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Metro migrant workers find it difficult to breathe



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By Rupsa Chakraborty

Bangalore has seen about 55 percent increases in respiratory problems among Metro migrant workers in the last two years.

Migrant child workers drilling, carrying cement on their heads and pulling heavy machines is a common site when you pass by the Metro construction sites on Mysore Road.

The child workers are most vulnerable to pollutants and get affected easily with respiratory problems than adults.

"Last month while working, I fainted and when the workers took me to the hospital, I got to know that pollutants have damaged my respiratory valves," said Rajan Podder, a 12-year-old laborer who neither smokes nor drinks. "Now I can't work the way I used to work earlier. I am under constant medication."

Every month Victoria Hospital gets a minimum of 30 to 45 cases of Metro migrant workers, who suffer from different kinds of respiratory diseases including allergies, bronchitis, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

"This happens due to their constant exposure to pollution at the Metro construction sites," said Madhusudan Das, medical information officer at Victoria Hospital.

"Thirty percent of the cases of respiratory diseases we get are children," said P. Kumar, a cardiologist at Victoria Hospital.

Ramesh Rao, a local contractor of Namma Metro said that the reason they recruit child workers from neighboring states like West



Rupsa Chakraborty

Migrant workers at the metro construction sites are not provided with masks to protect them from breathing dust and other pollutants

Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh is because they are cheaper and less demanding.

"We don't assign children with heavy work. They mainly work as helpers to other migrant workers," said Rao.

He also added that Metro workers are continuously exposed to three components such as carbon dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide.

"We have to work for 10 to 12

hours every day. The pollutants from construction work and vehicles affect our breathing condition," said Nitai Das, a Metro migrant worker on Mysore Road.

"The cases of respiratory diseases have doubled because 80 percent of the migrant workers stop taking their medicines due to economic problems," said Das.

According to Sanjay Kumar, another migrant worker they are not provided with masks like the traffic

policemen get to protect them from inhaling dust. But Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited claims that it's the labor department's responsibility.

"These migrant workers are unregistered under the labor department so it's impossible to provide any kind of health scheme or facilities to them," said Mr. M. S. Ravishankar, IAS, labor commissioner, department of labor, government of Karnataka.

Garbage haunts residents for eight years



Sankar C G.

Residents of Subbannaiah Palya sit on heaps of garbage dumped in their backyard

By Sankar C G

BBMP has failed to set up automated garbage segregation plant leaving residents of Subbannaiah Palya with a heap of garbage and ill health for the past

eight years.

The automated garbage segregation plant worth Rs.60 crore was to be built in Subbannaiah Palya by the end of 2011.

"Bangalore produces 3,500 tons of waste every day. More than

half of it is dumped in Subbannaiah Palya," said Putta Moorthy, asistant engineer, BBMP.

According to the BBMP website the tender process was to be completed before April 30, 2011. But BBMP has failed to complete

the tender process till date.

"We are going to implement this project on Design Build Operate Transfer basis. The first tender was cancelled because of lack of bidders and competition," said Putta Moorthy.

Manjunath, a local resident said that they have protested about the garbage heap three to four times, but it was of no use.

"Every day 65 trucks dump garbage here. Our children are missing classes because of fever and other diseases. We can't even have food properly because of the bad smell coming from the garbage," he added.

The protests from the residents forced BBMP to find a permanent solution to the problem.

"In 2009 BBMP proposed to build New Automated Garbage Plant taking into consideration the garbage elimination problem in Subbannaiah Palya," said Moorthy.

"Automated Garbage Plant is a new technology of segregating wastes."

"After segregating wastes, plastics will be sent for recycling domestic waste for bio-gas production and the remaining 20 percent will be sent for land filling," he added.

Venket Shekhar of Karnataka State Pollution Control Board on the other hand refuted all claims made by the BBMP.

He denied any knowledge of the plant. According to him BBMP never approached his department for any environmental clearance.

Subbannaiah Palya was assured the first waste segregation plant in 2009 but BBMP built it in Mandoor and Mavallipura.

In the midst of the tussle between the BBMP and the KSPCB, the residents of Subbannaiah Palya continue to suffer due to the waste dumped in their backyard.

Too expensive to have a sweet tooth

By Nivedita Niranjankumar

The cost of sweets and rituals has gone up in Bangalore because of the increase in milk price by Rs.3 by the Karnataka Milk Federation on January 7, 2012.

The rising milk price has affected many people and business in Bangalore. With the direct impact being on the sweet industry, the price of bathing idols with milk also known as abhishekham done in a temple has also gone up by Rs 100, said Natraj, a priest at a temple on Commercial Street.

