

# Dhaka: An unlivable city indeed!



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

**BITTER TRUTH**

ONCE again Dhaka has attained the dubious distinction of being the second-worst unlivable city in the world by a survey conducted over 140 cities by the London-based Economist Intelligent Unit.

The cities are measured on the basis of political and social stability, crime rates, access to quality healthcare, natural environment, education, and the standard of infrastructure including public transport. Dhaka is not livable by any standard or measurement. Traffic congestion has reached nightmarish proportions. Crimes and corruption are rampant, and the law and order situation is on the point of breakdown. The city has too few parks, and they are infested by elements who vitiate the peace, tranquility and scenic beauty.

Population growth incompatible with development of resources, lack of environmental consideration in the development process, poor management of waste, noxious emissions and toxic effluents from the industries and smoke-belching vehicles are causes of the city's environmental degradation.

The slum population has been increasing at more than double the general growth rate of urban population. It is reported that the number of slum dwellers in Dhaka city will cross 10 million in the next 5 years as the rural poor are continuously pouring into the capital city. Dhaka could become one of the top ten cities of the world in respect of population boom, but from the perspectives of services delivery system to the city dwellers, and demarcation into different zones for different purposes, it has failed miserably.

With the city's skyline thrusting up aggressively and the sprawling market places bustling with activity, people seem to be drunk with opulence. Conscious citizens have time and again voiced their concern about the way urbanisation was taking place, but the wheels of development defied reason and rational consideration.

Rivers and lakes have special significance for a city. Legend has it that if a city has a memory, then the Thames would be always a part of the London's eternal psyche. For Dhaka, there is the river Buriganga. But rarely does anyone living in Dhaka and adjoining areas realise that it has the rivers Shitalakhya, Turag and Balu, and some lakes, surrounding it. Unscrupulous people, allegedly with political backing, have encroached on the rivers, lakes and wetlands close to the city periphery.

In spite of the HC directive to clean the Buriganga and Turag, contamination remains as grave as ever. With about 300 factories throwing in toxic waste and people emptying human excreta and rubbish in the open rivers, the surface water has become extremely polluted. In consequence, 85% of the water demand is met through underground water, causing the water table to drop by about 3 to 4

metres every year.

Dhaka is now best known for urban indiscipline. Norms of organised civic life continues to be violated with impunity. Illegal encroachment and unauthorised constructions have become rampant. Land and building mafias have cropped up everywhere.

While those who ravish the city and imperil its future get away with illegal gains, the law abiding citizens suffer the consequences of traffic congestion, pot-holed roads, garbage accumulation in front of their houses, and the shortage of civic services that the illegal constructions cause.

In the teeming older part of the city and even in newly developed areas like Gulshan, Baridhara and Uttara, filthy water chokes the drains. DCC officials must admit that the city's garbage collection points are nothing more than open



MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/ DRINK NEWS

heaps of refuse. Most of these ills are there because development has taken place before proper planning. Moreover, only one-third of the city has the privilege of underground sewer system. In fact, Dhaka is symbolic of the ills that plague the country's unplanned urbanisation. But it is hardly possible that city corporation services like maintaining roads, sanitation, water bodies and healthcare will improve because transactions and official business in the country have been redolent with the stench of corruption as usual. It is most unfortunate that the present administration like the past ones failed to bring about any real improvement because of lack of commitment and political will. Inevitably, if things are left as they are now, Dhaka will continue to win the "worst polluted city" medal year after year.

Dhaka city roads, including the innumerable lanes and by-lanes, have turned into a veritable mess. These roads have been pulverised, cratered, and pot-holed under the constant load of traffic, and non-repair for years.

In spite of the fact that city dwellers have been paying holding taxes regularly and more so even when the tax ceiling has been increased several times in recent time, there is hardly any improvement in the civic amenities. Recently, the government split Dhaka City Corporation into two for better service -- at least that was the government's version regarding the split. Now city dwellers do not know which part of the corporation is responsible for looking after their problems. They have become resilient and inured to the sufferings they are being subjected to, because they know there is none to listen to or redress their problems.

The crisis of governance is particularly marked not only at the municipal or city corporation levels, it extends far beyond that. The constitution ensured regular mayoral elections to all urban bodies including Dhaka City Corporation, but no election was held during the last eleven years. That is the main reason that performance or civic amenities and services didn't improve. Whereas urban governance demands a coherent, coordinated and vibrant set-up, our cities have been saddled with fragmented authorities incapable of tackling core problems.

After the liberation of the country, successive governments should have evolved a clear urban vision which should have been a part of an equally clear national vision. Unfortunately, those at the helm did not show any real ingenuity. They became more imitative than creative. They failed to regenerate the people's mind. The Dickensian blight and haze that hang over Dhaka city today, is nothing but a fallout of foggy vision.

We may spell out what we mean by urban vision. If under inspiring urban leadership and vision, Buriganga water had once again been made crystal clear, if the banks could be cleared of illegal encroachments, if a green vista had been developed along the river front and if the trade and industry including Hazaribagh tannery had been relocated, Dhaka would not have only regained its glory but also emerged as a thriving and a dynamic centre of modern civic life. It would have become a symbol of resurgent Bangladesh. Now, in the absence of a vision, Dhaka has lapsed into a beehive of filth, congestion and urban blight.

