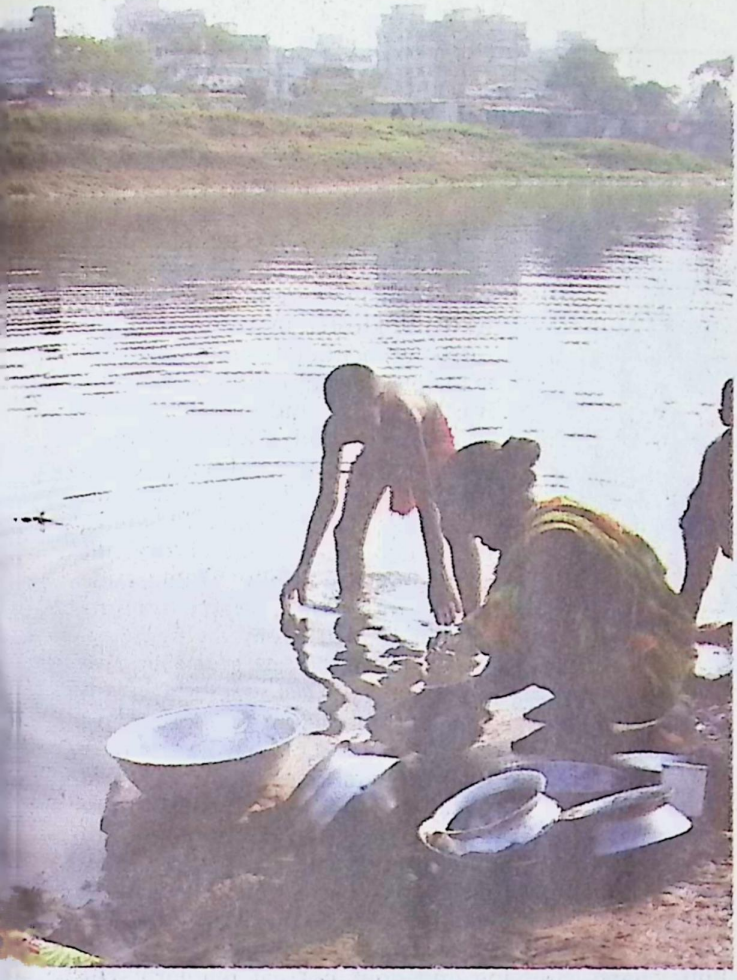


These slum dwellers use the waters of the Turag River for their daily lives, which is where the waste from different industries is expelled.

The problem of lead pollution in Dhaka was identified as early as 1980. However in 1997 levels of lead in samples of suspended particles were recorded in the Capital and was found to be the highest in the world. In a large cross-sectional study of 779 school children, almost 90 percent had BLLs ≥ 10µg/dL, 50 percent had BLLs ≥ 15µg/dL, and almost 20 percent had BLLs ≥ 20µg/dL. The government of Bangladesh executed a landmark decision of providing only unleaded gasoline from 1999 and followed it up with the withdrawal of 2-stroke engines in 2003 although the diesel-based vehicles like human haulers, maxis and riders were introduced right after that. And according to Mitra there is no total control over the use of leaded gasoline in the country. Law enforcing agencies do not monitor lead emissions through industrial waste disposal. Because of a lack of proper waste management system, disposed batteries, potteries and cans are left near areas where children living in slum areas play.

Liza Akhter Laboni and Rupa Akhter Shila are two sisters living in a tin-roofed house adjoining Shojib's house. Liza is 10 and her sister Rupa is nine. They both study at the Emersion School and both have been found to have a high level of lead in their blood. Liza shows no outwardly signs of lead poisoning but says that she often feels tired and does not feel like studying. Rupa has a blank stare and had recently had two seizures. In the absence of their father Lutfur Rahman who works in a hospital in Saudi Arabia, her mother Mukul Begum took her to a doctor after her seizures. Although Rupa is under medication her mother is not quite convinced that it is a medical problem and makes her wear a *tabij* (amulet), which her mother is convinced will keep the 'evil spirits' that cause the convulsions away from her. Although the doctors have prescribed medicine for both the sisters to neutralise the lead in their body, their mother never made the effort to even buy it, let alone ensure that they take one regularly. Mukul Begum and her family drink water from the main supply and do not boil it before drinking.

Lead can get inside our body from a variety of sources. Lead-based paint can be a major source of lead-contaminated soil. Industries such as lead ore mining, lead ore milling, smelting, municipal solid waste incinerators, and lead-acid battery recycling facilities can be sources of lead-contaminated soils. Sources of airborne lead include emissions from gasoline combustion, smelters, and battery manufacturers, among others. Windblown dust is another source when the dust contains lead. Inside our homes it can come from lead-based paint and lead pipes. Improper glazing on enamelled or ceramic pots and dishware can get lead into foods. Lead can get into children's bodies from the soil, toys with lead-based paints, colour pencils, whitewashing from the walls, amulets etc. And it all boils down to the fact that children from low-income families are more likely to get lead inside their bodies because they are usually not very well-nourished and so have low immunity.



The black smoke from vehicles is a source of lead poisoning.