"Earlier we used to take Rs 250 for performing an abhishekham, now we are taking Rs 100 extra. We have no option but to take more money from worshippers," said Natraj.

The sweet shops that are mostly dependent on milk are threatened by the price hike.

People are shocked at such a huge price hike. "Earlier there used to be Rs. 1 hike but this time there is a direct increase of Rs.3. At some places the shopkeepers charge Rs.4 extra," said Manjunath, a resident of

Dispensary road.

"The manufacturing cost of sweets has gone up for us. It has gone up by 7-8 percent," said Prakash Bhoutika, partner at Anand Sweets.

Owners believe that with the increase in milk price, the quantity of sweets sold by them has gone down.

"We have had to increase the price of sweets by 10 percent. The customers are not happy. They don't understand that we have to spend more now on making the sweets and hence we have had to increase the price of sweets," added Prakash of Anand Sweets.

With the festivals of Pongal and Makar Sankranti coming up, many sweet shops have decided to keep the price of sweets constant.

"We are planning to increase the price of sweets after the festival as we don't want the sales to be affected," said Rajeshwar Singh, Factory Manager at Kanti Sweets.

Milk being the main ingredient for making sweets, an increase in price affects the sweet industry from



Nivedita Niranjankumar

Sweet shops in the city plan to hike prices by 10 percent, following increase in milk price

all sides. "Even the price of badam flavoured milk will go up now," said Rajeshwar Singh.

According to Shikha head of management, Kanti Sweets, with majority of customers in sweet shops belonging to the middle class community, sweet shops have to

think twice before increasing prices.

"The poor cannot afford sweets; the rich being health conscious don't buy much. It is the middle class who form the major chunk of our customers. This rise will also affect them," said Shikha, Kanti sweets.

Common man is already burdened under the increasing price of basic necessities, said Shikha.

"I will buy fewer sweets from now. I used to buy a half a kg of sweets earlier, now I will buy just 250 grams," said Selva Reddy, a customer at Shantaram Sweets.

The Daily
OBSERVER

IJNM PUBLICATIONS

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Email: editor@ijnm.org
Website: www.ijnm.org
For private circulation only

The Daily Observer

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Dinner talk ends in youth's murder



Sankar C. G

Relatives mourn the death of Manjunath

By Sankar C. G

Manjunath, 22 years, was murdered in Mahadevapura near Hoodi circle by a relative last night after a quarrel.

Manjunath and Arun Kumar were working together in Hoodi circle as laborers. Both of them migrated to Bangalore 10 years back from their native Biragana Pallya village in Kolar.

"On the day of incident, Manjunath and Arun were having their dinner together near the construction site. After some time they quarreled with each other on unknown grounds. In meantime the

latter came out and spoke to someone on phone and left," said S.R.Manjunath, sub.inspector of Mahadevapura Police Station.

"By around 10.45 p.m. Satish, brother of Arun Kumar came in a black pulsar bike followed by Arun Kumar in another bike and started fighting again and they ended up killing Manjunath."

Police recovered the knife from the spot used for the murder. Police has registered a case against them under IPC section 302 and investigation is going on.

A police team has been dispatched to catch the suspects.

Walking, a risky affair

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Devi, 32 said "I work as a household aid and earn only 600 rupees a month," as her youngest daughter sticks to her mother sulking in front of their house in the Ambedkar Nagar slum near Nyandnahaalli.

With earnings of Rs. 600 per month it is hard for Devi to board a bus in Bangalore, where the minimum fare is Rs.9. So she walks around 7 to 8 km every day to reach her workplace in Rajarajeshwari Nagar.

Devi also attends to her children and other house hold chores after walking through the dusty stretch of Mysore road.

"It's scary to walk here but I have no choice," said Devi, who holding her youngest daughter tightly. "There is no proper space made for pedestrians, which increases the risk of accident. My children are very small and totally dependent on me sir. If something happen to me who will look after them."

Dependence on motor-vehicles is increasing in Bangalore. Long distances make walking and cycling less difficult, while the rise of motor



Dipika Datta Pillay

Devi cheats death everyday

vehicles make walking and cycling less safe according to a report of annual traffic maintenance report. More and more people have to commute long distances to their workplace, which increases traffic.

A look at the city budget of Bangalore explains the rest. It proposes investment of about Rs. 1,200 crores over a 15 year time frame on upgrading roads. The percentage share allocated to pedestrian projects is only 0.6 percent of the total budget which is around Rs.7.2 crores.

