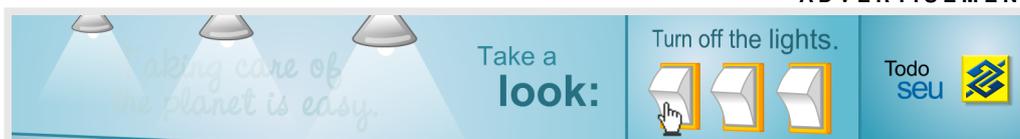


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ENVIRONMENT-INDIA: IT Hub In Acute Pollution Distress

By Keya Acharya

BANGALORE, Feb 5 (IPS) - Air pollution levels monitored by southern Karnataka state's pollution control board (KSPCB) in this imploding southern Indian city -- among Asia's fastest-growing with an official population of 6.8 million people -- have risen alarmingly over the last five years.

In 2007, this city, home to major IT, industrial, scientific and off-shore operational centres, exceeded all national emission control parameters in sulphur dioxide(SO₂), nitrogen oxide (NO_x), respirable suspended particulate matter (RSPM), and suspended particulate matter (SPM).

The rise in pollutants is highest in sensitive areas that house hospitals or are mixed urban zones that are part-residential and part-industrial.

The annual average concentrations of SO₂, NO_x, RSPM and SPM near Victoria Hospital, the city's main government hospital, have exceeded the national ambient air quality standards.

The total SPM, measured in the heart of this overcrowded city, has nearly tripled over the national standard of 70 ug/m³ (microns per cubic metre).

These findings come from just four monitoring stations that the KSPCB currently operate.

"We have the funding for setting up an entire network of monitoring stations around Bangalore, but we need partners to come forward help us tackle the issue," the KSPCB chairman, H.C. Sharatchandra told a workshop convened here last month by the United Nations Environmentally Programme (UNEP), KSPCB and other institutions on air pollution problems in the metropolises of India.

Sharatchandra says that the many academic and scientific institutions located in Bangalore, capital to Karnataka state, are not showing any interest in the issue. Excessive emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, sulphur hexafluoride and chlorofluorocarbons are the main greenhouse gases (GhGs)causing global warming today

This at a time when UNEP is looking towards India to help set standards for developing countries. "It is appropriate that India take the leadership to address the issue of carbon emissions for developing countries," said Surendra Shrestha, UNEP regional director for Asia Pacific.

UNEP also highlighted the chain link in all air pollution, from indoor emissions which travel outside to form urban air pollution that in turn links to regional and thereafter to global air emissions.

" We are currently funding an eight-nation Asia Pacific regional co-operation to monitor data and impact studies which we will then use to convert into health parameters," says Mylvakanam lyngararasan of UNEP, Asia Pacific.

Toxic emissions in industrial areas of the city have also been steadily increasing, though they remain within the national standard up to now.

For instance, sulphur dioxide emissions from the well-known Peenya Industrial Area, housing small-scale industries, have risen from 10 ug/m³ in 2005-06 to 15.5 ug/m³ in 2006-07 -- an over 50 percent increase within one year.

Total suspended particulates form the city's highest pollutants, peaking right after at 8 pm.

Exploding traffic has also added to the city's crumbling infrastructure with 1,200-1,400 new vehicles being added every day on its inadequate 1,500 km network of roads.

There are already approximately 3.5 million vehicles on Bangalore's roads, a thumping number compared to other cities and caused due to the increasing economic affluence of residents, says the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Company (BMTc).

Only 16 percent of Bangalore roads are arterials and about 80 percent of the roads are less than 30 metres wide. On many roads, traffic flow has been reduced to a crawl.

" We are ready with funds to add more buses for public transportation, but where are the roads to support this?" asks Anand Rao, director of BMTc.

A GhG inventory released by KSPCB and a consultant company Enzen at the workshop however blames heavy-duty diesel vehicles for emitting 60 percent of the transport sector's CO₂ emissions.

The inventory estimates that at the current rate of emissions, the transport sector will emit about 4.06m tonnes of CO₂ by 2017.

Indeed, the city is already so inundated with population and vehicular pressure that real estate prices have skyrocketed. Desperate measures such as building flyovers, one-way streets and making three-wheeler



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