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Garbage, garbage everywhere

SHIRLEY WIJESINGHE

Impact Assessment (EIA) procedures coupled with difficulties in finding suitable land for dumping could delay the solution to the garbage problem at least for another two years, the Colombo Municipal Council Solid Waste Management Unit Director P. Thangamile told the *Daily News*.

He said that temporary dumping grounds in the Colombo City had not been used for the last two weeks due to bad weather. "All access to these sites have been flooded and main culverts broken. The garbage trucks were unloaded due to blockage of accesses.

He said however complaints of villagers have gradually lessened due to the awareness programs with the assistance of the police, Thangamile said.

Answering questions about such delays in the clearance of garbage, he said the CMC is not in a position to give a sustainable solution for speedy

garbage collection and disposal process unless tender issues are sorted out in keeping with strict Supreme Court guidelines. The prospective tenderer should be able to establish gas or power generation plants by recycling garbage. The main problem is finding out a land for garbage disposal.

The garbage problem in the city and suburban areas have assumed serious proportions in recent times due to the high incidence of dengue which has alarmed health authorities and the general public.

As such local bodies cannot turn a blind eye to this problem or pass the buck without coming up with a sustainable solution through a systemic clearance of garbage in their localities.

According to statistics provided by the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) more than 80 cases have been filed in Courts and over 2,000 warnings issued to residences and Government institutions in Colombo. A number of construction sites includ-

ing a site in Havelock Town had been given warning notices as several dengue cases have been reported from around the area. There were growing fears that the present garbage dumps in the city would create mosquito breeding environments leading to increased risk of dengue and other diseases. People entering the city of Colombo for various matters complain about the haphazard garbage collection, with disposal of garbage not being attended to. When people pass random garbage dumps they simply cannot bear the smell and appear angry and curse the authorities responsible.

To find out the full extent of the problem the *Daily News* visited areas where the garbage problem is more acute and spoke to some of the residents and also employees at state institutions guilty of neglect.

Our first visit was to the Colombo National Hospital where infected waste coming from patients accumulates.

Commenting on the rotting garbage uncollected for more than two weeks, Hospital Sanitary Worker, Nihal Perera told the *Daily News* that the CMC garbage collecting trucks do not perform their duties properly. They just come and go. One of our largest garbage bins is spilling over. More bins are needed to cope with



CMC Solid Waste Management Unit Director P. Thangamile commenting on the issue

the accumulating waste and garbage.

Vermin were seen on floor of the garbage cubicle of the hospital since the last garbage collection was done only two weeks ago. It has been noticed that the cubicle for temporary garbage within the hospital is not protected. Roaming cats and crows easily enter the cubicle through the gap between the floor and mesh. This is a severe hygienic problem for the hospital patients as well as the residents in the vicinity.

Garbage collection in the Western part of the city appears to be better than in other parts. A



Garbage collection of Mutwal carried out by a private company; progressing at a slower pace

female labourer, Arini Nirmala attached to a private cleaning company and engage in garbage collecting in the area of Mutwal said that they did not keep the collected garbage for a long time. The company takes immediate action to clear the garbage in the area.

Our final stop was at Kolonnawa, Pothuwilkumbura dumpsite, where the dumping is presently carried out according to the Supreme Court guidelines. K. Ramyalata, mother of two who had lived more than 30 years in the area said that none of the CMC officials ever visited them to inquire into the problem. The children frequently fall ill due to the polluted environment. The situation will worsen now that this area has been selected as a garbage dumping site by the Colombo Municipality.

However garbage collection in Havelock Town, Kirulapana, Borella and Dematagoda areas which are the worst affected is going on at a slow pace further aggravating the health risk of the public.



Garbage being openly transported in a tractor to Kolonnawa dumping site in violation of the regulations



The makeshift garbage dump inside the Colombo National Hospital. It was not cleared for two weeks; the wriggling worms on the ground say it all



Some makeshift garbage dumps with stinking seepage yet to be cleared. Pictures by Nishani Liyanage