Everyday Devi dresses up and goes for work and Shamshuddin waits for customer, to ply on the same road amidst raging traffic.

Model flats built without Fire Department's approval



Arjzoma Sengupta

Karnataka Police Housing Corporation flats for police constables at Adugodi

By Arjzoma Sengupta

The Karnataka Police Housing Corporation have built flats for the police constables using Australia's Expanded Polystyrene and Steel technology in Rajajinagar and Adugodi without having approval from the fire department.

"These are the two model flats that have been built for the first time in India using such technology," said Venkat, a police constable.

"Although these flats are not fire proof but they are earthquake and flood proof," he added.

The flats in Rajajinagar have already been given to the staff from the fire department and the one in Adugodi to two police constables.

"I am happy that my new flat has nice and spacious rooms but at the same time I cannot hide from the fact that it doesn't have any approval from the department of fire," said Dasappa, a police

constable and beneficiary of a flat in Adugodi.

The Karnataka Police Housing Corporation said that they plan to construct similar houses for police constables within a year.

"The Rajajinagar flats have been given to the staffs from the fire department so what is the need for license or approval," said B.G Changappa, director, fire department.

Anwar who is a son of a police constable said that he is not at all interested in having such houses.

He feels it cannot take load of more than 3,000 kilograms and moreover it is not approved by the fire department.

"There is no need for any kind of approval for those buildings and if incase it catches fire, the families can simply call up fire service for help," said B.F. Patil, additional commissioner, BBMP.

The SoftCopy
An IJNM Web Publication

Intelligent toilets fail to function in trains

By Rubeena Ismail

Implementation of controlled waste disposal system to keep the railways tracks at the station clean failed in the toilets of the Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains.

The waste disposal system automatically shuts down the toilets when the train stops at a platform. The Indian Railways research and design standards organization's engineers have installed flaps covering the outlets under toilets. A mechanical contraption is attached to the bogey wheels that will close the toilets when the train reaches a speed of 15 KMPH to 30KMPH.

"We have been working on this design from the past few years, it got implemented one year back and for trial purposes we have installed it in few coaches of the Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains" said an official at the RDSO office, Lucknow. "We are waiting for a feedback from the government."

"This was a good initiative but it's sad that this system has come with a lot of drawbacks; I have travelled in the Shatabdi express

and have heard people complaining that it's unfair to shut the toilets down on the tracks," said Suresh Kumar, a passenger.

According to Shamsuddin, Senior Section Engineer people do not know how to use these new toilets that's why we have a big problem.

He also said that they have been developing different methods to keep the tracks clean, but this is not a fool proof method. The research work gone into building this is intensive but no one anticipated the amount of maintenance work the valve below will require.

Cleaners have complained about the additional work and more time it take to clean these washrooms, and for the same payment. The RDSO is also planning a Bio-disposal system which is expected to be more effective but will take more time to develop

"The railway tracks around the country are dirty and our attempt to clean at least the track at the railway stations is still on," said Shamsuddin.



Rubeena Ismaili

Passengers wait for Shatabdi express which has the intelligent human waste disposal system.

Railway forbids sale of competitors' bottled water



Dipika Datta Pillay

No more Bailey, Kinley, Aquafina and Himalaya in railway stations

By Dipika Datta Pillay

Indian Railways has stopped the sale of packaged drinking water of private companies in an attempt to increase their revenue and promote their in-house brand of water "Rail Neer."

Ministry of Railways has made a rule that shopkeepers and stall owners at railway stations found selling other brands of water will be fined for this act. Apart from this, their stock will also be seized. Presently a liter of Rail Neer costs Rs. 12 to the otherwise Rs. 15 of Bisleri, Kinley, Bailey or Aquafina.

The rule was implemented all over north and east India railway premises two years back. This is the latest (third) plant set up by Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation.

"The purpose of the Palur plant is to supply safe drinking water to trains and stations especially in Chennai and Bangalore. Our main aim is to provide clean drinking water and not make profit," said

Vijay Kumar, Manager, Chennai water plant, IRCTC. "Profit will be calculated after three years. So far we are not running in loss."

Kumar added that because of the increase in the transportation

'We have suffered a loss of six lakhs'

- Praveen, area sales manager, Bisleri Bangalore

cost, IRCTC has not been able to cover the entire south. Stations till Vijaywada, Renigunta, Mangalore, Bangalore, Chennai, Palakad and Madurai have been captured. Hubli has been introduced with Rail Neer a fortnight ago.

