

## FEATURES

'Organised' in some areas, 'haphazard' in others, garbage collection is a mess



# Stinking problem

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Mounds of garbage lying on streets beside boards that prohibit such dumping. Not only garbage dumping but also its collection seem to be problems that have no answers.

Housewife Shalini, has her garbage problem under control. Her home freezer contains food as well as waste. Whenever she has prawns for dinner, she ties up the shells in a polythene bag and puts it in the freezer to be handed over whenever the garbage collectors decide to come.

But for Sujatha Fernando, it is a different story. On the day the truck is due, she keeps her garbage out but sometimes it does not come. Then she lugs it back into the house and endures the stench and flies. In desperation she persuades her husband to shove it into the car and they set off in the evening looking for a dumping "bin".

The whole evening is wasted driving around, and as night falls, they surreptitiously drop it by the roadside and drive off in a hurry.

This is the situation faced by the majority of people in urban areas, be it Colombo, Kandy, Sri Jayawardhanapura Kotte, Dehiwela - Mount Lavinia, Galle, Moratuwa or Batticaloa. How are rate-payers to dispose of their garbage? In the good old days, when most homes had large gardens, garbage pits were a common feature. But with limited space, householders are at their wits' end when local authorities refuse to take responsibility for garbage collection.

The largest number of

complaints seems to emerge from the area under the purview of the Dehiwela-Mount Lavinia Municipal Council. Garbage trucks line up in Ratmalana as the only garbage dump of the area is situated there. "This too will have to end this month," says Mr. Suman Siri Silva, the Mayor's Coordinating Secretary at the Municipal Council. "The residents of Attidiya took the Dehiwela - Mount Lavinia Municipal Council to court over the dumping that takes place in the area."

According to Mr. Silva: "The residents are not responsible enough to place their garbage at the right place at the right time. The garbage is collected from the main roads every day and from by-roads and residential areas at least twice a week."

"There are times when after the truck has made its round, people call in saying that their garbage was not collected. Also, the dumping grounds cannot hold the large volumes of waste that is collected every day."

The Municipality has considered alternatives, composting and recycling among them. But residents still complain that their rates have increased though services, like garbage collection, have not. While accepting this fact, Mr. Silva points out that this is not due to any change in the Municipality's policy. It is simply due to the fact that the valuation of the land on which basis the rates are decided, took place only last year after a lapse of eight years.

In other areas, residents come up with their own garbage solutions. Take the case of Tharuka and her neighbours, who live in Rajagiriya. They pay the garbage collectors to

pick up their garbage; as otherwise, the truck does not come down their road.

But on nearby Nawala Road the situation is different. "Our garbage collection is very regular," says Sharmila Cooray adding that the Kotte Municipality has even provided residents with "bio bins" for perishable garbage. These bins, formerly tar barrels with lids and an outlet at the bottom, once packed with biodegradable garbage, gives out manure after six weeks.

The main complaint of residents of the Kotte Municipality is the dumping of garbage on Buthgamuwa Road. "We hope to solve the problem in 2-3 weeks as we have already isolated another dumping ground. In the meantime we work from 8 to 8 at the Buthgamuwa dumping site to level the land in order to use it for another development project," says Mr. Pasan Attale, the Secretary to the Mayor of the Kotte Municipality. Besides this they are also exploring possibilities of alternative methods of disposing garbage.

"We are a forgotten lot," says Priyanthi de Silva of Himbutana, close to Thalangama that comes under the Kottikawatte Pradeshiya Sabha. There is no regular pick-up and residents take their garbage to dumps which may or may not be cleared each week. "We pay annual taxes and still get no service."

Residents of Kelaniya complain that they have little option but to drag their garbage long distances.

Private organizations engaged in garbage collection include Abans Environmental Service (AES), a private janitorial service company that takes care of street sweeping, garbage collection from houses, cleaning of

surface drains and removal of posters and banners in Colombo West, Colombo Central (this includes a part of Fort, Hulftsdorp and Kotahena) and Kotte. "All the garbage that we collect is dumped in the Bloemendhal dumping yard provided by the Municipality," says AES Director, Mr. Feroze Pestonjee.