The future seems daunting and grim in consideration of the fact that Dhaka city would be teeming with 20 million people by 2020 as a World Bank study and demographers in the county estimate, with most migrant people living in slums. It is not only the unclean way of life but also the utter disregard of civic obligation that make these slums extremely filthy. Myopic and blinkered policies of the past have created nightmarish conditions in most of the cities of the country. Unless we change the contours of our mindscape the urban landscape will continue to decay.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star. E-mail: aukhandk@gmail.com

## Sunila Abeysekera 1952-2013

MEREDITH TAX

SUNILA Abeysekera, a long time activist for women's human rights, passed away on September 9, in Colombo. She was a founder, steadfast supporter, and Advisory Board Member of the Centre for Secular Space. She was a formative voice in the women's movement in Sri Lanka and in South Asia, as well as in international movements for women's human rights.

Sunila was a trainer on women's rights and conflict transformation, within Sri Lanka as well as globally. She wrote several articles on these issues, and was part of the South Asian Network on Gender and Transformation (SANGAT), Forum-Asia, and the Asian Forum on Human Rights and Development. She was awarded the UN Human Rights Prize for Asia and the Pacific.

During the past few years, Sunila focused on training and teaching on issues of women, peace-building, and conflict transformation at the national and regional levels. For some years, she was also the president of the Movement for Interracial Justice and Equality in Sri Lanka. In 2002, she was part of the feminist International Initiative on Justice in Gujarat, India, working with Indian feminist groups to seek redress for Muslim women who were victims of violence during the Gujarat carnage.

Sunila was a formative voice in the women's movement in Sri Lanka and in South Asia, as well as international movements for women's human rights. Like many of her peers, her work was shaped by the ethnic conflict that has been going on in Sri Lanka for the past 20 years. She played a large part in the efforts of women's groups and peace groups to draw the UN's attention to the need to include women's concerns, voices, and perspectives in peace-building and conflict-transformation through the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

In 1987, she left Sri Lanka after receiving death threats and witnessing the assassination of a colleague. She lived in The Netherlands for six months, but returned to Sri Lanka. Her special focus was on civilians living in war-affected areas, women's rights, and sexual and reproductive rights, including the rights of communities such as sex workers, people living with HIV/AIDS, and lesbian, gay and transgender persons.

In 1989, Sunila helped establish INFORM, which documented human rights' abuses at a time when repression and terror in Sri Lanka were peaking. By bringing it before the international community, she played a critical role in seeking redress for human rights' abuses.

Sunila's most effective contribution to women's rights and human rights is through her work at bridging the divide between these two areas. She has worked with women's groups and social activists on ways to introduce basic concepts of nonviolent ways of conflict resolution, focusing on a feminist perspective on the issues of militarization, conflict, conflict transformation and peace-building. Her experience in bringing together communities of women has been drawn upon by women activists in Gujarat, the Indian Northeast, Uganda and Timor Leste.

Sunila believed that her biggest challenge has been to combine single parenting with her activism. Her comment on receiving the UN Human Rights Prize from Kofi Annan was: "At last my children will see that what I do is recognised as worthwhile!"

# Thermal pollution of water by power plants

QUAMRUL HAIDER

SINCE the beginning of the last century, fossil fuel power plants have drastically diminished the quality of the air we breathe by venting most of the undesirable contaminants into the atmosphere. Despite regulatory and technical progress in pollution control, the degradation of air quality still continues, albeit at a reduced rate. But how many of us are aware that power plants also pollute rivers, lakes, and oceans? Unfortunately, we hardly mention this kind of water pollution when discussing the general issue of pollution.

Waste heat is an inevitable by-product of the power plants. In a fossil fuel power plant, the amount of heat energy rejected is approximately 60%. The amount rejected by a nuclear power plant is even larger -- close to 70%. The medium that receives this no longer-needed heat is the coolant from where water was drawn to keep the equipment cool. That is why power plants are almost always built near rivers, lakes, or seashores for a ready supply of cooling water. This practice of dumping the waste heat in the form of hot water into its natural source is called thermal pollution.

Besides power plants, thermal pollution is also caused by deforestation and soil erosion. This exposes water bodies to more sunlight, thereby raising the temperature. Whatever may be the cause, thermal pollution degrades water quality of the source by a process that changes its ambient temperature.

Adding hot water to the environment is not the simple act of dilution it might appear to be. To put this subtle disturbance into perspective, we must view an aquatic organism together with its environment as an integrated ecosystem. Thus heated liquid waste discharged into a river not only affects organisms directly, but also the entire ecosystem of the aquatic environment.

One of the vital requirements for the survival of an aquatic life form is its ambient temperature. Because water can absorb thermal energy while experiencing only small changes in temperature, most aquatic organisms have developed enzyme systems that operate in a narrow temperature range.

