

INDUSTRIAL WASTE

Owners' apathy over waste treatment plant

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

In response to the government's ultimatum to set up Effluent Treatment Plants by October 31, only 24 textile industries in Dhaka have so far submitted their action plans on ETP to the

Department of Environment (DoE).

On March 22 the environment ministry set the deadline and asked the industry owners to come up with their action plan and submit it to the DoE. But the DoE officials said they received

poor response from the mill owners.

"We are mainly focusing on textile mills and related industries. Because of their high density they are mainly responsible for the pollution and the appalling condition of the rivers

around Dhaka city. But the industry owners are still very reluctant to comply with the deadline," said Nazimuddin Chowdhury, director of DoE, Dhaka Division.

"If we can control the untreated liquid waste discharged from these industries, then the situation will improve significantly. The pollution will reach a tolerable level," he added.

"Those who submitted the proposed action plans have failed to mention a specific timeline. Most of the proposals are vague. It did not include how and when they will finish the ETP installation process," Chowdhury mentioned.

There are about 1,800 industries in and around Dhaka city that include textile, pharmaceutical and chemical industries and tanneries producing liquid waste. Among them 800 are textile mills and related industries including dyeing, washing, and finishing.

These industries are situated in Tejgaon, Shyampur, Fatulla, Konabari, Ashulia and Rupganj areas, and on the banks of Shitalakkhya, Bangsi, Balu and Turagrivers.

DoE officials said only 89 of them have in-house ETP. The others continue production without ETP, discharging toxic

waste into the rivers and other water bodies. Some factories do not run the treatment plant to save operating cost.

Millions of gallons of hazardous untreated wastes from these industries are polluting all the four rivers, canals and low-lying areas around the city, posing major environmental threat and health hazards.

According to a study, 67.7 million litres of untreated liquid industrial wastes are dumped into the nature every day.

Towfique Hassan, secretary general, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, said ETP is a new idea for the factory owners. After recent meetings with the environment adviser, they realised that it will not be possible for them to operate their industries without ETP. Their awareness about pollution has increased.

"But it will take time to bring the entire industry under ETP system. Main reason is that because of the sudden increase in demand, suppliers are not being able to deliver necessary machinery within this short period of time," he noted.

There are other issues involved, he mentioned. "Smaller industrial units are not economically solvent enough to install and run ETP and they are

very large in number.

Most of the small units do not have land of their own."

Hassan said these small units need bank loans to implement the plan on ETP.

"If smaller units are given a little more time they can arrange ETP system jointly with factories situated in the same area. If the government permits setting up of an ETP for 10 to 12 factories together, it would be easier," he said.

Chowdhury said before 1997 there was no law related to environment. When the garment industry began to expand there were only cutting and sewing industries. It did not involve any wet processing. Later when dyeing and washing plants were introduced it became a problem. There was no specific guideline regarding liquid waste discharge until 1997.

The DoE, with the assistance of joint forces, will take stern actions under the Environment Conservation Act 1997 against the owners of industrial units who will not carry out ETP installation programmes within the deadline, he said.

The environment ministry has decided to shut down all industrial units running without ETP and polluting water bodies with untreated wastes from November 1.



SK ENAMUL HAQ

Untreated wastes from dyeing factories near Gazipur flow into the local river.

DHAKA EASTERN BYPASS

Govt seeks assistance from donors

Country's second most important project in terms of poverty alleviation cannot be launched due to fund constraints

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Water Resources Ministry has requested the Economic Relations Division (ERD) to seek foreign financial assistance for the Dhaka Eastern Bypass Project, sources said.

The 30-km long Dhaka Integrated Flood Control Embankment Cum Eastern Bypass Project would cost around Tk 2,475 crore and encompass the 124 square km area from Tongi railway bridge to Kanchpur bridge. An inter-ministerial meeting in July 2004 classified the project as the second most important one in terms of national priority to reduce poverty. The project would secure this vast area from recurring floods and also expand the city. It would also play a vital role in diverting west and southbound traffic from northern parts of the country.

An official source in the ministry said that a letter was sent to the ERD after the WDB (Water Development Board) okayed an updated version of the project studies.

An official source at the ERD said that they had written to several donors seeking funds for the project.

