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Down to Earth

Fighting City's Air Pollution

By A.S.M. Nurunnabi

In Dhaka city, air pollution has reached such shocking levels that it has replaced Mexico City as the most polluted city in the world.

We have been lately informed that no less than 1000 tonnes of pollutants go into the city's air everyday, and vehicles plying the city roads account for 70 per cent of the pollutants.

In such a situation, lead pollution has reached unbearable proportions, causing serious health problems. The city dwellers are afflicted with a number of ailments caused by air pollution, and experts fear such pollution can cause much greater damage to public health in the coming days if nothing is done to contain it.

CoI The situation has been repeatedly deteriorating with the burgeoning trend in the number of motorised vehicles on the roads. The three-wheelers, known to be the most potent source of pollution, are yet to be phased out. And though fresh duties have been imposed on imported three-wheelers, one may get the feeling that unless the case for eliminating them from the roads is pursued with due seriousness and determination, the menace may continue. There are other agents of pollution.

A large number of vehicles spewing black smoke ply the city roads under the nose of the law enforcers. The mobile courts set up from time to time to punish the violators seem sporadic in their functions and they provide only a partial solution to the problem on our hands.

Obviously, it is not enough to make rules which are regularly violated. The imperative need is to institute regular vigilance to keep the city roads free from faulty and ramshackle vehicles, which usually cause the most severe type of pollution. The sad fact is that the agency for determining the fitness of a vehicle does not seem to operate with the desired level of efficiency, as it is believed to be amenable to unholy influence.

The terrible extent of air pollution is grossly visible in some city areas, for example in Mohakhali and Farm Gate areas. There it hangs like a pall of smog interfering with clear visibility for the road users.

At a seminar organised recently by the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry and some related agencies on the subject of Transport (Air, Water, and Land) and Policies related to Infrastructure and Utilities, speakers alleged the existence of widespread corruption and anomalies in transport sector, stressing that emission of pollutants must be checked through application of stringent laws. One of the speakers pointed out that the business in all dimensions would suffer in the inflow of investment and outflow if the infrastructure and utilities were not improved further. Another suggestion made at the seminar was to set up an institute under Army supervision to reduce corruption and to provide training in matters of certification and vehicles safety inspection.

So things have to be set

right at more than one point. No less important is the question of introducing lead-free fuel which will help greatly in coping with air pollution.

Lately, the government has announced plans to launch an Air Quality Management Project for the capital city. The project is to be implemented at a cost of Tk. 29 crore and will be financed by the government and the World Bank. Its major purpose is to reduce the level of air pollution caused mostly by two-stroke engines and diesel-operated vehicles.

It is well-known that the level of hydrocarbons, especially the aromatic hydrocarbons in unburned gasoline and 'mob' are very high. Lead, a very hazardous substance, is present in both petrol and octane; so in addition to the use of unleaded gasoline, the adoption of catalytic converters for motorcars is a must and needs to be included in the project.

If, as the government says, the Air Quality Management Project aims at developing an air quality management system in the country to reduce human exposure to vehicular air pollution, specially in Dhaka, they cannot close their eyes to what lead is doing to people, particularly children. A recent study showed that children living in Dhaka have a higher percentage of lead in their blood than any children in the world. Since lead is known to affect a person's intelligence by impairing blood synthesis, thus harming human organs, tackling the lead threat by appropriate means should be an important factor in the project.

34 arrested from ZIA for harassing passengers

By Staff Correspondent

Police yesterday arrested 34 people, including 'dollar beggars' from Zia International Airport area on charge of harassing incoming passengers. According to the police, a total of 277 people were arrested from the airport canopy and car parking area on charges of harassing incoming passengers and forcibly carrying their luggage during the month of September.

Of the arrested, 17 were male, five women and 12 children. The women and children were sent to vagrant center at Mirpur for their rehabilitation. The males were handed to Cantonment police. A case was filed against them.

The recent raid against the miscreants and dollar beggars began following an order from the home ministry, sources said.

3 held with arms in N'ganj

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Sept 22: Two people were arrested with firearms from 'Jalkuri' bus stand under Fatullah thana today.

