed in the troubled area to prevent further untoward incidents.

Two separate cases were filed with local police in this connection.

SKOP

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SKOP said the employers were presenting concocted figures and information on the industrial sector and trying to make the situation murky.

SKOP said the workers employed last wage hike in 1984. After that nine years had passed and prices of essentials had shot up without any rise in wages, SKOP said.

SKOP further blamed that government did not implement its agreement with workers though it took one month's time for doing so. It said as the government failed in its commitment, SKOP would continue the movement until the agreement was implemented.

Fahd, Sharif

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firmly that history will never forgive whoever violates it," Sharif said.

Rabbani said King Fahd had pledged, during a meeting with the Afghan leaders on Thursday night, to extend support to rebuild Afghanistan's economy ravaged by 14 years of civil war that brought the Mujahideen to power.

"King Fahd told us Saudi Arabia plans to rebuild Afghanistan which was destroyed by the war," Rabbani said. He added that Afghanistan was in urgent need on emergency food and medical supplies.

No word emerged on possible agreements reached during three days of talks in Saudi Arabia on ways to implement the agreement or on points of dispute left out of the original accord.

Most important of these points was the role of Afghan Defence Minister Ahmad Masood Shah, arch-rival of new Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who yet to form a government.

Masood said on Thursday he was ready to cooperate with Hekmatyar, but said he would withdraw his forces from the Defence Ministry's control if he lost his job.

MOU: Rohingya

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travelled to New York in January and discussed the issue with UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and the US state department officials. His talks led to the efforts to sign the MOU between Dhaka and the UNHCR.

The controversy on the repatriation emerged mainly because many of an estimated 250,000 refugees were found unwilling to return home until Myanmar permits international observers to monitor their return and rehabilitation.

Though Myanmar says the refugees are welcome back home with their religious and other rights restored, the military junta in Yangon still refuses to let UNHCR or any international agency to supervise the refugees' resettlement in Arakan from where they have fled over the last two years to escape alleged rapes, forced labour, murders and indiscriminate arrests.