



Pollution in the water bodies of Sylhet sadar upazila has worsened in recent years, reportedly because of untreated wastewater from the industrial estate of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) in Khadimnagar. The photo was taken recently from Kallagram village in the upazila. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

10 factories in 5 BSCIC estates running without ETPs

They are causing unabated environmental damage

SUKANTA HALDER and DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Seventy-year-old Shamsul Haque remembers how clean the Balutikar canal was when he moved to Kallagram village in Sylhet 20 years ago.

Pollution in the water body has severely worsened in recent years, reportedly because of untreated wastewater from the industrial estate of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) in Khadimnagar.

Among the factories in over 80 BSCIC industrial estates across Bangladesh, 173 discharge liquid waste and 157 of them have set up effluent treatment plants (ETPs), according to BSCIC data.

Seven of these ETPs are closed now while six others are under construction.

It means 10 factories in these industrial estates have not installed any ETPs. These factories are situated in five districts - four in Sylhet, three in Natore, and one each in Mymensingh, Chattogram's Kalurghat and Cumilla's Chauddagram.

The 10 factories mainly belong to the textiles, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, pesticides and yarn industries, according to a source in BSCIC.

The source also stated that a lack of space, shifts in the production sector, financial insolvency, and limited awareness about environmental pollution have all contributed to the absence of ETPs in the factories.

In Sylhet, before the factories without ETPs started polluting Balutikar, the water was so good that people could cook food with it and bathe, recalled retired service holder Shamsul from Kallagram village, which was recently added to the city corporation. "Even people from other villages would come here to fish."

Now the stench of water, which looks like tar, is so bad that it is difficult to even walk alongside it. The bad odour spreads through the villages all the time, and sometimes foam and filthy waste gathers.

The canal has been a source of irrigation for Boro paddy in the three wetlands called Haors under Khadimpara union. But the pollution is damaging the croplands, said locals.

The Balutikar canal is connected to the Surma river via the Kushigang river, which means the wastewater from the factories without ETPs is also affecting the rivers.

Officials at BSCIC industrial estate in Khadimnagar said they have no data regarding pollution and environmental damage caused by the four factories without ETPs.

Sources said the four factories are Akther Rubber and Latex Industry, Auto Clean, The Sylhet Top Clean and Hanifi Auto Board Mill.

Nurun Nabi, director of Akther Rubber and Latex Industry, said they could not install an ETP due to a lack of space.

Eight years ago, they applied for a 1,000-square-foot space adjacent to their factory, but the authorities allotted the plot to another larger industry.

Last year, they applied for another small space adjacent to their factory and that too is yet to be allotted to them, he said.

"We got prepared to install an ETP years ago, but the BSCIC officials are giving preferences to larger industries," Nurun Nabi alleged.

Another factory owner claimed that the wastewater his factory produces is not harmful to the environment, rather the insecticide and fertilisers being used by a tea garden near the BSCIC estate are

responsible for the pollution of the canal.

Even many of the factories with ETPs are allegedly not using the plants regularly, the owner said.

M Suhel Hawlader, the general manager of BSCIC in Sylhet, stated that the corporation has repeatedly urged the factories to install an ETP or comply with the regulations. However, these factories have cited a land shortage as the reason for their non-compliance.

Badrul Huda, assistant director of the Department of Environment (DoE) in Sylhet district, said they were aware of the water pollution of the Balutikar canal.

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Soon, drives will be conducted against organisations that do not have ETP and environmental clearance.

Those who have ETPs should be brought under IP cameras and monitoring should be increased so that they cannot spread polluted waste in the canal, he says.

In Natore, where three factories do not have ETPs, the wastewater from BSCIC estate flows through drains in villages.

The water is so toxic that poultry or livestock die instantly when any falls into the drains, said Rezia Begum, a resident of Doatpara village next to the industrial estate.

"We catch skin diseases and other sort of sicknesses when the wastewater gets

mixed up with floodwater and enters our homes after heavy rains," she added.

Shahina Begum, who lives in Goaldanga, another village in the area, also alleged the toxic water of the drains was causing diseases among the residents.

Mihir Hossain, a resident of Dattapara village, alleged the villagers had been threatened when they had spoken up against the influential businessmen of the BSCIC estate.

"We have stopped protesting since the locals get in danger whenever we raise our voice while the businessmen face no action," he said.

Dilruba Dipti, deputy manager of the BSCIC estate in Natore, said the factories without ETPs have been repeatedly reminded of the issue, but they never paid heed to what the authorities said.

Asked about the allegations made by the villagers that the drains were causing health and environmental damage, she claimed no one complained that the drains caused any harm.

An official at the BSCIC head office said the industries without ETPs are frequently warned against producing environmentally harmful products.

The DoE had been informed and urged to take appropriate legal action against the non-compliant factories, the official added.

GM Robbani Talukdar, deputy general manager for the industrial estate and coordination section of BSCIC, said a lack of space on their plots is hindering the factories from building ETPs.

"These plots were allotted a long ago, and at that time, environmental concerns were not as prominent as now. That's why ETPs were not part of their plans," he explained.

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Economic census facing hurdles in data collection

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) is struggling to complete its economic census for 2024 as most medium to large scale industrial and commercial enterprises are reluctant to provide data on their income and expenditure.

The country's central statistical agency is currently collecting data focusing on eight major areas of the economy, including environmental costs and e-commerce, for the census being carried out between December 10 to 26 this year.

"When we approach any big enterprise like a garment factory, they usually try to avoid sharing data on income and expenditure," said Mohammad Nasim, an enumerator covering Ashulia in Savar.

