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## DOWN TO EARTH

### Buriganga - A Dying River

By A S M Nurunnabi

The Buriganga river flowing in the south of the Dhaka city has seen the rise and growth of the city over centuries. At present the waterway is threatened with widespread pollution and gradual decay created by several man-made factors. Some of these causative factors are noted below.

The main centre of tannery industries in Dhaka is located in the Hazaribagh area. The tannery industries developed in this area from the early sixties because of the available advantage of discharging their wastes into the nearby Buriganga. According to a survey conducted by the Department of Environment, on the southern and western end of the river, there are about 175 tanneries, big and small. These tanneries are highly outdated and do not possess waste treatment facilities. The newly-established ones also are without this facility.

For the processing of leather, many chemicals are used, such as chromosol, sodium chloride, sodium sulphate, lime and other acid compounds. It is estimated that from each tannery in this area, about two thousand five hundred gallons of liquid wastes fall into the Buriganga every day. On this basis, 2500 to 3000 cubic metres of liquid wastes go into river water daily. Besides chromium, the wastes contain a large quantity of biological waste, leather, animal hairs, bloods, oil, grease, diluted and undiluted salt, etc. For the preservation of aquatic life, the level of dissolved oxygen (DO) should not be over 5 PPM. But in the Buriganga, the level of DO is

found to be between 7 to 38 PPM.

According to the findings of the Department of Environment, the river bed is being silted up with the high volume of wastes, thereby making use of the river water highly dangerous for health. This big casualty of this ominous situation have been the fish resources of the river.

Fishermen, who in the past caught ruhi, katha, pangash, shoal etc. from parts of the river near Dhaka, hardly ever net these species nowadays.

The other serious pollutors of Buriganga are the large number of sewer lines which enter into the river. Sewerage lines from Wiseghat, Postogola, Farashganj Ghat, Mitford, Badamtali Ghat etc. regularly discharge untreated putrid substances into the river water.

The river, on account of the presence of the high volume of different pollutants, has changed the healthy and transparent colour of its water. Some parts of the river look brownish, some parts reddish and some parts greenish in colour. The river appears to have lost its charm and natural beauty under the pressure of the heavy burden of industrial wastes from various quarters.

The cleansing of the Buriganga river on all counts has, therefore, become an urgent task. The pollution needs to be eradicated by banning industries of all sizes and kinds from emptying any waste without due treatment processes.

The Department of Environment has a great responsibility in this respect. In the event of our failure to take remedial measures on a priority basis, we may be living by a stinking cesspool before long.

Moreover, most of the factories and industrial along the river banks have no waste treatments. Industrial wastes are dumped into the river from different salt factories at Kamrangirchar areas. Other polluting agents include mixed soap, soda and bleaching powder used by washermen at Chandnighat. At Swarighat and Sadarghat, chemicals from different jewelry shops, ice

factories and bilge and oil from the river vessels are released into the river. From Sadarghat to Pagla Bazar, different cold storages and brickkilns dump solid and liquid wastes into the river.

The result of all this is that we are now living near a dying river. Perhaps before long, the river with which the livelihood of the people of Dhaka from divers occupations is associated, will be a severe burden for them. From use of the different poisonous chemicals-borne water of the river, people living on its banks at Syambazar, Badamtali, Wiseghat, Swarighat, Mitford, Killermoore, Islambagh areas are reportedly afflicted with various forms of diseases, besides a high incidence of skin diseases.

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