

# The Daily Star

## on Friday

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## Fertiliser factories spew death

Thousands exposed to air filled with ammonia from two Ghorashal plants

By Morshed Ali Khan, back from Ghorashal, Narsingdi

Serious corrosion in the urea reactor, inadequate gas supply, frequent failure in the national power grid are contributing to lethal discharge of ammonia from the Ghorashal and Palash Fertiliser factories into the atmosphere, affecting the entire population, livestock, plantations, river and crops of adjacent Khanepur village.

In Khanepur village, about a kilometre from these two factories, almost all kinds of plants have died off. Dead fishes are floating in the ponds and people are showing signs of respiratory problem. There are about 3,000 people living in the Khanepur village.

The villagers said that they had recently demonstrated and even staged a sit-in at the fertiliser companies but the 'emission of the unbearable gas continues'.

Ammonia is an alkaline compound. Exposure to ammo-

nia could cause renal and respiratory failure, and urinary complications, a biochemistry professor of Dhaka University said.

Its long-time effects could be an alarming reduction of 'protein synthesis' in human body and severe affect on enzymes which could result in death, he added.

Following reports published yesterday in The Daily Star, the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) has served a legal notice against the Ghorashal and Palash urea factories asking all government functionaries concerned to show cause within ten days.

Over an area of two kilometres around the village, there is a pungent smell in the air. Villagers say that when the wind blows in the direction of the village, they have to remain indoors, keeping their doors and windows shut and covering their faces with clothes.

This year the problem is many times more than previous years, they say.

Villagers at Narganagram, under Kaliganj thana across the river Sitalakhya, say that the water of the river has long been polluted by the toxic discharge from the factories.

Thick layer of foam can be seen floating in the river near the discharge point where millions of gallons of wastes from the fertiliser factories gush out into the river.

Ghorashal factory officials said the ammonia leakage was 'inevitable'. The plant, established in 1972, is now ridden with some major problems.

'We have a serious problem at the urea reactor, its soil tube has corroded and is leaking,' said Jahangir Alam Khan, General Manager (Operations). 'The matter has been brought under control for the time being. But, we still need some urgent repairs to control the leakage.'

Jahangir said another major cause for ammonia leakage was frequent power failure and consequent 'trip' or shutdown of the plant.

'In the process of restarting the machines after power failure, a huge amount of ammonia gets spilled and we have almost no mechanism to discharge wastes scientifically,' he said.

Other officials said the government had cut down on supply of gas from 46 cubic metres to 40. This is also forcing frequent shutdown of the plant.

According to officials, wastes flow into a huge retention point or a place known as lagoon that is situated near the Khanepur village on the southern side of the factories. When the wastes get deposited on the bed of the lagoon after some time, the water is then discharged into the river Sitalakhya.

