

LIVEABLE LEH TOWNHALL MEETING

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY CELEBRATED TO HIGHLIGHT PROBLEM OF AIR POLLUTION



Eshey Tondup, executive director of LEDeG, giving the welcome speech.

Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDeG) in collaboration with three other leading civil society organisations (CSOs) - All Ladakh Tour Operators Association (ALTOA), Ladakh Taxi Operators Cooperative Ltd, and Ladakh Heart Foundation- organised World Environment Day on June 5, 2019, at the Leh main market area. The theme for this year was 'air pollution.' The event was organised under the aegis of the Liveable Leh project,

which has been funded by the European Union and BORDA.

Dr Ishey Namgyal, president of Municipal Committee Leh (MCL), was the chief guest for the event. Mr Shahid from the State Pollution Control Board, Leh, was one of the expert speakers for the event. Tsetan Wangchuk, president, ALTOA; Stanzin Desal, general secretary of the Ladakh Taxi Union, and Klaus from Germany were the other speakers.



LEDeG executive director welcomes Shouvik Datta, senior programme manager



LEDeG executive director welcomes Shouvik Datta, senior programme manager

Sahitya Natak Akademi awardee Mipham Otsal and his group from Ladakh Theatre Organisation (LTO), singer Faisal Ashoor and group, Omyer and his group, and Art in Motion were some of the performers for the event.

Eshey Tondup, executive director of LEDeG, welcomed the guests and the huge crowd that had turned up for the event in the main market. He shared that all the four organisations had collaborated to raise and spread awareness among the people on the importance of protecting our fragile environment through speeches, skits and cultural performances. Eshey added that the quality of air in Leh has deteriorated over the past few decades and the people should put a lot of effort to protect our environment for the next generation.

He said that people should not make excuses and wait for others to take action. Eshey said the effort should be collective to ensure a positive change. He also informed the audience about the #SelfiewithSapling campaign by the Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar as part of the World Environment Day celebrations in which he urged people to plant a sapling and post a selfie with it on the social media.

Mr Shahid from State Pollution Control Board, Leh, said that although the pollution level of air is less in comparison to Delhi, but the toxic gases that are released during construction of houses is one of the reasons for air pollution in Leh. He added that burning of leaves instead of decomposing and using in agricultural lands is one of the reasons of increasing air pollution in Leh.

Shahid criticised people's habit of burning garbage and

also for using diesel vehicles which are more than 20 years old. Such vehicles, he said, release harmful gases in the air, which are hazardous to health. He said the department is trying to ban diesel vehicles which are more than 20 years old but still plying on city roads. He informed that old diesel-run vehicles release particulate matter (PM) and are responsible for the black smoke traditionally associated with diesel powered vehicles. He said that PM is one of the major harmful emissions produced by diesel engines. He requested the people to plant more trees and said such practices can bring air pollution under control.

Tsetan Wangchuk, president of ALTOA, also spoke on the occasion and said the level of air pollution is increasing in Leh town. He said that NGOs and CSOs working in Leh are using the day as a platform to increase awareness among the public about the long-term effects of air pollution on health and climate. He said that air pollution would emerge as a big challenge for the next generation in the absence of timely interventions. He gave the example of Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old student from Sweden, who began protesting outside the Swedish parliament about the need for immediate action to combat climate change, and has since become an outspoken climate activist.

Tsetan said recently students from Leh town organised a peaceful rally to highlight the issues of climate change and the need for a global solution to overcome the challenge. He expressed his joy and gratitude in seeing the youth's interest in protecting the environment.

He said that keeping in view the alarming rate at which glaciers are receding, some urgent policies are needed to





LEDeG executive director welcomes Shouvik Datta, senior programme manager



LEDeG executive director welcomes Shouvik Datta, senior programme manager

regulate the increasing footfall of tourists in Leh town. He also apprised the audience about the various initiatives undertaken by the organisation to protect the environment which included a cleanliness drive at Tsomoriri Lake in which ALTOA brought 20 tonnes of garbage back to Leh. Last year, ALTOA had initiated a cleanliness drive at Stok Kangri and had brought back a truck full of garbage to Leh.

Mr Klaus from Germany shared information about the life span of plastics and the effects of increasing pollution on health.

Stanzin Desal, general secretary of the Ladakh Taxi Union, said that the earth is dying a slow death and there is an urgent need to spread awareness among people to protect our environment. He said that even though people are getting richer, they are not taking any steps to protect the environment. He said the taxi union has made it mandatory for all the drivers to keep a dustbin in their taxis to avoid littering on the road.