A total of 65 main railway stations from Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Jammu, Punjab, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam, Odhisa and Uttarkhand have

already switched to this. The idea of opening its own water plant was first conceived by former railway minister Nitish Kumar, chief minister of Bihar.

"Yes, they stopped our supply of water in Railway canteens from the past two months. We have suffered a loss of six lakhs," said Praveen, area sales manager, Bisleri Bangalore. Stall owners in the stations prefer to sell water bottles of other brands as they got more profit on them, usually Rs.5 to Rs.8.

In Feb. 2011 after maintaining good sales, the IRCTC ventured its product in the open market of Bihar.

"The Rail Neer water is good; it's the same as other popular brands. There is no difference in taste," says Satya Shourie, a website professional in Bangalore.

To meet the demand of trains originating from Mumbai area stations, a fourth plant has been planned at Ambernath, Maharashtra which is supposed to be operational in the fiscal year 2012-2013.

Planning disaster: The traffic of Bangalore

By Nitindra Bandopadhyay

The information technology sector is trying to revive itself from the morgue, roads are in a mess, inflation is high and the value of rupee is depreciating.

Life is hard for Fairoze, owner of the horse cart stand at Kalisipalyam. He looks at Bhura, his ailing pony, with a tear in his eye.

"Bhura was hit by a motor vehicle six months back, which made him crippled," said Fairoze

In Bangalore's hustle, the pony cart or "tonga" has lost its glory. Only a few Tonga owners are left in the city. Every day they who struggle to get some business to feed the pony and their families.

The life of the ponies is tough on the roads of Bangalore says Kumar, who has owned a tonga for 15 years.

At traffic signals, the horse chokes inhaling fumes from the buses and auto rickshaws. They are restless and scared. The fear can be seen in their eyes when caught in

the middle of automobiles, at the signals.

"These governments will never think about the poor people, the only thing they care about is to fill their own pockets," said Shamsuddin, 40, who is a tongawala for 20 years.

Tonga, which was a cheap mode of transportation for many, is almost fading away due to poor planning and lack of infrastructural support.

"Business is running sir but not like old days," mutters Fairoze with a heave of sigh.

"Nothing is left from what I earn; it is getting difficult day by day."

Sometime some unruly driver hits the horse, some die and some suffer like Bhura who now lives with a broken leg.

The plight of people not owning motorized vehicles for transportation does not end with the Tongas. The pedestrians in Bangalore suffer the same fate as the tongawalas and their horses.

Continued to Page 2



Dipika Datta Pillay

Shamsuddin and Kumar waiting for customers at the Kalasipalyam horse stand

Water is still miles away for slums

By Ancy K. Sunny

Peeping from behind her mother, tugging at her kameez, five-year-old Nagma gives a mischievous nod when asked if her mother beats her for playing with water kept in the pots at home. Same is the case with four-year-old Ali who hides his face behind a slate and cries when asked to pose for a photograph.

Nagma and Ali are two of those many little children who walk barefooted through rocky pathways to lend a helping hand to their mothers, who strive to carry pots of drinking water to their homes.

“I’ll also help you bring water,” says Adil and runs behind me carrying a plastic pot of his own,” says Adil’s mother Nasira, who is a domestic worker in Bangalore.

She adjusts her hijab, wraps her arms around a still sulking Adil and says with a motherly smile, “Children play in water. We struggle a lot to get this water. So, we scold and beat them so that they realize the value of water. Now they tell us they will come along with us to fetch water.”

Nasira’s little home in Rajendra Nagar has a pipe that is supposed to supply the Cauvery drinking water.

But neither she nor any of her family members can exactly recall when was the last time, the tap supplied water.

Every alternate day, Nasira walks a kilometer to fetch water for the family.

She is accompanied by her sister-in-law Shabreen, 19, mother of a 5-month-old daughter.

The Cauvery water supply comes from 4 to 9pm on alternate days. There is inequality even in slums.

The comparatively richer lot in the slum fit motors to drive most of

the water into tanks and sumps built at their homes.

After they have saved enough of water for themselves, they sell the remaining to others like Nasira and Shabreen.

They buy a pot of water for Re.1. They say each pot holds about 6 liters of water.

They buy 15 pots of water for the family of seven members, which includes five children. They use this water for drinking, cooking and bathing.

“This water is not enough for all of us, but we adjust. A person needs two pots of water to take bath, but most of the time we adjust with one or even three-fourths of a pot of water,” says Nasira.

Pulling her hijab to cover up her hair right, she continues with a smile, “We don’t go for more water because it is expensive. We work really hard and it oozes the life out of us as we get tired after the day’s work. We walk up and down for water.”