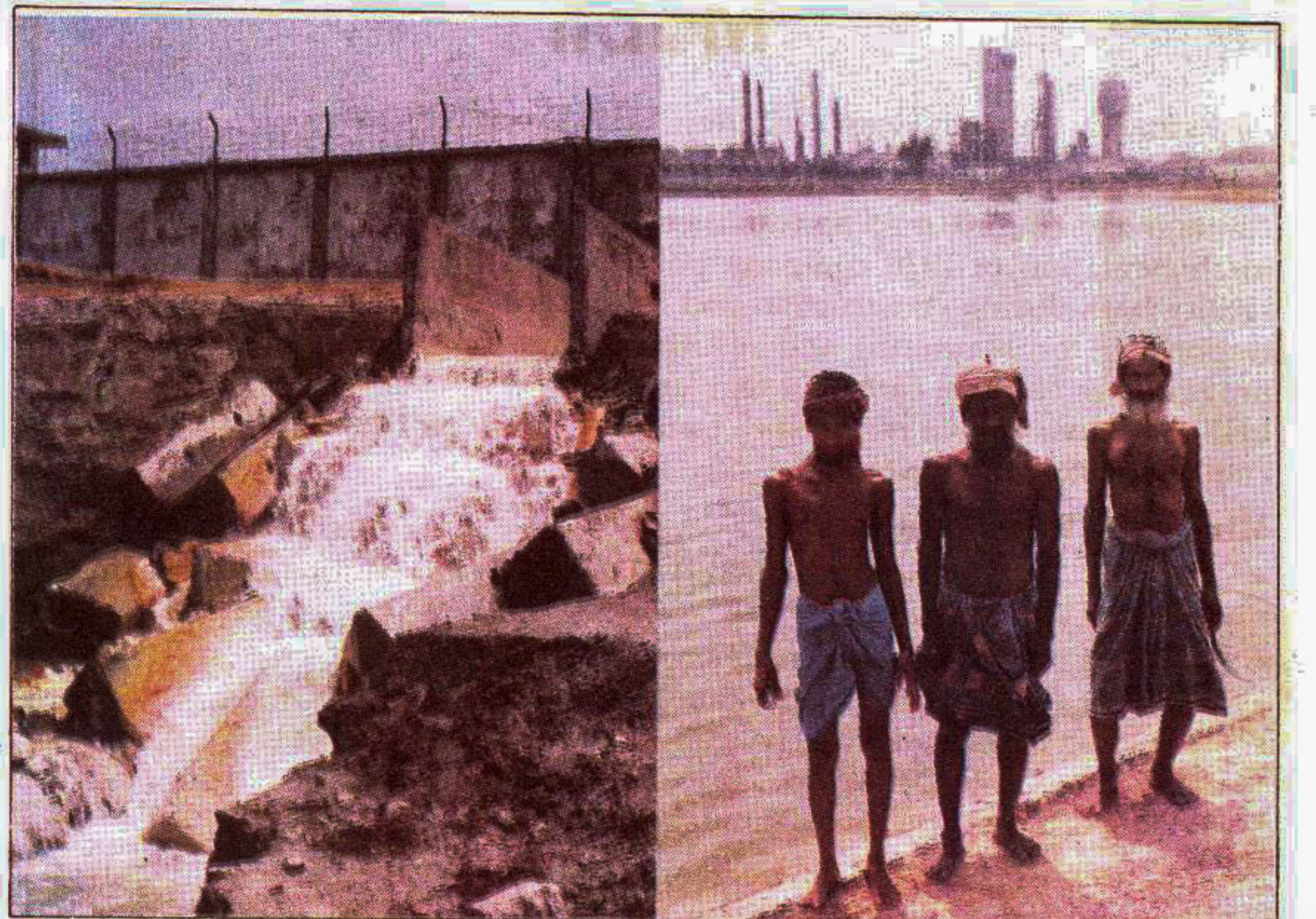
But villagers in Khanepur say that during the dry season

factory authorities never bother to fill the lagoon with water. The bed of the lagoon is often dry when tonnes of ammonia waste are released. The heat causes evaporation of the waste.

Factory sources said after the local people had started to demonstrate with their children about fifteen days back, authorities informed the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) office in Dhaka and told them that the factory had to be shut down for urgent repairs on the leaking vessels.

An official said BCIC was strongly against a shutdown fearing that nation-wide fertiliser production would suffer.

'But when the situation became unbearable in the first week of March, we were forced to shut the factory for four days and somehow the volume of leakage was reduced,' the official said.



Waste ... wasted  
Toxic waste from the fertiliser factories (left) flows into the lagoon (right).  
Star photo: AKM Mohsin

## Former DSE chief indicted

By M Shamsur Rahman

A metropolitan court yesterday framed charges against former DSE chairman Hemayetuddin for manipulating the country's share market through a syndicate in 1996.

Also charged was Ahmed Iqbal Hasan, senior vice-president of the DSE who is also an associate of the HMMS Financial Consultancy Securities, a company the former DSE chief mainly owns.

Three other directors of the company, Syed Mahub Hossain, Sharif Ataur Rahman and Mustaque Ahmed Sadeque, were also charged.

HMMS became the sixth company charged with manipu-

lation of share market. The Securities and Exchange Commission filed complaints against 15 companies and their 42 directors.

The HMMS directors raise the number of directors so far charged to 14 in connection with the 1996 share scam.

Before framing of charges, the prosecution opened the hearing saying that the accused manipulated the market by forming a syndicate under the name of HMMS.

'As per foreign DVP (delivery versus payment) statement submitted by Banque Indosuez and Standard Chartered Bank, the company sold a

huge number of shares. Total transactions in volume and value were Tk. 31.98 lakh,' Special Public Prosecutor Dr Mohammad Ali said.

He said the company was the second largest trader in terms of value and fourth in terms of volume. Unsettled claims against their trades stood at Tk 1.32 crore. The HMMS comprised of four leading brokers of DSE who traded shares among themselves and, with the associate abetting, inflated the share price.