Fatullah thana police challenged three youths at the bus stand for their suspicious movement. They arrested two of them, identified as Riyad 28 and Sujon 27 while the other managed to flee.

Police also recovered a revolver and three bullets from their possession.

A case has been lodged with Fatullah PS in this connection.

Four terrorists held in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Sept 22: Police arrested four alleged terrorists from Mirpur this afternoon. They are Tarek Hossain, Ali Tarek, Shahnewaz Bappi and Wahiduzzaman.

According to police, all of them are armed cadres of a professional killing squad. Of them, Tarek Hossain is one of the accused in JP leader Abul Kashem murder case.

Hailing from Chittagong district, Tarek Hossain, 30, was hired to kill Abul Kashem in April, 1995, as was stated in the investigation report. But he could not be arrested so long.

This professional killer was again named in the general diaries for threatening AL leader and former KCC Mayor Kazi Aminul Haq and BNP leader Shaharuzzaman Martuza and two former MPs Abdul Gaffar Biswas and JP leader Abul Hossain.

These four top leaders of Awami League, BNP and Jatiya Party filed general diaries with Khulna thana fearing attempt on their lives by a group of armed cadres led by Tarek Hossain.

Police said all of them are armed cadres of Purbo Banglar Communist Party.



Family members of Ansars who lost their jobs in 1994 demonstrated in the city yesterday demanding reinstatement. In January 1994, many Ansars lost jobs owing to a government decision following violent protest by the Ansar members who were denied of higher wages and job security.

- Star photo

Fire at N'ganj garments unit: 10 injured

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Sept 22: A fire broke out at an export oriented garments factory in the town on Thursday night, damaging property and injuring 10 people.

According to fire brigade sources, the fire originated from an electric short circuit at the finished goods section of Samrat and Company (Pvt) Ltd at around 3 am and soon engulfed the other sections of the unit. Machinery and finished goods, kept under lock and key during the incident, were damaged by fire.

Fire fighters from Mondalpara rushed to the spot and extinguish the blaze with the help of local people.

Ten people were injured while extinguishing the fire. A case was filed with N'ganj police station in this connection.

Boat sinks in Meghna: Two missing

From Our Correspondent

MUNSHIGANJ, Sept 22: Two persons were missing as a mechanised boat sank in the river Meghna near the Meghna Bridge under Gazaria upazila of the district today following a collision with a cargo vessel, reports BSS.

The Gazaria thana police went to the spot. Police said Arai Hazar bound engine boat loaded with sand and stone collided with a vessel at noon and sank in the river.

People of nearby boats rescued six passengers of the boat while two others, identified as Ershad, 10, and Simul, 12, remained missing. The Gazaria thana police went to the spot.

Inaction, negligence by cops led to double murder at Sutrapur

By Staff Correspondent

Administrative inaction and negligence in duty by the three suspended sub-inspectors of Sutrapur police station led to the murder of two teenage boys on September 15, according to official findings.

The three SIs - Shahidul Islam, Mahbubur Rahman and Liaquat Ali - were accused of administrative failure and negligence in duty since they refused to respond to the requests by the victims' families, sources said quoting the probe report.

Mohammad Mohsin, 18, and Mohammad Saem, 19, residents of SK Das Lane under the Sutrapur police station were picked up from their residence by a gang allegedly led by Rabed Hasan Sumon at about 7:00 am on September 15. They were tortured inside the Ganderia Rifle Club for realisation of Tk 50,000 ransom. Both the victims were later killed and their beheaded bodies cut into six pieces each were recovered from a manhole in the area.

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Teen-aged housemaid found dead in city

By Staff Correspondent

A teen-aged housemaid died mysteriously in the city's Pallabi area yesterday.

The dead was identified as Rumana, 17, daughter of Mohammad Ishaq from Nasirabad in Brahmanbaria. She worked as a housemaid for more than three and a half years at the Pallabi residence of Shahidul Islam Bhuiyan, a businessman, said the people of the neighbourhood.