The guests were gifted a sapling of apple tree to encourage the people to plant trees. Omyer and Mipham Otsal-led Ladakh Theatre Organisation (LTO) presented skits to highlight the problems of air pollution. Faisal Ashoor and other talented singers from the town regaled the crowd with their mesmerising songs.

Thereafter, Dr Ishey Namgyal, president of MCL, came to the dais and congratulated all the four organisations for organising the event. He said that air pollution has taken a toll on our health and necessary steps must be taken to control it. He said people should practice 3 R's- reduce, reuse and recycle.

He then informed the audience about the various initiatives taken up by MCL to combat pollution in Leh town. He said that 30-40 trucks of garbage are dumped at Bomb Garh every day. He said there was no solution to treat the garbage, but now the MCL has come up with a project worth Rs 12 crore, which will be completed in two-three months and emerge as a solution for solid waste in the town. He said that under this project the garbage will be segregated at source. He added that a new machine will be installed at Bomb Garh that can treat 1,000 kg of garbage a day without releasing any toxic gas in the air.

He appreciated 'Project Tsangda' which was initiated by the Rural Development Department and said such self-sustainable projects should be encouraged. He also apprised the audience about the government's initiative of making it mandatory to use 8% of plastic waste for construction of roads. The plastic waste coated aggregate is mixed with hot bitumen and the resulting mix is used for road construction. He said that such mix will be used during the construction of the 11 km-long road at Stok village.

He said that the state government recently issued a notice putting a ban on all plastic materials in the state. He said that even disposable cups and plates made of plastics have been banned by the government in the state. He said that people of Ladakh should go back to their roots and once again introduce the practice of taking along their own cups and plates to functions.

Tenzin Motup, event manager of LEDeG, gave the vote of thanks to the guests.

INDUCTION TRAINING FOR NEW EU STAFF

An induction training for new staff of the Liveable Leh project was organised at LEDeG office campus and Ribook Center on June 1. As many as seven new staff joined to fill the vacant posts.

Smanla Norboo Dorjey, an urban planner by profession, joined as coordinator of planning and development team. Konchok Tashi and Sonam Gurmet, both graduates from School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), were recruited as urban planners.

Anub Tsetan Paljor, an alumni of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Mumbai, joined the EU project as communication and public relations personnel. Phunsok Angmo would be the thematic expert on solid waste management whereas Dechan Spalzes joined the EU project as the faecal sludge management (FSM) coordinator.

Rinchen Angmo will be at the helm of administration and human resource (HR).

Eshey Tondup, executive director of LEDeG, welcomed the new staff and shared his thoughts on the successful completion of the EU project. Thinless Dorjey, operational assistant, gave an overview of the history of LEDeG, which is the implementing agency of the EU project. Thereafter, Fariha Yousuf, training assistant, shared with the new staff the different work taken up by LEDeG and its activities in the last one year.

A lunch was organised at LEDeG Hostel at Ribook Center. Post-lunch, there was a formal introduction of the new Liveable Leh project staff following which Tenzin Motup gave a presentation on the high-level progress of the Liveable Leh project.

INDIA HAS THE WORLD'S WORST AIR POLLUTION: REPORT

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China are home to the 50 cities worldwide with the dirtiest air, new study shows.

by David Child (Al Jazeera)

Seven of the world's 10 worst polluted cities are in India, a new study has revealed, with wider South Asia home to scores more blighted by dirty air.

Gurugram, a city about 30km southwest of India's capital New Delhi, had the worst pollution levels globally in 2018, the study published on Tuesday by AirVisual and Greenpeace showed.

Three other Indian cities, and Faisalabad, in Pakistan, made up the top five. Out of the 20 most polluted cities worldwide, 18 were in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

New Delhi, home to more than 20 million people, was ranked at 11, making it the world's most polluted capital, ahead of Dhaka, in Bangladesh, and Kabul, in Afghanistan.

"Air pollution steals our livelihoods and our futures," Yeb Sano, executive director of Greenpeace Southeast Asia, said in a statement. "In addition to human lives lost, there's an estimated global cost of 225 billion dollars in lost labour, and trillions in medical costs," he added.

"We want this report to make people think about the air we breathe, because

when we understand the impacts of air quality on our lives, we will act to protect what's most important."

'Catastrophic level of air pollution'

The AirVisual and Greenpeace index was based on the quantity of PM2.5 registered last year in tens of thousands of air-quality monitoring stations around the world.

PM2.5 is particulate matter that has a diameter of less than 2.5 micrometres, which is about three percent the diameter of a human hair.