Most of the garbage collected within the Colombo Municipal Limits is dumped in Bloemendhal. Having received numerous complaints with regard to the stench, the CMC is now in the process of handing over the compost-

ing operation to a private organization. It has been ascertained that 30% of the non-biodegradable substances can be recycled (this differs from place to place) and of the 70% of the biodegradable waste, 50% can be converted into compost.

Those living in the heart of Kandy town, however, are lucky. The garbage is collected every morning. "We have no complaints," says S. S. M. Zavahir who lives in Kotogodella Veediya, adding that the Municipal Council had also taken measures to ensure that littering does not take place. "The Municipality

put up plastic cans to stop littering."

In the Kandy suburbs however, there are many complaints. Last November a circular went out from the Kandy Municipality to those living in Nuwarawella, about 2 1/2 miles from the town, informing them that the garbage would be collected at 8 every morning.

A week went by but no truck came and the people therefore had no choice but to dump their garbage about a mile away.

Why is there such a disparity? Mr. M.G.M. Sarooj, the Administrative Officer of the Solid Waste Man-

agement Section of the Kandy Municipal Council says they have five main zones. The first zone covering the Kandy town has been commissioned to Care Kleen, a private institution specializing in janitorial services, while the other zones are under the Municipal Council. The collected garbage is then dumped in Gohagoda, a 35-acre landfill around 8 kms from the town.

Care Kleen has its own complaints as the public has not been informed of the collection timings. The Administrative Officer of Care Kleen's Kandy branch says this makes it chaotic

and more time consuming. He believes that the public takes the service for granted, expecting the workers to be at their beck and call any time of the day. Mr. Sarooj confirms that the Municipality has to foot a large bill of its own to pay the janitorial fee. As for the complaints from residents away from the town centre, he says, "We have informed them of the times and the places from which the garbage will be collected. It is up to them to make a conscious effort to help us out to make the city litter free."

**Next week: What are the answers?**

## Recycling

Large scale recycling of metal, paper and plastic is done in many countries in the west where they follow an efficient solid waste management system. Here in Sri Lanka, except for paper, there is no other recycling activity. There are a few private organic farms in Kandy that have a composting operation including the one in Piliyandala that uses market waste.

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) through their Bottle Binning Campaign has taken a step towards recycling used bottles and cans. Labelled bins have been placed outside the Keells Supermarket at Liberty Plaza where customers can drop off their used bottles that are not accepted by the 'Bothal' man. Arrangements have been made with the organizations that sell bottled

products to reuse them. All the organizers ask of the consumers is that they rinse out and sort the bottles by colour before handing them over.

"Environmental awareness is not strong enough and people are not totally committed to recycling and reducing waste," says PATA Sri Lanka Chapter Chairman Hiran Cooray. "It has to happen from schools, religious institutions, business houses, politicians and the entire community to make it work. Until that happens the attitude of most people is to 'use and throw.' Their intervention is just a small step in the right direction," he explains.

PATA plans to expand this operation from Ja-ela to Moratuwa with the co-operation of the travel trade, the Ceylon Glass Company, leading supermarkets, hotels and res-

taurants. If successful it would be carried out in other parts of the country as plans are being made to expand the project to include plastic bottles, plastic bags and tin food cans.

But what action is being taken by the state? According to Mr. Chatura Malwana, Senior Environmental Officer at the Central Environmental Authority, a pilot project involving 5,000 households in the Maharagama area is already underway. Under this programme garbage separation is enabled through the distribution of coloured garbage bags. Blue for paper, yellow for plastic, brown for metal and coconut shells and red for glass. In addition to this compost bins are also distributed. Since this has proved to be effective they plan to extend this to the rest of the country in a phased manner.