

There has not been an extensive study of lead pollution in the air ever since leaded gasoline was banned by the government and 2-stroke engines taken off the capital city.

first place. Dr Amal Mitra next plans to carry out his survey over different socio-economic classes. The survey till now was directed at children from low-income families only.

Mitra believes that there should be regulations to control the levels of lead in the air but there should also be regular monitoring, which has to be done by the government. According to BAPA (Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon), there has been no known study on lead levels in the air throughout the country ever since leaded gasoline was banned by the government.

The Industrial Town of Tongi

One only needs to visit a part of the Turag River once to understand why this town is an environmental disaster. The colour of the water is a strange shade of greenish black and the area around the river reeks so badly it can instantly make a healthy person nauseous. For the hundreds of slum dwellers and *bede* community living in the area though it is life. All the industrial waste expelled from the innumerable jute mills, garment industries, battery factories, cement factories, ceramic factories, plastic and steel factories, printing presses, car workshops, and brick fields all end up in this river which at a point connects to Buriganga. During the daytime most of these slum dwellers work in the industries around the area and during night they have to sleep with the stench from the industries they work in. This water -- which is undoubtedly nothing but poison and one would not dare to touch with bare hands -- is unfortunately part of people's livelihoods. This is where the people of the slums take their regular baths, wash their clothes and dishes and some even use it for cooking. The small pockets of water bodies around the river are infested with mosquitoes. Many of the buses and trucks in the area also emit black fumes and go unchecked. Garbage is dumped everywhere unchecked and the air is heavy and foul.

After getting rid of leaded gasoline and 2-stroke 3-wheelers from Dhaka City, the government has become complacent about the issue of lead poisoning in children. There have been no follow-up studies of any significance anywhere around the country. No studies have been carried out to measure the lead levels in the environment from insecticides, pesticides, engine boats, waste disposed from various industries and 2-stroke auto-rickshaws outside the city. But the study carried out by Dr Amal Mitra in Tongi speaks volumes. And in children, blood lead levels as low as 10µg/dL have been associated with developmental delays, deficits in intellectual performance and neurobehavioural functioning, decreased stature, and diminished hearing acuity. Long-term follow-up studies have demonstrated an inverse relation between early exposure to low levels of lead and cognitive ability in later years. The lack of awareness from parents and negligence of the symptoms makes matters worse. A combined effort from the government and environment pressure groups can prevent a future of uninspired people with low IQs. ■