Rumana died Thursday night after suffering from diarrhoea, police said quoting the FIR. A section of local people, however, alleged that the teen-aged girl was strangled to death by the inmates of the house. The neighbours also claimed that she was in good health just a day before.

Several people from nearby slums encircled the residence at house number 133, Road number 8, B-block of section 12 in Pallabi from morning till evening and also threw stones on the 3rd floor of the five-story building. They demanded trial of the alleged killers of the housemaid.

Pallabi police went there in the evening and assured the people of necessary action after autopsy reports.

Police later filed an unnatural death case in connection with the incident and sent the body to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

BNP to stage demonstration today

By Staff Correspondent

The main opposition BNP will stage demonstration across the country today in protest against abduction of its leader Advocate Nurul Islam and the worsening law and order in the country.

The BNP and its different front organisations will bring out processions and hold rallies in each thana and district throughout the country, excluding the capital city, also to protest government atrocity on the opposition as well as killing and terrorism across the country.

Meanwhile, a BNP press release yesterday called upon all its unit leaders and workers to make the programme a success.

Greater Feni unit of BNP brought out a procession in the city yesterday to mainly protest abduction of Nurul Islam.

Leaders of central committee of BNP and its front organisations also attended the procession.



New US envoy arrives

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Mary Ann Peters, the newly appointed US ambassador in Bangladesh, will present her credentials to President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Banghaban on September 26.

Mary Ann is the 11th US Ambassador and the second woman envoy of that country to Bangladesh. Jane Abell Coon was the first women ambassador in Bangladesh who served from mid-1981 to August 1984.

A career diplomat, Mary Ann Peters was the Deputy Chief of Mission of the US Embassy in Ottawa prior to her new appointment. She arrived in Dhaka on Thursday.

Mary Ann Peters succeeds John C. Holzman who served from August 28, 1997 till July 2000.

Prior to her posting in Ottawa, Ambassador Peters worked in the White House as Director for European and Canadian Affairs at the National Security Council. Among other portfolios in that position, Peters worked on the diplomatic and security aspects in the search for peace in Northern Ireland. She also served as

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British judges rule Siamese twins should be separated

LONDON, Sept 22: Britain's Court of Appeal ruled today that a pair of Siamese twins should be separated against their parents' wishes, allowing one to die but giving the other the chance to lead a normal life, reports AFP.

In a dramatic and long-awaited decision, the three judges sitting in London said doctors should go ahead with the procedure to divide the pair. The operation will condemn Mary to an almost certain death, but could save the life of her healthier sister Jodie.

Their devout Roman Catholic parents from the Mediterranean island of Gozo, Malta, had asked the Court of Appeal to overturn a High Court ruling from last month giving surgeons the go-ahead.

However, it is still possible for the case to be taken to a further appeal before the House of Lords, the highest court in Britain. The parents' lawyer said they were considering what

do to. The horrific nature of the life-or-death dilemma was shown in the comments of Lord Justice Ward, the senior of the three judges.

"Mary is killing Jodie," he said in his ruling.

Mary "sucks the blood out of Jodie." It was "parasitic living."

Arriving at the court earlier, he admitted it had been an "excruciatingly difficult" decision to make.

"One's heart bleeds for the family," he told the BBC.

"Fifty per cent of the population will agree with the decision, 50 per cent will think we have gone potty."

Ward, who has twins of his own, said the issue had not been fully explored by the courts for centuries.

The twins, given false names to protect their identity, were born on August 8 in Manchester, northwest England. Their parents had come to England to give them the best chance of survival.

Doctors recommended that the girls be separated to save at least one of the two lives, but the parents decided that was "not God's will" and nature should take its course, even if it meant the loss of both children.

The twins are joined at the lower abdomen. While Jodie is bright and alert, her twin relies on her for heart and lung function.

The court was originally told that doctors expected both would die within six months without the operation.

During the hearing, new evidence raised "the horrible spectre" that they could survive joined together, possibly for years, with Mary slowly draining away Jodie's life until both died.

A High Court judge found in favour of doctors on August 25, but the parents appealed.

Medical experts, called upon by the appeal court to review

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