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Press Statement

India: Stop Asbestos Factories in Bhojpur, Vaishali, Champaran, Madhubani

BANI Welcomes PUCL's Recommendation Seeking Ban on Construction of Asbestos Factories in Bihar

Sunday 20 February 2011, by [BANI](#) (Date first published: 20 February 2011).

BANI Welcomes PUCL's Recommendation Seeking Ban on Construction of Asbestos Factories in Bihar

Union Budget Must Promote Alternatives of Asbestos & Discourage Trade in Asbestos Fibers

BANI Demands Immediate & Unconditional Release of leaders of Khet Bachao Jeewan Bachao Jan Sangharsh Committee from Jail

New Delhi, 20/2/2011: "Considering the worldwide move for a ban on asbestos it will be unwise and a misplaced idea to promote factories of asbestos in the state of Bihar. It is reported that as many as six plants are coming up in Bihar, the Marwan being in the most advanced stage with largest capacity. Others are proposed in Madhubani, Chapra, Vaishali, W. Champaran and Bhojpur," observes a Report on the Issues relating to setting up of an Asbestos factory at Marwan in Muzaffarpur district released by People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), India's oldest and the largest human rights organization on 20th February, 2011.

It may be noted that the proposed location for asbestos based plant at Chapra has been shifted. Tamil Nadu based Nibhi Industries Pvt. Ltd's proposal for the establishment of 1,00,000 (One Lakh) MT Capacity Asbestos Fiber Cement Corrugated Sheet, Flat Sheet and Accessories and Light Weight Fly Ash Block Plant will now be set up at Industrial Growth Centre, Giddha, Ara. The change of place from Dariapur, Chapra to Industrial Growth Centre, Giddha, Ara has been approved in Bihar State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) meeting on 19th October, 2009. The villagers in the vicinity of the proposed are deeply disturbed.

PUCL rightly recommends "an immediate stoppage of the work at all the places. Bihar can not be made the dumping ground of hazardous production exposing the people here to all kinds of risks, because they are poor." The report and their Press Release is attached.

PUCL report should have underlined the central role of Union Government in the promotion of asbestos trade as well. It should have asked central government too to take immediate steps to phase out existing asbestos products and adopt a policy no future use of asbestos of all kinds including white asbestos (Chrysotile) especially in the context of the upcoming Budget Session of the Parliament.

Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANI)* has written to Bihar government and the Union Environment Ministry to stop the proposed asbestos plants in Bihar. These include:

1) Chennai based Ramco Industries Ltd for establishment of 1,20,000 MT/Annum Capacity of Asbestos Cement Sheet Plant and 2 Lakh MT/Annum Capacity of Cement Grinding Plant at Industrial Area, Bihiya, Bhojpur

2) Chennai based Nibhi Industries Pvt. Ltd for establishment of the One Lakh MT Capacity Asbestos Fiber Cement Corrugated Sheet, Flat Sheet and Accessories and Light Weight Fly Ash Block Plant at Industrial Growth Centre, Giddha, Ara, Bhojpur

3) Andhra Pradesh based Hyderabad Industries Ltd for establishment of 2,50,000 MT per year capacity Asbestos Cement Sheeting Plant in two Phases at Kumarbagh Industrial Area, West Champaran

4) Kolkata based Balmukund Cement & Roofings Ltd for establishment of 1.5 Lakh MT capacity production unit of Asbestos Fiber Cement Sheet (Corrugated/Flat) and Accessories at Chainpur-Bishunpur, Marwan, Muzaffarpur

5) Kolkata based UAL Industries Ltd for Establishment of 2, 33, 000 MT per year capacity Asbestos Cement Sheet and Corrugated Sheets Plant in two phases at Goraul, Vaishali in the name of UAL-Bihar. Earlier it was proposed at Bakhtiyarpur

6) Rajasthan based A Infrastructure Ltd for establishment of 1, 25, 000 MT per year capacity Asbestos Cement (A.C.) Sheet and 1,00,000 MT per year capacity A.C. Pressure Pipe at Pandaul Industrial Area, Madhubani. Earlier it was proposed in Industrial Area, Kumarbagh, Bettiah

Bihar's State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) must be made to adopt a policy of not approving asbestos based industrial projects. SIPB gave approval to Kolkata based M/S Balmukund Cement & Roofings Ltd's proposal for establishment of 1.5 Lakh MT capacity production unit of Asbestos Fiber Cement Sheet (Corrugated/Flat) and Accessories at Chainpur-Bishunpur, Marwan, Muzaffarpur on 21st December, 2009.

All the locations of proposed asbestos plants are also simmering with discontent. The list of these proposals is attached.

The Section 144 of IPC which has been imposed in Chainpur-Bishunpur is likely to be lifted on 23rd February. The situation might become quite volatile after that taking note of the same, BANI demands immediate and unconditional release of Tarkeshwar Giri and Kumud Ram, leaders of Khet Bachao Jeewan Bachao Jan Sangharsh Committee from Jail.

In a paper presented at the World Asbestos Congress in Tokyo, BANI pointed out that Government's own records show that the danger from asbestos was documented in India as early as 1968. In undivided Bihar, P Mazumdar, leader of the United Mine Workers Union had campaigned for the occupational health rights of 30 workers from the Roro mines, Chaibasa, West Singhbhum district died of asbestosis. This issue was raised in the Parliament by Indrajit Gupta, Member of Parliament but no action has been taken against the company in question so far.

Notably, none of the 300 medical colleges in India have the competence of even diagnosing the incurable diseases caused by the killer fibers of asbestos. Meanwhile, Annie Thebaud-Mony, the leader who successfully spearheaded the ban asbestos campaign in France is scheduled to be in India from March onwards. France became the first country in the world to ban asbestos and win the case against Canada.

PUCL report once again vindicates the veracity of BANI's position in the face of the onslaught of misinformation campaign by Chrysotile Asbestos (white asbestos) industry association and

sponsored news reports and advertorials. BANI awaits the Fact Finding report of Asbestos Virodhi Nagrik Manch as well.

BANI appeals to the Union Finance Minister to provide budgetary allocation for promoting substitutes for asbestos, rehabilitation packages and alternative employment for asbestos workers. There are many long-established alternatives to chrysotile asbestos, which do not rely on fibre technology. Several types of non-asbestos fibres developed for use in a wide range of products can also be substituted for asbestos. The main non-asbestos fibres in current use are PVA, aramid and cellulose. A considered scientific view on their safety has recently become available. There is an urgent need to set up a Mesothelioma Register to take stock of asbestos victims. With developed nations banning and phasing out asbestos, developing countries like India have become the dumping ground for asbestos from countries like Russia and Canada.

The Union Ministry of Agriculture had sponsored the Central Building Research Institute's (CBRI) research into alternative vegetable fibres and wastes as reinforcements for fibre-cements. The CBRI has developed roofing tiles and blocks using coir fibre and cement. These can also be used in place of asbestos by developing cement-building materials incorporating by-products of oilseeds, pulses and maize.

While Bihar government can and should ban asbestos based products on health grounds because health is a state subject, the central government must adopt a policy of no future use of asbestos of all kinds and desist from signing trade agreement with asbestos countries like Quebec, Canada.

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* BANI is working as a national alliance for asbestos free India to warn the citizens and governments about the impending epidemic of incurable asbestos related diseases and the consequent public health crisis in the absence of environmental-occupational due to mining, manufacturing, use and trade of asbestos is preventable. Chrysotile Asbestos (white asbestos) is promoted by Russia, Canada, India & other asbestos producing countries.