If the temperature change is gradual or a small amount of heat is added, acclimatisation is possible and the effect on the aquatic ecosystem will be minimal. On the other hand, if the change in temperature is sudden or a large quantity of heat is added, conditions can shift beyond the tolerance limits of the aquatic organisms' metabolic systems. In most cases, the consequences are lethal. This change can devastate even heat-tolerant species that are inured to warmer waters.

The presence of dissolved oxygen is probably the single most important factor in the biology of aquatic systems, and a great variety of physical and biological interactions stem from it. But as the temperature of water increases, its dissolved oxygen content decreases. Since metabolism requires oxygen, some species may be eliminated entirely if the water temperature rises by 10 degrees Celsius. Additionally, dissolved oxygen is the key to assimilation of organic wastes by microorganisms. Heating a water body will impair this assimilation.

Thermal pollution not only kills heat intolerant fish, but also plants, thereby disrupting the web of life dependent on the aquatic food chain. Also, the elimination of heat-intolerant species may allow less desirable heat-tolerant species to take over.

The life cycles of many aquatic organisms are closely and delicately geared to water temperature. Fish are often disturbed, migrate, and spawn in response to



temperature cues. When water temperature is artificially changed, the disruption of aquatic organisms' normal activities and patterns can be catastrophic. There may be large-scale migration to an environment more favourable to their survival. The addition of new species of fish will change the eco-balance of the migrated area.

Water temperature also influences the early development of aquatic organisms. Furthermore, it affects the larvae and eggs of fish in rivers. For instance, trout eggs may not hatch if the water is too warm. Even if they hatch, they won't survive for long because aquatic juveniles are the least tolerant to abrupt temperature changes. Thermal pollution can also increase the susceptibility of aquatic organisms to parasites, toxins and pathogens, making them vulnerable to various diseases.

If thermal pollution continues for a long time, it can cause huge bacteria and plant growth leading to algae bloom that will subsequently result in even less oxygen in the water. Algae have unfavourable effects on aquatic life.

We have to realise that human behaviour has led to the pollution of the planet on which we live. As renowned explorer and environmentalist Jacques Cousteau said: "Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans." If we want a healthier planet with breathable air and unpolluted water, we have to use less energy, cleaner energy, or use energy in ways that will minimize adverse environmental impacts. To that end, we have to shift from fossil fuels and nuclear power to energy sources that won't change the chemical make-up of our land, air, and water. Otherwise, we have to learn to arrest emissions from power plants and other industries and sequester them away from our environment.

The writer is a Professor of Physics at Fordham University, New York.

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 1958 hit "La —"

6 Confinement

11 Once more

12 Un-escorted

13 What some rescuers search for

15 Shade tree

16 Funny fellow

17 "Ice Age" sluth

18 Numbs

20 — Aviv

21 Tick off

22 Soccer legend

23 Makes headway

26 Fruit coats

27 Taverns

28 Regret

29 Free (of)

30 Some fast food chicken

34 Paris pal

35 Bustle

36 Geese formation

37 The birds and the bees

40 Speedy

41 Destined

42 School paper

43 Ship poles

DOWN

1 Head-quartered

2 Acrobatic

3 Molten rock

4 Coal holder

5 Puzzle book section

6 Tool

7 Building wing

8 Wet

9 Diamond part

10 Sewing items

14 Cry from a sty

19 Clamors

22 Multi-colored

23 Tall

24 Zoo residents

25 Book parts

26 Tie-breaking elections

28 Make over

30 Scrumptious

31 Musical set in Argentina

32 Allude

33 Future flowers

38 Brit's brew

39 Trip around the track

Yesterday's answer

1 DATER

2 SLAT

3 ICAME

4 NORAH

5 CUTUP

6 AGAPE

7 ETRA

8 RAF

9 BIN

10 DESTITUTION

11 ONE

12 RACE

13 HASTA

14 TONAIR

15 AVIS

16 RESTITUTION

17 ANT

18 NAP

19 NNE

20 SUITE

21 CANES

22 SENIOR

23 AGENT

24 SENT

25 NERDS

2-20

8-20

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

On letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

8-19 CRYPTOQUOTE

UK UQ LSK QS NJDE SJY

GYUFLVQ' EFTO KEXK EFTOQ

JQ. XQ KEF DSLGUVFLDF SG

KEFUY EFTO. — FOUJYJQ

Yesterday's Cryptoquip:

OTHER THINGS MAY CHANGE US, BUT WE START AND END WITH FAMILY.

- ANTHONY BRANDT

BEETLE BAILY

THERE'S A BUNCH OF SOLDIERS OVER BY THE RIVER

SOLDIERS EXERCISE A LOT, THEY'RE TOO LEAN

BUT IT'S WORTH A LOOK

2-2

©2012 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.

HENRY

ZZ

HENRY, YOU MUST LEARN NOT TO WASTE TIME, BUT TO SAVE IT!

2-3

©2012 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.

by Mort Walker

GET ME THE STEAK SAUCE!

2-3

©2012 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.

by Don Tranchette

2-3

©2012 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved.

QUOTABLE Quotes

"Politicians are people who, when they see light at the end of the tunnel, go out and buy some more tunnel."

John Quinton