The 92 most-polluted cities all had an "unhealthy" average annual presence of the particles, which can penetrate deep in the lungs and bloodstream and cause a wide range of adverse health effects, including premature death in the most extreme cases.

The World Health Organization estimates seven million people are killed every year due to air pollution, while non-fatal effects of over-exposure to PM2.5 include irregular heartbeats, aggravated asthma and decreased lung function, according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

Lauri Myllyvirta, a senior analyst

for Greenpeace's Global Air Pollution Unit, said there were a "number of reasons" for the high quantities of the particulate matter throughout South Asia documented in Tuesday's report.

"The biggest sources are generally household emissions, industrial emissions ... and transport," he told Al Jazeera.

"A lot of households in South Asia rely on solid fuels, sometimes biomass, often coal, for their cooking and heating ... and there are often cities with large scale industries with poor emissions controls," he added.

Myllyvirta also attributed South Asia's high population density as another contributing factor to the region's poor air quality.

"You do have other places with similar levels of emissions, but because you have far fewer people [there], it doesn't lead to this kind of ... catastrophic level of air pollution," he said.

South Asia has the highest population density of any region within Asia, which itself is the most densely populated continent on earth.

'Our bodies are suffering'



New Delhi, home to more than 20 million people, is the world's most polluted capital city [Adnan Abidi/Reuters]

In India, South Asia's most populous country, with about 1.3 billion people, researchers warned that current levels of air pollution represented a "public health emergency" requiring a "full emergency mode" response from local and national authorities.

"We are enduring this but our bodies are still suffering from it ... [and] governments are trying to fix the blame rather than the problem," Jyoti Pande Lavakare, president and cofounder of Delhi-based NGO Care for Air India, told Al Jazeera.

"It is horrific to live under such poor air quality conditions," she added.

Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has focused on delivering economic growth in a bid to boost employment and drag millions out of poverty.

But critics have accused his administration of failing to adequately address environmental issues, including air pollution, and rejected New Delhi's recently minted National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) as insufficient.

Lavakare said the NCAP, which aims to cut concentrations of PM2.5 and PM10 (larger particulate matter) throughout the country between 20-30 percent by 2024, was a "reactive" attempt to clean up India's air and called on New Delhi to take a more "proactive approach".

"We need year-round measures on a national scale," she said, adding there was a need for "cleaner fuels for motorised transport, removing subsidies on dirty fuels, enforcing strict controls on open waste burning and reducing industrial emissions".

A spokesperson for the Indian health ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

China cuts emissions

Tuesday's report highlighted improved air quality levels elsewhere in Asia, however, with Chinese cities, in particular, registering a 12 percent fall in average PM2.5 concentrations since 2017.

While the Asian economic powerhouse still accounted for 22 of

the 50 most polluted cities worldwide, its capital, Beijing, showed a marked improvement on 2017 levels of pollution, with the average annual presence of particulates falling by more than 13 percent last year.

AirVisual and Greenpeace said the reduction was a result of the "extensive monitoring networks" and effective "air pollution reduction policies" rolled out by Chinese authorities in recent years.

Under President Xi Jinping, China's ruling Communist Party has pledged to wage a "war" on the country's chronic air, water and land pollution.

Greenpeace's Myllyvirta said China's progress on reducing air pollution demonstrated the need for policymakers to fully "understand" the issue first, through effective data collection and measurement.

Describing Tuesday's report as "very alarming and very concerning" for the most part, Myllyvirta praised Beijing for showing "what can be achieved when a country makes tackling air pollution a top priority".



First row: Punchok Angmo, Rinchen Angmo, Tsewang Dolma, Deachen Spalzes
 Back: Smanla Norboo Dorjey, Anub Tsetan Paljor, Konchok Tashi, Sonam Gurmet

1) Punchok Angmo
 Position: Thematic expert- Solid Waste Management

2) Rinchen Angmo
 Position: Admin & Human Resource (HR)

3) Tsewang Dolma
 Position: Chief Programme Coordinator (CPC), LEDeG

4) Deachen Spalzes
 Position: Coordinator, faecal sludge management (FSM)

5) Smanla Norboo Dorjey
 Position: Coordinator, planning and development (PD)

6) Anub Tsetan Paljor
 Position: Communication and Public Relations (PR)

7) Konchok Tashi
 Position: Junior Urban Planner

8) Sonam Gurmet
 Position: Junior Urban Planner

Funded By:



Partners:



Editor : Tashi Lundup
Editorial Team : TenzinMotup, Fariha Yousuf,
Designer : Tundup Gyatso