

Pharmaceutical plants routinely flout environmental rules

Toxic waste dumped into open sewers pose serious health hazard

By Naimul Haq

More than 20 pharmaceutical plants in the Tongi industrial zone and at Savar routinely dump hundreds of tonnes of untreated chemical effluents into open sewers that flow into nearby rivers, endangering marine as well as human life.

Most of these plants, producing more than 200 categories of drugs, operate without effluent treatment plant, initial environment examination report, environmental management plan, pollution effect abatement plan and other emergency devices as required by law.

Only a few plants, mostly multinationals, have waste treatment facilities. Others simply dump their wastes.

Soluble chemicals that these plants normally discharge include ammonia, nitrate, arsenic, boron, cadmium, chromium, chloride, copper, sulphide, fluoride, mercury, lead, nickel, oil and grease, selenium, dissolved phosphorus, zinc and potassium.

Gaseous discharge include hydrochloric acid

gas, sulphuric acid mist, lead and mercury particles, sulphur dioxide, chlorine, nitrogen oxide, etc.

Chemical emissions from these plants are extremely toxic, and some are carcinogenic.

The Department of Environment (DoE) does have some set rules to contain discharge of industrial wastes. Units exceeding the discharge limits are liable to punitive measures.

The department is also responsible for conserving the physical, chemical and biological properties of air, water and soil and monitoring any change in temperature, odour and density.

However, according to DOE sources, it rarely examines the quality of water and gases released from the plants as the laboratory tests cost a lot.

On the other hand, the Drug Administration is not adequately equipped to play the regulatory role. It has neither logistic nor personnel support to ensure that provisions for proper waste disposal are being abided by.

Officials, who are supposed to visit the phar-

maceutical plants every two years, hardly make the rounds. It is alleged that some of them are routinely bribed by the companies to stay away from the plants.

"Potential for health hazards is all too high in these areas since there is virtually no monitoring system," said an environmentalist. "Worse still, a large number of people living in these areas are exposed to poisonous chemicals."

"Human health requirements and the protection of the environment should be prioritised," he added.

Syeda Rezwana Hassan, programmes director of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA), said, "There is no effective regulation to define wastes from the user points in Bangladesh."

However, she pointed out, "since wastes See page 11 col 1

JP divided over ways to release Ershad from jail

One group wants to pay fine, the other wants ruling reviewed

Star Report

Senior leaders of Jatiya Party's Ershad-led faction are split on ways to release the deposed president from jail.

According to party insiders, one group wants to get Ershad, who is currently serving a jail-term for the Janata Tower case, out of jail on payment of the fine. This group is made mostly of Ershad's relatives.

The other, led by party secretary-general Nazim Rahman Manjur, wants a review of the Supreme Court verdict before making any plan to have him released. Manjur and the like-minded leaders believe that a review petition would actually do the party chairman a world of

good.

Ershad was sentenced to five years in prison and a fine of Tk 5.5 crore, in default of which another six months' imprisonment.

Instead of paying the fine, Ershad, who surrendered to the trial court and was sent to jail on November 20 last year, is completing the six-month jail-term.

The Manjur-led group wants to cash in on the much-talked-about cassette scam case. They feel that there could be something in the conversation between Ershad and Justice Latifur Rahman which may prove to be a blessing for their leader in the review of Janata Tower case

should he be found guilty in the cassette scam case.

Ershad had a telephonic conversation with Justice Rahman after the verdict in the Janata Tower case. He was later charged with contempt of court. The contempt charge is now under trial at the High Court. Maximum punishment in the contempt of court case is six months in jail or a fine of Tk 2,000 only.

A senior JP leader said that Ershad's lawyers were insisting not to free Ershad through paying the fine. "They want to fight the

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Nasim says Opposition conspiring to dislodge AL govt

By Staff Correspondent

Home Minister Mohamamd Nasim has alleged that the BNP-led opposition alliance has resorted to destructive activities to embarrass and remove the Awami League government by any means.

Talking to a group of newsmen at his office during the opposition-called hartal yesterday, he said that these parties started destructive activities after remaining silent for a short time as their movement against the government totally failed.

Describing yesterday's hartal as an instance of their 'subversive activities', the home minister vowed to resist them politically.