Md Amirul Islam, zonal head for enumerators in Ashulia, echoed the same and said they are having to visit almost every business several times in order to collect the data.

"They typically refuse to divulge any information without the consent of their higher-ups," he added. For the census, the BBS has identified around 1.22 crore businesses across the country.

Md Mizanur Rahman, deputy project director of the census, said the hesitance among businesses to share financial data stems from their concerns about privacy.

"But we are trying to assure them that the data will remain private," he added.

Rahman explained that census supervisors and coordinators are having to step in and persuade businesses to furnish information when the enumerators fail in this regard.

He also said this is the first time that the BBS is collecting data on the consumption, expenditure and profit of businesses separately.

"As of Sunday, we have collected around 83 percent of the total information," Rahman added.

Bangladesh's first economic census was held in 1986 while the second was carried out between the years 2001 and 2003.

Rahman further said that businesses could be unwilling to share their financial data as they lack awareness about the census.

"But we have already conducted a lot of campaigns through online, broadcast, print and mass media to build peoples' awareness on the survey," he added while urging all to cooperate with the BBS to ensure credible and reliable economic data.

Stocks fall after gaining for 2 days

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The indexes of the stock markets in Bangladesh fell yesterday on rising for two days last week as jittery investors were reluctant to pour fresh funds amid economic uncertainties.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), edged down by 25.16 points, or 0.48 percent from the previous day to end at 5,196 yesterday.

Similarly, the DSES, the index that represents the Shariah-based shares, went down by 5.20 points, or 0.44 percent, to 1,162 while the DS30 index for the blue-chip stocks receded by 3.12 points, or 0.16 percent, to 1,935.

Out of the 393 issues that were traded at the DSE, 66 advanced, 281 closed lower and the remaining 46 did not witness any price movement.

Turnover, which is the cumulative value of the shares traded, stood at Tk 313 crore, a decrease of 6.76 percent compared to that on the previous trading session.

The pharmaceuticals sector dominated the market activities, accounting for 20.42 percent of the day's total turnover.

Food and allied, telecom, and mutual fund were the top three sectors to close in the positive, while services & real estate, ceramics, and textile became the top three to close in the negative.

At Chittagong Stock Exchange, the CASPI, the premier index of the port city bourse, dropped by 54.64 points, or 0.38 percent, to settle at 14,468.

India's steel imports from China hit record high

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's finished steel imports from China reached an all-time high during the first eight months of the fiscal year to March 2025, provisional government data showed, adding to concerns among domestic mills about cheap shipments from China.

Total imports of finished steel were at an eight-year high with India, the world's second-biggest crude steel producer, a net importer during the period.

India shipped in 6.5 million metric tons of finished steel, a 26.6 percent increase year-on-year, the data showed.

China sent 1.96 million metric tons of steel to India during April-November, up 22.8 percent year-on-year, the data showed.

Beijing mainly exported stainless steel, hot-rolled coil, plates, electrical sheets, galvanised plain or corrugated sheets, pipes, bars and rods, among other grades.

Finished steel imports from Japan also reached at least a six-year high during April-November, with imports more than doubling to 1.4 million metric tons, according to the data.

China, Japan and South Korea accounted for 79 percent of India's total finished steel imports during the period.

Hot-rolled coils were the most imported steel product during the period, while bars and rods topped imports in the non-flat product category.

New Delhi has launched a probe to determine whether to impose a safeguard duty - a temporary tax - of up to 25 percent to curb unbridled steel imports.

US consumer spending rises; inflation showing progress

REUTERS, Washington

US consumer spending increased in November amid strong demand for a range of goods and services, underscoring the economy's resilience, which saw the Federal Reserve this week projecting fewer interest rate cuts in 2025 than it had in September.

There was also good news on inflation last month after a series of warmer readings. The report from the Commerce Department on Friday showed moderate monthly rises in prices, with a measure of underlying inflation posting its smallest gain in six months. Nonetheless, the annual increase in core inflation, excluding food and energy, remained stubbornly well above the US central bank's 2 percent target.

There are also worries that plans by President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration to cut taxes, impose or raise tariffs on imports and deport millions of undocumented immigrants would stoke inflation.

"The economy continues to grow from strong consumer demand as income growth and the wealth effect from higher portfolio values give consumers capacity to spend," said Jeffrey Roach, chief economist

at LPL Financial. "Inflation was more benign than expected but the stickiness of some categories supports the Fed's hesitancy to materially lower rates next year."

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic

activity, rose 0.4 percent last month after a downwardly revised 0.3 percent gain in October, the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending advancing

0.5 percent after a previously reported 0.4 percent rise in October.

The nearly broad-based increase in spending was led by new motor vehicles, likely in part as households replaced vehicles damaged during Hurricanes Helene and Milton. That accounted for the bulk of the 0.8 percent rebound in goods outlays.

Spending on recreational goods and vehicles also rose as did outlays on financial services and insurance, mostly charges, fees and commissions. There was also increased spending on recreation services, healthcare, clothing and footwear, furniture as well as housing and utilities.

Spending at restaurants and bars as well as on hotel and motel stays also increased. Spending on services rose 0.2 percent.

When adjusted for inflation, consumer spending rose 0.3 percent after edging up 0.1 percent in October. The so-called real consumer spending is running at an annualized rate of 3.1 percent in the first two months of the fourth quarter.

"That will lay the foundation for another very solid GDP number for the fourth quarter," said Lou Crandall, chief economist at Wrightson ICAP.



A person shops at a Whole Foods Market grocery store in New York City on December 17. US consumer spending rose 0.4 percent last month. PHOTO: AFP

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