

Tannery shifting moves at snail's pace

Residents may have to go through another phase of environment pollution

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With another Eid-ul-Azha round the corner, residents of Hazaribagh complain that this time too, the river will be polluted and bad odour will fill the environment, as the tannery has not been shifted.

"How long will we have to suffer from bad odour and environment pollution?" asked Moshtak Ahmed, a resident. "Another Eid-ul-Azha is at hand and again the largest collection of animal extracts and bees will come to stay. Will the tannery be moved at all?" he queried.

Bangladesh Tanners Association (BTA) doubt whether the Hazaribagh tannery expected to be shifted by June 2006, would even start by that time, as its progress is extremely slow.

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"We are all ready to make sacrifices for shifting but the area must first be durable and the plot handed over to the tannery production units," said the owner of a tannery in Hazaribagh. "Apart from a piece of acquired land, nothing is there on the site and therefore shifting to Savar might take ages, he said.

"There are around 65,000 workers directly involved in the tannery industry. We have been operating in Hazaribagh since 1950. So if the place in Savar is not ready for us, we cannot move suddenly. We need both time and facilities," he added.

BTA General Secretary

Mohammed Abdul Hai said initially the Savar project has 195 plots on 200 acres of land, though they had demand 400 acres to include other facilities like dormitories (low cost housing), medical exigencies for tannery workers and their families.

Without the extra 200 acres, the shifting will be totally incomplete. Plenty of machinery needs to be setup and a common effluent treatment plant (CETP) to be developed at a cost of Tk 81 crore at the Savar site -- all of which along with the dormitory and other facilities require extralands.

With all the confusion of the shifting starting on time, Bangladesh Small and Cottage

Industries Corporation (BSCIC), the implementing authority of this high-priority Tk 175-crore project entirely funded by the government, is confident of starting on time.

However, a high official from the corporation admitted that the shifting is lagging behind because the initial work delayed. An extension of the part for earth filling of the second phase will be proposed so that, the tannery houses can start shifting from July 2006.

Meanwhile, BTA members said in the absence of the treatment plant, there is nothing they could do about the untreated wastes from the tanneries flowing into the River

Buriganga polluting the environment.

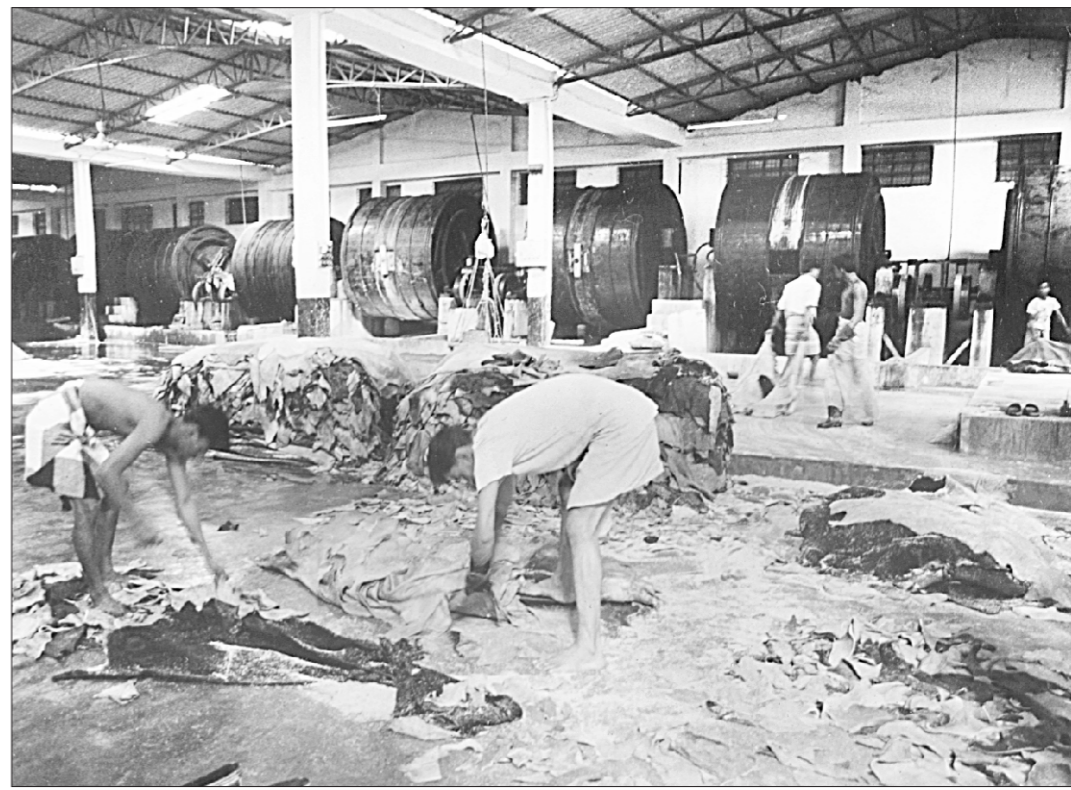
About 243 tanneries out of the total 270 in Bangladesh are situated in Hazaribagh, Boubazar and Kalinagar areas.

These tanneries produce 88 tonnes of solid waste and release 7.70 million litres of liquid waste a day, said Partha Shankar Saha, training and programme officer of the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), an NGO.

Wastes are channelled into the Buriganga through a sluice gate, which often remains closed, according to Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa).

The treatment plant will be set up in Savar mainly to avoid health hazards. The plant is expected to purify water from hazardous elements like chromium and aonium affecting water, air and the human body.

The CETP will keep the air clean in the project area. The water containing wastes will be purified in the plant and will be re-used to reduce wastage, BTA sources said.



Men at work at one of the tanneries in Hazaribagh.

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12x3

12x2

15x3