Nasim alleged that the opposition alliance was conspiring to destroy the democratic process and the successes achieved by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government.

He reiterated that religious fanatics and anti-liberation forces were responsible for the bomb explosion at Saturday's rally of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) at Paltan Maidan in the city.

"Investigation into the incident is going on and I hope those responsible for it would be traced and arrested very soon," Nasim said.

In reply to question whether he thinks the BNP-led alliance was involved in the bomb attack, he said it is not possible to make any comment till the investigation is complete.

He was asked, "Then how do you hold anti-liberation forces responsible for this?" The minister replied it was apparent because they would benefit from the incident.

Nasim said the government and the ruling party are embarrassed at the death of workers of a political party but a certain political party is out to take advantage of it.

Hartal passes off peacefully in Chittagong

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 22: Normal life was disrupted in the port city today during a dawn-to-dusk hartal called by the BNP-led opposition alliance.

However, no untoward incidents were reported during hartal hours, police said.

Pro-hartal activists organised rallies and brought out processions at different points of the city.

Ruling party activists also organised anti-hartal rallies and processions at New Market crossing, Muradpur and other places here today.

A tense situation prevailed because of pro and anti-hartal programmes during hartal hours. Paramilitary BDR and additional police force were deployed at all vulnerable points of the city to foil any attempt of violence.

All kinds of vehicles except rickshaws stayed off the roads. Except major shopping centres, most of the shops were seen open during today's hartal, witnesses said.

Delivery of goods to and from port remained suspended during hartal though cargo handling was as usual inside the jetties, port sources said.

Mills and factories at the industrial belts of Nasirabad, Kalurghat, Patenga and Sitakundu suffered production loss due to thin attendance of workers, sources said.



Flower garlands decorate an engine of a goods train standing for a signal on Sunday at Petrapole, the last railway station within the Indian border, some 80 kilometres north of Calcutta. Indian Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee inaugurated the Benapole - Petrapole rail link. -- AFP photo

Rajuk's move to reclaim Gulshan lake partly grabbed by CSKS

By Staff Correspondent

The Cooperative Society of Senakalyan Sangstha (CSKS) has stopped filling up part of Gulshan lake near Section-1 Shooting Club after Rajuk warned of filing a case under the Protection of Playground, Open Space, Park, Natural Water-body and Low-lying Area Act.

Rajuk sources said that following the visit of Minister for Public Works and Housing Mosharruf Hossain and Secretary of the Ministry to the site on Thursday, it was decided that Rajuk would recover the lake area by removing the earth dumped by the CSKS.

"Gulshan thana refused to accept the case. So as per the

minister's directive, we will soon file a case with the Metropolitan Magistrate's Court and remove the earth from about six kathas of lake area," said a Rajuk engineer.

During his spot visit, the minister reportedly said there was no doubt that the CSKS was filling up part of the lake. A section of people was taking advantage of legal loopholes to grab the lake. He directed Rajuk authorities to take legal steps to recover the lake from encroachment by the Water Front Apartment Ltd near Banani Graveyard adjacent to Road 18.

The CSKS started to fill up the lake early last month, claim-

ing ownership of a big chunk of it. Rajuk officials intervened and compelled it to stop the work.

Some sources said several big developers are also claiming ownership of Gulshan lake. These developers and influential persons have used legal loopholes and released 'lands' from Rajuk's jurisdiction allegedly with the help of the Deputy Commissioner's office and a section of officials of the Land Ministry.

"These officials are apt in processing such files and they help those quarters grab public lands for their gain," one source noted.

7 victims of bomb blast still under treatment

By staff correspondent

Seven of those injured in bomb explosion at the CPB rally at Paltan Maidan on Saturday were under treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) till yesterday.

Of them, two at the post-operative ward were still unconscious, one was at the intensive care unit (ICU) and four at emergency ward 32.

Six others were released yesterday.

The injured persons under treatment were still not getting required life-saving drugs, even at the ICU and the post-operative ward of the hospital, it was alleged.

CPB leaders and activists told this correspondent yesterday evening that despite requests to the hospital authorities, there was not enough supply of drugs for the injured.

