

Women handle tannery waste to be used as raw material for fish and poultry feed.



Tannery labourers dry pieces of leather in the open.

DoE has been enforcing appropriate punishment to those who ruin the environment. "Punishments and fines are not the ultimate solution," he says. He refers that the industries ministry has to take care of the situation.

As we get close to Lalbagh, an array of clothes hang on bamboos along the canals catch our attention. A few laundrymen are busy spreading out wet clothes that have been supposedly washed using the jet-black canal water. An irked laundryman says, "We are too poor to relocate and too helpless to find an alternative source of water." These people seem helpless against the polluted resource the environment has to offer for their small business. But it is a clear evidence of how the delay in relocating the tanneries has affected the periphery and contaminated other livelihoods.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A child unknowingly puts tannery waste in her mouth. The photo was taken from Beribadh area in February.

The laundryman continues, "We have been doing this for years, we don't know anything else; we can't switch to something else for a living, nor can we threaten anyone to stop polluting the water. If the government does not take steps in relocating the tanneries, we will soon be out of business."

Green activist MA Matin thinks the government has failed to exert adequate force on the tannery owners for relocating. "Whenever the HC date closes in, the BTA appears to be apathetic. The government, instead of being rigid against the BTA, appeals at the HC to delay the date," he says.

"The government can be stern in implementing the existing laws that may force the owners to move to Savar. An existing law already says that such industries cannot be run without ETPs. So the government can exert pressure on them on this ground," he adds.

It is already a matter of grave concern that pollution in Hazaribagh is beyond limits. The government and the tanners have been blaming each other for the uncertainty about settling the funding for tannery relocation and the construction of the CETP. While the relocation process is caught in a bureaucratic knot, health and safety hazards have multiplied. Meanwhile, the peripheral businesses have largely grown in this area, particularly those depending on tannery wastes. The government should give a second thought about the peripheral businesses and that these must be closed down if we want the area saved from becoming an abandoned wasteland. ■