Natural gas vehicle programme would lead to safer, environment-friendly future for region, say experts

For low-carbon future, activist votes CNG

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DHAKA, JAN 28: A robust natural gas vehicle programme in the subcontinent is one of the most important ways to reduce environmental impact, say experts.

"Both Dhaka and Delhi are leaders of the CNG programme in South Asia, as well as in the world," said Anumita Roychowdhury, associate director of the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). She presented a keynote paper at a seminar held here on Thursday.

"The dialogue on improving quality and performance of natural gas vehicle programme in South Asia - was organised jointly by the Department of Environment (Delhi) and the CSE. Roychowdhury spoke to The Independent on the sidelines of the seminar.

"In the last few years, there has been considerable growth in the population of natural gas vehicles (NGV) worldwide," she said. "There are now about 50 million NGVs in many countries and Asia is expected to be the major growth area for the NGV sector.

"There are many reasons why NGVs should be promoted," Roychowdhury said. She said that a diesel bus emits 46 times higher particulates than a similar CNG vehicle. "Diesel vehicles are known to emit higher particles and NOx than their petrol counterparts," she said.

"It would give the much-needed momentum for cleaner, greener policy," Roychowdhury said. She said the CNG programme is the first opportunity to jump beyond the pollution-intensive technologies and two-stroke engines. "The environmental benefit of this programme has been further enhanced because this is linked with a public transport augmentation plan," she said.

"The impact of the bus fleet must certainly be genuine to switch the majority of vehicles to CNG without facing any major hurdle. In India, the transition was tough - there were about 8 million NGVs in 2003-04 due to this transition."

"Taking a leaf out of her experience in India - the automobile industry is big in India and promoting a new transport policy is hard because of influential sectors," Roychowdhury said. She said a public transport policy for clean air and health would give the much-needed momentum for a cleaner, greener policy.

"Roychowdhury said the western world is now demolishing their expressways and beginning to develop infrastructure for mass rapid transport systems (metro railways being one prime example).

"The problem," she said, is that policymakers in both countries presume a modernised city means a city with an array of private cars but the truth is, a modernised city is one with a harmonised transport system comprising mass rapid transit, dedicated lanes for pedestrians and public transport vehicles, and an environment-friendly infrastructure.

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