One leader said, "I have given Tk 3,468 today for purchase of

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157 AIDS patients detected & 7 of them dead, JS told

By Staff Correspondent

Seven persons have so far died of AIDS in the country and 150 are carrying HIV, Health Minister Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim informed the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

The government has undertaken a Tk 313 crore project to create public awareness about the dreadful disease, he said replying to a question from Aleya Afroz of Awami League.

Donors are financing the four-year project, he added. Besides the media, 24 NGOs are engaged in the campaign to create awareness for prevention of AIDS in the country, he said.

Ninety-seven blood transfusion centres have been set up at 13 medical colleges and specialised hospitals at a cost of Tk 18 crore for supply of safe blood. Such centres will be established at all Upazilas in phases, the minister said.

A National AIDS Policy has been formulated for prevention of AIDS and a monitoring cell is operating to detect HIV carriers, he said.

Replying to another question from Ali Reza Raju of the ruling party, the health minister said at the moment, the government has no plan to ban private practice by government doctors after their office hours.

A move is underway to restrict private practice by government doctors holding non-practising positions and those working in emergency departments at hospitals. Doctors at emergency departments will be paid non-practising allowance, he said.

UNB adds: A 500-bed medical college hospital will be set up in Mymensingh.

The construction work will start in the current fiscal year. See page 11 col 8

Maj Akhter's JS seat Writ challenging EC's decision likely today

A writ petition is likely to be filed with the High Court today challenging the Election Commission decision to vacate the parliamentary seat of expelled BNP leader Akhteruzzaman.

Some voters of Kishoreganj-2 constituency, including Adv Rafiqul Islam, Abdus Sobhan, Alauddin Saberi, Abdus Salam and Prof Siddiq Hossain, are likely to file the writ.

Eminent lawyer Dr Kamal Hossain is likely to move the writ on behalf of the petitioners, Adv Rafiq told UNB yesterday.

He said people of Kotiadi had elected Maj (ret'd) Akhter to represent them in parliament and expulsion by his (Akhter's) party can't snatch the rights of the voters. "We have taken mandate of the people to challenge the decision of the Election Commission."

Advocate Rafiq thinks Major Akhter was removed illegally and unconstitutionally.

Meanwhile, Akhter, who lost his seat following verdict by the tribunal of the Election Commission on

January 10, recently submitted his red passport and ID card, and handed over the MP hostel room to the parliament authorities.

Akhter, who is known for creating stunts, wrote a letter to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday criticising them for calling yet another hartal, which was observed yesterday.

In his letter Akhter wrote if the opposition had been in parliament, then it could have raised in the House the issue of Saturday's killings in the CPB meeting.

"The ruling party does not want the presence of opposition in parliament and opposition parties have fallen into that trap," he said in the letter to her former leader.

Branding party leadership, especially the student leadership of the 90s as corrupt, the ex-army officer observed that "corrupt people can't build movement against this corrupt government."

He called upon Khaleda Zia to take right decisions for the sake of people and the party.

EU Needs Assessment Mission due Jan 27

A 7-member Needs Assessment Mission from European Union will arrive in Dhaka on January 27 to determine the scope and modality of an EU poll observation team for next general election in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

The mission comprises three officials of European Commission, three consultants, two of them election experts and one logistic expert, and one representative of Swedish presidency of EU.

Sandro Cerrato, principal administrator, EC, and desk officer for Bangladesh in Brussels will lead the team that will be staying here until February 6 doing groundwork for election monitoring by the donors.

JV Ketelson, counsellor of the EC Delegation in Dhaka, said the mission would hold series of meetings with major political parties, PCJSS, the Election Commission, ambassadors of EU countries, USA, Canada, Japan, Switzerland and Norway and representatives of international organizations.

The mission will also visit Pabna to see the by-election there on February 5 and visit Feni See page 11 col 7

5 killed, 20 hurt in Sylhet road accident

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Jan 22: Five persons were killed and 20 injured when a truck carrying gas cylinders collided head-on with a minibus at Kuchai on the Sylhet-Jakiganj highway last night. Two of them died on the spot and three at the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

The dead are Faruque Ahmed, Kamal Ahmed and Gous Miah, all from Jakiganj. Two others could not be identified.

Drivers of both the vehicles managed to escape. The injured have been admitted to the hospital.

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