"This is a very important project and we are trying to find a donor for it," said the source requesting anonymity. Seven ministries with the water resources ministry in the lead would implement the project.

A WDB engineer said that the Eastern Bypass project is one of the most important projects that is set to change the face of the city. He said that considering its importance they are hopeful that the government would give it its due priority.

While preparations are underway to launch the long awaited project, the govern-

ment however has no plan in hand to save the natural canals and water retention ponds in the 124 square kilometre area under the project, mostly low-lying, being filled up indiscriminately.

Lack of initiative to retain the natural canals and water retention ponds before the project starts has raised fears among environmentalists and experts that as in the case of the western flood protection embankment, the 'new city extension' on the eastern fringe would be an environmental nightmare, resulting in permanent water logging and other hazards.

Most of the low-lying land in the bypass project area is now in the grip of private housing companies and individuals. From Khilkhet to Kanchpur along the river Balu, massive signboards have been installed announcing the start of mega housing projects.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

The Balu river where the Eastern Bypass would be built.



Shankhanidhi House, a protected building at Tipu Sultan Road in the old part of the city, has been illegally leased out by the DC office.

STAR PHOTO

FOLLOW UP

SHANKHANIDHI HOUSE

Department of Archaeology sleeps over historical site

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Department of Archaeology (DoA) is yet to notify the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) office demanding cancellation of a lease order illegally issued by the Additional Deputy Commissioner Revenue (ADC) office on a historically protected site.

Following reports published in the Star City Md Khalequzzaman, deputy director, DoA said that they would send a letter to DC office asking them to cancel the lease. The letter is yet to be issued.

The deputy director had earlier said that the Shankhanidhi House, built in 1921 at Tipu Sultan Road in the old part of the city was listed by DoA as a historically protected site and his department would soon write to the DC office for cancellation of the lease it had issued in 2002.

When contacted yesterday Khalequzzaman first said that they had sent a 'letter' to the DC office on Wednesday (May 9) whose content was the list of protected sites in the city.

"Before taking any official measure we first need our

regional office to conduct an investigation so that we may start an action plan," he said.

Defying the law ADC Revenue office of DC office leased out two-thirds of this listed archaeological heritage building on February 2, 2002.

ADC Revenue Shamima Yasmin yesterday said that they could only cancel the lease if the DoA notifies them. "But we have not received any communication from the DoA in this regard," Yasmin said.

Shankhanidhi House, a building with significant architectural

features on Tipu Sultan Road in the city now houses an automobile workshop, lube shops, two families and an office of workshop owners association.

Present inhabitants of the house have changed its original features according to their whims while an automobile workshop rented out by lessees in the ground floor has blackened the beautiful courtyard.

According to an inscription, whitewashed at present, it was built in 1921 by two merchant brothers Lal Mohan Saha and Gaur Nitai Saha.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"The military is certainly backing the government but let me point out that this government was sworn in under a provision of the constitution of the country"

-- Fakhruddin Ahmed
Chief Adviser

Told BBC, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"It is my greatest achievement that I have made it to the land and the people where I belong"

-- Sheikh Hasina
Awami League Chief

Told thousands of ardent supporters after she returned home 20 days after the interim government sought to force her stay abroad, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"BNP is responsible for the current crisis"

-- Saifur Rahman
Former finance minister and BNP leader

Told a private TV channel, on Monday. Source: Jugantor

"To whom will we hand over power?"

-- Barrister Mainul Hossain
Law Adviser

Told reporters after a meeting on smuggling prevention at the Ministry of Home Affairs, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

"I failed to find anything positive, except appeal to extend the time [to install effluent treatment plant] at successive meetings"

-- CS Karim
Environment Adviser

Told a delegation of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association at his office, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"We are working with wrong information and data"

-- Tapan Chowdhury
Energy Adviser

Told reporters about the information provided by the Power Development Board on power generation, demand, supply, load-shedding and system loss at his ministry office, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"This is an artificial crisis imported from Pakistan"

-- Maulana Abdul Awwal Khan
Naeb Ameer, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Bangladesh

Said at a press conference at its office after an ultimatum was issued by Jadid-al-Qaeda asking Ahmadiyyas to acknowledge by May 10 that Prophet Muhammad (SM) is the last and greatest prophet, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias