Hazaribagh mostly rely on the leftovers from the tanneries. Using tannery-waste for producing poultry and fish feed has proved to be most threatening according to scientific studies and investigation. A Star report in 2010 cited a 2007 study by Dhaka University and Bangladesh Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) that found high quantities of chromium in eggs and poultry meat. By entering into the food chain through tannery-wastes and then feeds, heavy metals such as chromium may cause cancer or damage the kidney or the liver, says the report.

Confirming the study, Abu Anis Jahangir, director of BCSIR Laboratories, says that there has been no further research into this since 2007. "We also don't know whether anyone else conducted any research about the present state of using tannery-wastes for poultry and fish feed," he says.

In 2010, the High Court promptly directed the government to terminate such enterprises at Hazaribagh that use raw tannery-waste for producing poultry and fish feed after the Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) filed a petition. However, as recently as in February this year, photos of such materials being laid out at Hazaribagh was seen in newspaper reports. Presumably, these materials are still out there, being processed in the open.



Halfway to Lalbagh from the Martyr's Graveyard, some pitch black organic materials are seen over thin plastic sheets. Its grimy appearance and overpowering stench outdo anything we have come across so far; trying not to breathe appears to be the only way to filter out the smell. The labourers in charge of distributing this noxious material are women, working indifferently with bare hands and without a mask.

Busy in supervision, the owner of this business claims, "These are raw materials for fish feed, prepared from the leftovers gathered from fish markets." Requesting anonymity, he informs the site employs 24 labourers while each earns up to 5000 taka a month. A site can produce up to one ton of raw material in three days, resulting in a monthly profit of above 20,000 taka. He defends his position saying, "Bangladesh is a poor country, you have to understand. We are trying to create room for employment."

When asked about the wastes and such horrible working conditions, the tanners' association president Shaheen Ahmed says, "Around 70 percent of this waste is being taken by the board factories in Narsingdi. It may be the rest is collected by some unscrupulous businessmen for producing feeds". Industries Minister Dilip Barua, however, thinks otherwise. "These materials are meant to be decomposed but the tanneries sell these materials out for earning extra," he says.

Golam Rabbani, director general of the Department of Environment (DoE), comments that the