

AIR POLLUTION

# Unfit diesel-run vehicles do the damage

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Air quality in the capital is deteriorating again, spoiling the significant improvement achieved through various measures including banning of two-stroke auto rickshaws and introduction of CNG-run vehicles back in 2003.

The diesel-run vehicles, that were declared unfit back then are slowly making their way back on the city streets, are one of the main reasons for this deterioration of air quality, said officials at Department of Environment (DoE).

These unfit diesel-run vehicles are responsible for more than 70 percent of air pollution in the capital as they fail to comply with emission standards, added the officials.

A recent study conducted by Air Quality Monitoring Project (AQMP) of DoE revealed that the air in the city, affecting nearly 12 million inhabitants, fails to meet required health standards. The air quality, especially during the heavy traffic hours, is so poor that it falls below the legally permitted level of pollutants.

During the following week of banning the 2-stroke auto rickshaws in January 2003, presence of two of the major air pollutants -- particulate matters and hydrocarbon -- dropped significantly from city air. The particulate matters went down by around 41 percent while hydrocarbon by 52 percent, according to the DoE officials.

Both of these harmful elements as well as other pollutants have increased at an alarming rate during the recent times.

"Pulling the two-stroke auto rickshaws out [of the city] was a vital step taken by the government to improve the air quality in the city, and it also created a stir of awareness on this issue [air pollution]," said Hasib Hasan, enforcement officer at AQMP.

"However, it seems that the awareness was quite temporary as failure to ensure effective measures left room for the obsolete and unfit diesel-run vehicles to make a comeback on the streets," he added.

Vehicular emissions include pollutant elements such as particulate matter, hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide.



An unfit diesel-run vehicle emitting black smoke on a city street.

These are all potentially lethal and harmful to all forms of lives.

Zarif Mahmud, a service provider from Azimpur, was at Shahjahanpur intersection on his two-wheeled scooter waiting for the traffic lights to turn green.

He was already late for work and was struggling to make his way

through the Sunday morning rush hour traffic. As the vehicles began moving, he was engulfed by a gust of black smoke from a bus in front of him.

"My eyes began to sore and I started a coughing hysterically as I inhaled the toxic smoke," said Mahmud.

"I couldn't breathe properly for almost half a minute and coughed until my lungs cleared off the deadly smoke," he added.

At a time when cleansing drives in almost all aspects of urban life are being conducted by the present government, one would expect that the govern-

ment would take a tough stand on resolving this issue of air pollution, Mahmud hoped.

Israt Jahan, a resident of Pallabi, said, "I have to face such situation almost everyday on my way to drop my daughter off at her school and also the way back home."

"The consequences of these nuisances are extremely harmful for me as I have severe respiratory problems. It feels as if I am being choked to death," complained Jahan.

The AQMP department of DoE has two mobile inspection teams consisting 8 members who are inspect vehicles for violation of emission standards.

Under the Act 150 of traffic law, traffic officials can fine an offender only Tk 200 for violating vehicular emission standards. However, as par the environment protection act, a magistrate can fine a first-time offender up to Tk 5,000. For second and third offences, the penalty could be Tk 10,000 and jail term respectively.

While diesel-run vehicles emit the most of air pollutants, other polluters of city air include brick kilns, diesel generators, plastic factories, open air burning of plastic items and foundries, said AQMP officials.

During winter, around 4,000 brick kilns surrounding the city play a major role in polluting the city air by emitting toxic smoke, the AQMP officials added.

According to Dr Mohammad Nasiruddin, director of AQMP and also deputy secretary of DoE, a sustainable coordination is required between different governmental departments to improve the overall situation.

"Definitely there is a lack of coordination and understanding between different departments such as DoE, BRTA [Bangladesh Road Transport Authority] and DMP [Dhaka Metropolitan Police]. Coordination of all these departments is necessary to make the situation better," Dr Nasiruddin added.

"However, as for short term measures, the government should ban the import of reconditioned vehicles, especially from India as they are currently going through an environmental revolution and are basically dumping all their substandard and unfit vehicles into our country," he observed.

Before two-stroke auto rickshaws were banned and CNG run vehicles were introduced in Dhaka in the year 2003, environmentalist organisations worldwide used to dub Dhaka as 'gas chamber'.

# Death of Priyanka: Some questions unanswered

DURDANA GHIAS

The death of Sadia Nowshin Priyanka, a shining girl full of promises, is still shrouded in mystery.

Priyanka, who was found dead

mortem report. We have applied to the Ramna Police Station against the report on Wednesday [July 25], asking for another post mortem," he said.

"Ramna Police Station has sent the application to the court on Thursday. There was an error in

around her neck. I untied the knots with the help of our landlady. She and I took her to Rashmono Hospital by a rickshaw. Then we took her to the Holy Family Hospital. The doctors told us to take her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital," she said.

About the rumour on her father's having another wife, Sultan said: "I work in defence force. How is it possible for me to marry second time without official records? I want to know who is behind this rumour."

"We suspect Rintu [Zahidul Haque, Priyanka's maternal uncle] because he is a bad guy who used to shout at me and my wife when we protested his connections with unsocial elements," he said.

"Around an hour after Priyanka's death he called up his elder brother Zakir and wanted to know about Priyanka. After that he went into hiding. He did not even come to our house after Priyanka's death," said Faruque.

Rintu is an employee of Brac Bank. Before that he used to work at Zenith Company where he lost his job for pilfering money, he said.

"We also suspect the guard because he said that no one had entered my house when we were out," he added.

Sultan said the police are totally silent about the case saying that it is a suicide case. "They are taking no action to arrest the prime suspect Rintu."

Qazi Mohammad Didarul Alam, sub-inspector of Ramna Police Station and investigating officer of the case, said: "The girl has committed suicide by hanging according to the post mortem report by the forensic department of Dhaka Medical College. The girl's father has claimed that it was a murder but that is his own opinion. We have nothing to say about that. Investigation is going on. Now we are waiting for the court order."

Priyanka had been kidnapped when she was a class nine student, said her family members. During the abduction she was kept blindfolded in a dark room and she could not identify the abductors. She was later dropped at home by a woman who used to cook for the abductors.

Rab-3 is assisting police in investigating this case.

"We talked with her mother. But we cannot ignore the post mortem report, which says that it was a suicide and there was no

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## SUROVI

# Lights of education for domestic helps

FIDA-E-TASHFIA

A shady old tree and a corrugated iron shed - on a sunny day, these are the classrooms of the Surovi School, located at Dhanmondi Road-5 in the city. Groups of children in bright red uniforms gather eagerly on woven mats, or at low wooden benches, to take their lessons for the day.

Apparently one of many educational institutions in the area, Surovi stands out from the crowd because of its unique objective: to provide an education to domestic child workers.

Founded in 1979 by Syeda Iqbal Mand Banu, caters to those underprivileged children who toil in other people's homes for a living.

"My mother was particular about keeping teachers for all the servants in our house, and so from an early age the idea was ingrained in me, that every-one deserves to have some basic education," says Syeda Banu, who continues to fund many of the school's running expenses, such as the cost of uniforms and tiffin food for the students.

Now a non-governmental organisation (NGO) with 19 off-shoot schools and several other education-related projects, Surovi has provided over 15 lakh children with schooling up to class eight, till date.

While all underprivileged and working children are welcome to study there absolutely free of cost, most of the school's students are domestic child workers, and in its initial stages, Surovi took special care to encourage area residents to send their house helpers there.

"Nowadays the school has become so well known that people send their house helpers here of their own accord. In Dhanmondi especially, because of the large number of well-educated upper middle-class households, there are many employers who are enthusiastic about enrolling their domestic aids here," said Jesmin Akhter, a Project Co-ordinator at Surovi.

"When I was brought here from my village, the lady of the house where I work enrolled me in this school," said Mohammad Al-Amin, age 8, who works as a gardener at a house in Dhanmondi. His face lit up as

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A teacher and students at Surovi school.

## FOLLOW-UP

## SHANKHANIDHI HOUSE

# DC office dilly-dallies in cancelling illegal lease

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The deputy commissioner's (DC) office of Dhaka is dilly-dallying

over the cancellation of the illegal lease of Shankhanidhi House.

Shamima Yasmin, additional deputy commissioner (ADC) Revenue, said her office requires

at least 15 days to begin work on revoking the lease that they issued in 2002.

On June 17 this year, Department of Archaeology

(DoA) officially asked the DC of Dhaka to immediately cancel the lease of Shankhanidhi House, a listed historical structure on Tipu Sultan Road in the old part of the city, and hand it back to the DoA.

DC Kamaluddin has confirmed the receipt of the letter. He said that starting the process of cancelling the lease will take time, as they have many other things to deal with.

"We have many important works so it will take time before we start the process of cancellation," he said.

"There are also humanitarian issues related with the cancellation. We cannot just evict the present occupants," said ADC Revenue Shamima Yasmin.

ADC Revenue office of the DC office leased out two-thirds of the historical Shankhanidhi House on February 2, 2002.

Ananda Gopal Sankhanidhi, the successor of the Sankhanidhi family visited Dhaka in May and urged the authorities to preserve this his-

torical site.

A building with significant architectural features, Shankhanidhi House now houses an automobile workshop, lube shops, two families and an office of workshop owners association.

Present inhabitants of the house have changed its original features according to their whims, while an automobile workshop rented out by lessees in the ground floor has blackened the beautiful courtyard.

According to an inscription, whitewashed at present, it was built in 1921 by two merchant brothers Lal Mohan Saha and Gaur Nital Saha.

Following reports published in the Star City, the DoA said that they would send a letter to the DC office asking them to cancel the lease.

The DoA move came after Paribesh Bachao Andolon, an environmental group, urged the DoA to free the historical site from an illegal lease issued by the DC office in 2002, defying the law of the land.



STAR PHOTO

Priyanka's parents in a pensive mood show the crests and certificates that their daughter achieved in her school days.

on July 18 at her home, had just passed her SSC exam from Vigarunissa Noon School with brilliant results. It is hard to believe for her parents that she is no more.

Eleven days after her death the family members are still intrigued with unexplained questions. Although the autopsy report says she has committed suicide, apparently there is no reason for her at all to kill herself.

"Just a few days ago she told me: Abbu, I'm very happy that I am going to get admitted to college. She got GPA-5 and was very studious. She had a desire to become a doctor and build a hospital at her village home in Mothbaria in Pirojpur. How can she commit suicide?" said her father Sultan Faruque, an accountant of BDR.

"We have rejected the post

the report regarding the place where the body was buried [in Pathakata village of Mothbaria]," he added.

Her parents were sitting in the drawing room with the many certificates that Priyanka got for her excellence in studies and cultural activities.

"She bought a new dress from Mouchak market to wear it at the party arranged at Nandan Park for GPA-5 holders. She was ready to join the party. How can she commit suicide?" said her father.

"When I got home with my son from school, we found the door closed from outside. If she commits suicide then how can she close the door from outside? We found her on the floor. If she hanged herself then why will she be on the floor?" said her fearful mother simmering with questions.

"There was a georgette scarf



Shankhanidhi House, an elegant historical building, on the Tipu Sultan Road in the old part of the city.

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