He also said that an expert committee identified them and there were prima facie evidence. See Page 12 Col 4

## Sonia hits socialist minefield

Congress has the confidence, but not the numbers as yet

NEW DELHI, Apr 22: Indian opposition leader Sonia Gandhi's chances of forming a new government looked bleak today after centrist allies who helped topple the Hindu nationalist coalition withheld support, reports AFP.

Following a meeting of top opposition leaders late Wednesday, socialist Mulayam Singh Yadav, who commands 20 precious seats in parliament, said he would not support a government led by the Italian-born Gandhi's Congress party.

But Yadav's suggestion that veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu should head an alternative administration was immediately shot down by Basu's own Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI(M)). A dejected Gandhi convened an emergency meeting of her party around midnight, during which she reportedly refused to budge on her decision to form a minority government with outside support, rather than a

Congress-led coalition. She also warned that the only alternative to backing a Congress government was fresh elections.

'It's either Congress ... or polls,' The Hindustan Times newspaper quoted Gandhi as saying.

There was no immediate response to the Congress stance from the other opposition parties, now broadly divided between the communist, who favour Gandhi as prime minister and centrist-regional groups who oppose her.

The overnight meeting of opposition parties witnessed heated exchanges, with communist Basu demanding to know why some opposition leaders had discovered a sudden aversion for Gandhi and her party.

'It had been decided that the Congress will be allowed to form a government,' Basu said. 'I don't understand why this question is being raised again.'

Basu, who has been chief minister of West Bengal state for 22 years and almost became prime minister at the head of a coalition in 1996, reiterated that he was not interested in taking Gandhi's place.

A Congress strategist admitted Gandhi's carefully laid-out plans had run into serious problems, and that only the communists continued to back her outside of her own party.

'Things are looking bad,' the strategist told AFP. The sudden setback for Gandhi followed her audience Wednesday with Indian President K R Narayanan, during which she pledged to form a government with a parliamentary majority in two days.

If she is unable to prove that majority, Narayanan will have little alternative but to call a general election.

Gandhi was followed to the presidential palace by members of outgoing Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu na-

tionalist alliance, who argued that they should be called back to power.

Vajpayee's BJP party remains the largest in the 545-member parliament with 182 seats, compared to just 140 for the Congress.

Congress spokesman Arjun Singh, a close aide of Gandhi, said his party was still confident of garnering enough support for a minority government.

'We hope good sense will dawn on everybody,' said Singh, who also added to the uncertainty surrounding Gandhi's stance on taking over as prime minister.

Singh announced Tuesday that Gandhi, widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, would be premier in a new Congress government, but then he denied that she had 'ever proposed her name for the high office.'

An anti-Gandhi protest by BJP members of parliament on

Wednesday indicated that the Hindu nationalists would play up Gandhi's Italian, Roman Catholic roots in their bid to undermine the Congress.

The Congress aversion to forming a coalition is based on fears that such an alliance would be prey to same ugly infighting that plagued Vajpayee's government.

Meanwhile, India's parliament today passed the national budget for the fiscal year beginning April 1, despite a political crisis that had threatened to put the bill on hold.

Following the collapse of the Hindu nationalist-led government on Saturday, an all-party meeting had agreed to support the budget through parliament without amendments.

However, the first attempt failed Wednesday, when MPs from the government benches forced the adjournment of parliament by storming the floor of the house in an orchestrated protest against the opposition.



## Going for the fry, giving up the fish

Catching or selling jatka is a crime, but who cares?

By Nazmul Ashraf and Ehsanul Haq

City markets are now flooded with jatka fish, juveniles of national fish hilsa, as their indiscriminate catching is going on unabated.

The authorities seem reluctant to execute the law that prohibits catches, transportation and sales of the jatka fish, which is smaller than 23 cm in length.

Protection and Conservation of Fish Act, 1950 which was amended in 1985, provides for a fine of Taka 500 or six months' jail term or both for any of the offences.

Distributors and sellers are well aware of the illegal practice but they are not afraid of any legal action which, they claim, is never taken. They also allege that the jatka traders bribe police and relevant government officials to ensure smooth business.

'We know it's illegal but we're free to sell jatka. We never face problems,' said Quasem Mia, a seller at the city's Kawranbazar fish mar-

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## Bank notice awaits defaulting Maulana

Tk 13.69 cr of Tk 62.35 cr remains overdue

Star Report

Four companies owned by Moulana M A Mannan and his family members have out standing loans of Tk 62.35 crore with Sonali Bank. The Mannan group has already defaulted Tk 13.69 crore from this amount.

Bank sources alleged that Moulana Mannan, a former minister and now the managing director of Kaderia Publications and Production Ltd that publishes the Bengali Daily 'The Inqilab', took loans for different business organisations by applying political influence.

The amount remained outstanding as the group failed to pay due instalments regularly, the source alleged. The bank is now preparing relevant papers and documents to file cases with the bankruptcy court for recovery of the defaulted loans.

'The companies will be served a final notice for paying the over due loans within 90 days. If they fail to pay back the money the bank will file cases with bankruptcy court,' said a high official of the bank.

The four companies and amount of overdue loans against them are: Kaderia Publications and Products Ltd Tk 2.57 crore, M/s Arshia Apparels Ltd Tk 2.75 crore, River Side Leather and Foot wear Industries Tk 7.40 crore and M/s Shaheen and Brothers Ltd Tk 89 lakh.

The bank has already filed a case with first class magistrate in Narayanganj against M/s Shaheen and Brothers Ltd, a sister organisation of Kaderia Publications, alleging violation of bank rule.

The bank alleged that the Shaheen Brothers sold out a total of 91 thousand bags of potato valued at Tk 1.53 crore that was kept with the bank as mortgage against the company's loan. The potato was sold without informing the bank

and that is a criminal offence' the source alleged.

Moulana Mannan and none of the directors of the group were available at the Kaderia publications office on the R K Mission Road of Motijheel area when this reporter went there yesterday evening for their comments.

An official of the group said that all the directors of the company had gone outside Dhaka for business purposes.

When asked about defaulted loans, the official, requesting anonymity, denied the allegations saying that 'We have good relations with Sonali Bank and it is a continuous process of taking loans and realising instalments' he said.

'A loan can be defaulted any time due to particular reasons but we always try to keep it updated,' he said. 'The group appealed for rescheduling the loans which still remained unpaid' he claimed. But he could not say how much money was actually paid.

He said a certain group is conspiring against Moulana Mannan and Inqilab group to belittle him and the image of 'Inqilab' in the society.

He also denied the allegation that Mortgagee potato was sold without bank's consent. He said the bank was informed before selling the potato and that there was a bank appointed supervisor and guard. 'Selling mortgaged property without the bank's help is impossible' he said.

He added that Mannan's group has relevant papers and documents which prove that bank officials were informed about the selling of the potatoes prior to the actual transaction. The potatoes had to be disposed off as they were rotting due to a month long flood in the country. The papers will be submitted to the court, he informed the Daily Star.

## PM's another shot at foreign capital

Investment Forum at Paris told of Dhaka's package of incentives

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged foreign investors to be partners in progress through investment in Bangladesh which offers one of the most attractive packages of incentives to direct investors, reports BSS.

In a videotaped address to the Bangladesh Investors' Forum meet in Paris on April 21, the Prime Minister said the

present government has very clear and well-defined economic policies to promote foreign direct investment for creating employment opportunities, acquiring new technology and management skills.

Presenting Bangladesh as one of the most open economies among the developing countries, Hasina said Bangladesh's economy has already been ex-

tensively liberalised and the country was pursuing a private sector-led and export-oriented growth strategy.

'Our policies are geared towards creating an environment where the private sector would play its role effectively as the engine of growth,' Hasina said adding that her government is giving special focus on building

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Shazneen Tasnim Rahman

It is one year today since Shazneen was so brutally taken away from us by the cruel hands of assailants

To Almighty Allah, we express eternal gratitude for giving us the strength, to endure and survive this tragedy. To our relatives, friends and well-wishers we say thank you for all the support which you are, so generously, continuing to give every step of the way.

The excruciating pain of losing a child, especially a vibrant ever joyful, energetic and warm 15 years old, with everything ahead of her, has devastated family and friends alike. For us now nothing remains but to seek justice for Shazneen in the Courts of law. We are confident that In-sha-Allah justice will prevail not only for Shazneen, but also for other victims of such heinous crimes.

We humbly request all to continue to pray for justice for her in this world and eternal salvation in the Hereafter.

What your support has meant to all of us is something which we shall never be able to fully express. We thank all of you who have prayed for Shazneen and given us the courage to endure this nightmare over the past one year.

23rd April, 1999

- Family

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