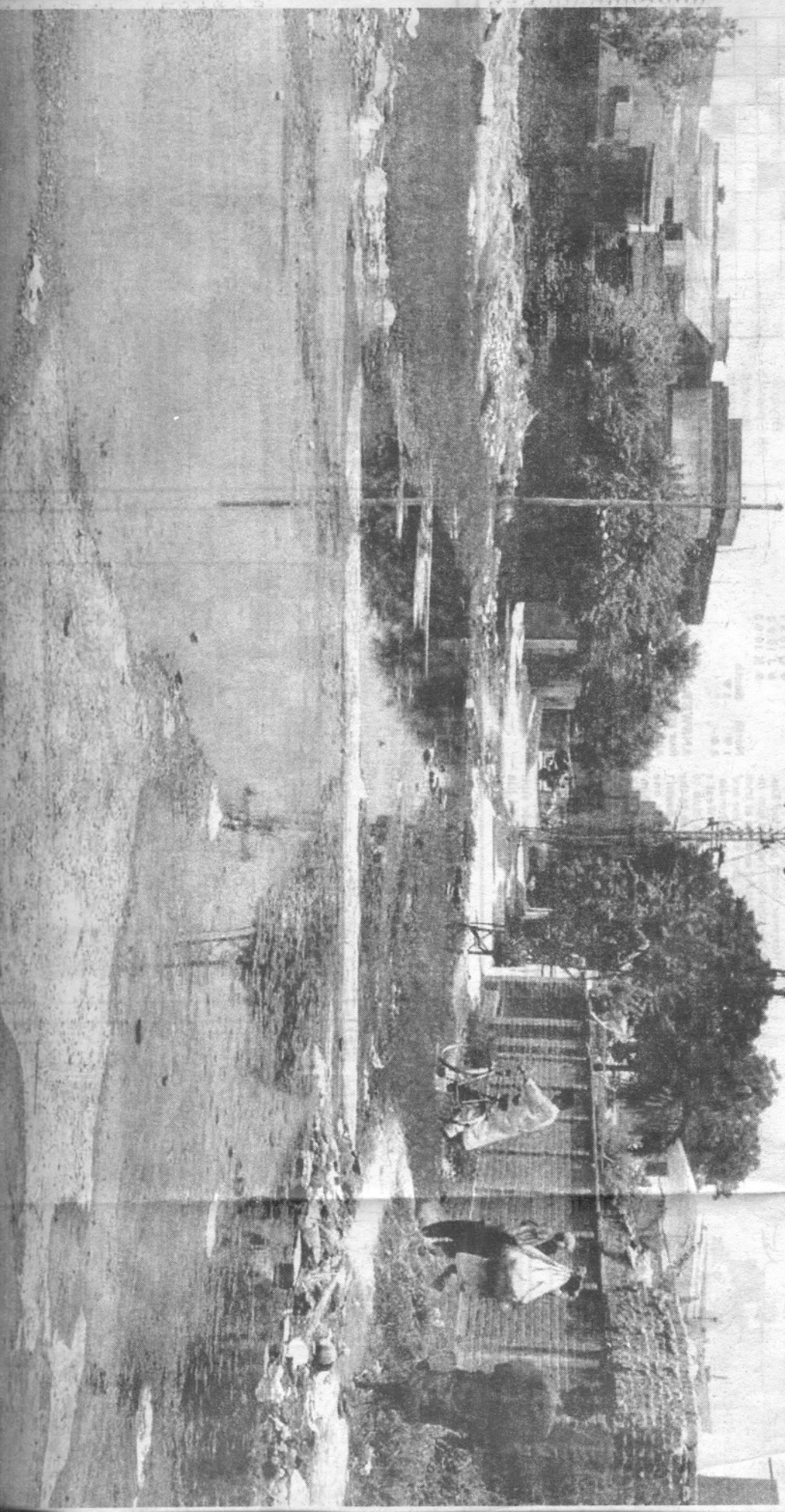


Lahore and environmental pollution

Lahore Nov 8
21.5.02



M R Chaudhry

Lahore has been a land of drams and legends. It is the place of attraction on several counts. There are many tourists resorts, historical places. There are many tourists universities business centres and mausoleums of great saints like Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh Hajveri. It is a city of hopes and opportunities. People go on pouring and thronging into this city day in and day out. It is estimated that at night the population of Lahore is approximately 9 millions but as soon as the sun rises, its populations goes on increasing as a good number of people goes on hailing from other cities and towns to Lahore either for service, business or for recreation. During the peak hours of the day there is an ocean of people, motors, motor bikes, rickshaws and public transport gushing around in all directions of the city. The way Lahore is expanding and flourishing it won't take very long to be on par with Karachi.

Lahore has some specialties, which make it unique and distinctive from other big cities. The writer feels that the major quality of this city is that it has an immense power of absorption of strangers. People coming from any part of the country or foreign countries feel no estrangement or alienation after a short stay in La-

hore rather soon after they become a part and parcel of this city and real Lahorites. Linguistic bias and racial discrimination are extinct here. Like London, New York and Paris it is a cosmopolitan city as Karachi which is known is mini Pakistan. Surely Lahore owns anybody or every body who comes here. It is a city of lively and broad minded people. They are accommodating amiable and full of benefactions. People attribute all these positive qualities to the blessings and benediction of the great saint Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh (May God bestow his boundless blessings upon his exalted soul). That is why Lahore is popularly known as Data Di Nagri (the land of Data Sahib.)

With the increasing population some problems are also multiplying and intensifying. Pollution is its first and foremost problem. Beside other factors, the ever increasing number of buses and vehicular transport, rickshaws and motor cycles are the greatest pollutants. After Karachi, Lahore is badly suffering from pollution being caused by all types of transport playing within the city. Smoke emitting vehicles are exceeding in number. Old and worn out coaches, buses, rickshaws and motor bikes are the source of immense smoke, carbon dioxide lead and other poisonous gases, which rise in the air in the form of clouds that spread all around even on the

Mall. This is seriously affecting the environment and the health of people. Traffic rules and Environmental protection Act are there to curb plying such unhealthy transport but these acts are seldom implemented and practised. Thus pollution has assumed the form of great threat to the health of the city dwellers. Water pollution is being caused due to faulty pipeclining and plumbing system. Too frequently the sewerage water and drinking water gets mixed up and people have to use this contaminated water for drinking, washing and bathing purpose as well as for washing fruit and vegetables and cooking food. Hospital wastes, chemicals and solid wastes of the industries are penetrating into the soil and polluting the subsoil water.

Pollution is the root cause of many deadly and fatal diseases and ill health, including bronchitis, hepatitis, tuberculosis, cataract, insomnia and lack of vitality. The lead emissions decrease IQ of the Children, retards, their growth and affects the hearing power. It is harmful to kidneys and brain. Chang chi rickshaws are causing immense sound pollution.

Environmental protection act and national and international standards need to be applied in their true sense and spirit. People need to be adequately educated as to how to protect the environment. For that matter the newly introduced district governments

should also chalk out programmes for combating pollution and keeping the atmosphere, air water and land free from all gaseous liquid and solid impurities. Lahore Metropolitans Corporation, Health Department and Environmental Protection should make a coordinated effort for effectively controlling this menace. As I gather some time ago some Japanese experts, who visited Lahore were consulted for environmental protection and controlling the city transport. They suggested that as one measure, instead of using cars, station wagons and motor cycle for pick and drop of the students individually in Lahore to their schools and colleges, buses should be used, which on the one hand would be economical and on the other, will help minimizing the pollution. They were of the considered opinion that this proposition will also be useful in protecting the social environment of students belonging to different tiers of our society as coming in luxury cars by some of the students has an adverse effect, resulting in inferiority complex amongst the others, while the former ones think themselves as children of a superior race. Moreover as the writer understands, all the big cities of China have made wonderful arrangements in environmental protection. The Chinese mobilized their resources and manpower belonging to the concerned departments and even the

school and college students for increasing forestry and plantation so that carbon dioxide and other poisonous gases are absorbed by the trees and plants and a healthy atmosphere is created for the city population. They have also constructed a sort of umbrella of plants and trees around all their big cities to provide pure and fresh air to these cities and towns. They have done so with a great missionary spirit. A good precedent wherever available must be followed in our own interest. We should not feel any hesitation in seeking the expert's guidance of China, which has won global environment awards from Norway and Australia. India has used certain technology to provide unleaded gasoline to vehicles in big cities like Delhi, Calcutta and Mumbai. This is great challenge for Dr Atta ur Rehman, Minister of Science and technology and our scientists to come forward and evolve a suitable technology for providing lead free POL or obtain one from any advanced country to apply the same in Lahore and other cities of Pakistan for controlling pollution and minimizing its adverse effects. It has been estimated that as much as 550 tons of lead are emitted by our vehicular traffic every year in Pakistan.

Our educationists, teachers, scholars and intellectuals should create awareness amongst the masses especially the students and launching environmental

protection programmes. Some time ago the Punjab University started a course on this subject and it will be more useful if the environmentalists and environment scientists may deliver lectures and arrange briefing in all schools, college and universities in the city to make students and teachers conscious of the requirements of environmental protection. There was a time during the Mughal era when Lahore was known as the city of gardens. Shalimar Garden badami Bagh, Shahdara Bagh and Baghbanpura still indicate that there were gardens all around Lahore. Thus we have got legacy for growing more and more trees in Lahore to bring it on par with its past.

Compressed natural gas is now being used in industry and transport. It is proving more environment friendly than POL. If the entire transport plying within Lahore is switched over from diesel and petrol to CNG it will be more economic and conducive to environment.

Electronic and print media should made the public well aware of the need of environmental protections for the upkeep of our health and maintenance of healthy atmosphere for ourselves and our children. Our religious scholars must be mobilized for the purpose so that they may motivate the people to make environmental protection as a part of their religious duty.