There were few children filling their pots from a bore well opposite to Nasira’s abode.

Pointing to it she said, “That water stinks.” And one can see stinky yellowish – green water flowing from the tap. These people use this water to wash their clothes.

Nasira said that at times they would buy clean bore well water for Rs. 10 or 20 to wash the entire family’s clothes.

Almost every other person who stood around rushed to tell me how the water stinks. They said it gets mixed with the water in the drains.

“There’s no use complaining about anything to anybody. Nobody bothers to come here and check,” said Mubeena, Nagma’s mother.

There are similar stories to be told in the EWS quarters,



Bhanu Garapati

Nagma and Ali accompany their mothers to fetch water for their home.

Koramangala which are not so far from Rajendranagar.

A sea of tin shed homes welcomed me in. One of them belongs to Jabeentaj, a mother of three. Although one finds oneself lost amidst those homes, Jabeentaj’s nine-year-old daughter Tabassum Fathima has no doubts about her home address. “It is Block no. 32, Door no. 21,” she says proudly.

There are 1,512 houses in this EWS quarters. There are 42 blocks of 36 houses each. But now you can see only tin sheds. A couple of the houses had collapsed in 1992 during the rains, killing about seven

children. The BBMP demolished the remaining houses and promised them new homes. But promises are still to become reality.

On block 32, there are four taps that supply Cauvery water. The residents said that water comes on alternate days from 7 – 11 p.m. Jabeentaj complains about how even here the water is discolored and stinks.

It is even worse than the water the Rajendra Nagar people have,” said she. “Most of the time we leave the water running for about an hour or so, waiting for it to clear. At times, the water supply stops after

this and we are left with no water,” she says. Then she and her neighbors walk for over a kilometer to fetch water. She said they fetch about 10 – 15 pots of water every alternate day.

When asked if 15 pots was sufficient for her, pointing to the little dilapidated tin shed which was her home she said, “where do you think I can store more water in that house?”

“Water is life. We are poor. What can we do? Every day we used to think we’ll get homes, we’ll get water. Now all hopes have gone,” said Jabeentaj

No Indian manja, only Chinese string



Rubeena Ismail

Shopkeepers say that the entrance of nylon thread and wired strings have hampered the popularity of the traditional manja.

By Dipika Datta Pillay

It’s the time of the year again when vibrant kites adorn the blue sky. But even with Sankranti at hand, the city’s manja makers in the city are facing a tough time as competing Chinese nylon thread is taking away their livelihood.

Manja makers are extensively found near Tannery Road in

Bangalore. In autumn they make paper kites and the coarse thread used in kite fighting competitions. Strings of normal thread are tied between pillars and applied with a thick concoction of rice powder, glass pieces, adhesive, chemical colors and cinnamon.

“Previously people flocked to buy manja but now it’s either Chinese manja or tangus manja,”

said Sadar Hussein, manja maker from Shivaji Nagar. “This year the sale has gone down. We have lost our good source of income.”

Chinese manja is a nylon thread and tangus manja is a wired string. One gheeti (a measure of approximately 35 metres) of Indian manja costs Rs.15 while Chinese and tangus cost around Rs.10. Tangus is made in Noida. Another

popular thread called Luddhi Manja from Bareilly has also invaded the market.

Hussein adds that many of his colleagues have left the profession and took to other means of livelihood like painting and in construction. “There has been a 30 per cent increase in cotton as compared to last year and that is the reason why manja prices have

increased,” said Hussein.

According to Abdul Latif, kite seller at Ragipet, “the public prefers Chinese manja over Indian manja because it is both stronger and cheaper. The thread is firmer and does not break easily when it comes to kite cutting competitions.”

Kite sellers in Ragipet and Chikpet market also attribute the change to cost cutting. “Previously we had paper kites but now people prefer plastic kites,” said Y.Babu, a kite seller and plastic dealer from Chikpet. “It survives the wind and doesn’t tear easily.”

The ugly side of Manja is its ability to slice flying birds and injure driving commuters.

Section 5 of Environment Protection Act (EPA) 1986 says any chemical substance that causes harm to living beings- animals, humans and plants, violates the law. It gives administrative authority to the state to take action.

According to a report published in 2010-2011, Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagar Palike rescued twelve kites, nine crows and a pigeon last Sankranti. The Chinese manja has been banned in Amritsar, Ahmedabad, Ludhiana and Mumbai.

However, it is yet to be seen that how this year, Sankranti would look without the environment friendly traditional manja.

The sky would be decked with kites but maybe birds would prefer not to fly.