

Occupational Safety and Health

Rights

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EDITOR AND LAYOUT
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Occupational safety and Health (OSH) Rights is a quarterly newsletter on occupational and safety issues in Asia. It is prepared by the ANROEV Secretariat. The newsletter contains information and news about the campaigns of the network in Asia – Mining, Victims Organising, Lung Diseases, Electronics

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All readers are welcome to share reactions and suggestions to articles of OSH Rights. In the coming issues, we will offer space for reader feedback.

For any questions about Occupational Health and Safety in Asia, send an email to anroev@gmail.com. Our panel of experts will attempt to reply to all questions.

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Feature

SHARPS: Sit-in and Year-end Rally

Since Oct. 7, SHARPS and some cluster victims have been staging a sit-in at Samsung's corporate headquarters in South Seoul. On the evening of Dec. 22, about 200 SHARPS supporters, attired in clean suits to represent each death of the cluster, circled the corporate headquarters, calling on the company to resume negotiations

with SHARPS and cluster victims.



On Nov. 13 evening, SHARPS activists and supporters rallied at Samsung corporate headquarters in south Seoul to call on the company to reinstate the arbitration process with occupational disease victims.

To offer support and know more please visit <https://stopsamsung.wordpress.com/>

Samsung reaches partial agreement with sick workers

Samsung Electronics reached a partial agreement on workplace safety with sickened workers and their families, nearly a decade after the death of a 22-year-old chip worker from leukemia galvanised concern about conditions in South Korea's semiconductor industry.

The South Korean company and Banolim, which is the main advocacy group for sick workers, along with another group representing workers signed an agreement Tuesday to establish an external committee that will have oversight of safety at Samsung.

Its mandate includes measures such as ensuring Samsung preserves information related to workers' health and conducting spot checks of chemicals used in its manufacturing. If any hazardous substances are detected during random checks, the company's health management team will order their use stopped, according to the agreement.

Samsung also agreed to give workers access to information related to their health and safety when they apply for government insurance covering occupational diseases. Workers and their lawyers have complained that Samsung denied access to key information on health and safety, citing confidentiality.

Baek Suhyeon, Samsung's top negotiator, said the agreement was "meaningful." Hwang Sang-gi, the founder of Banolim, said the measures were "significantly inadequate" but the group concluded the talks on preventive measures because negotiations had become too time-consuming. The group vowed to continue its protests and urged Samsung to resume talks on compensation.

The external committee will examine workplace conditions that affect workers' health and safety at Samsung, such as management of chemicals. The committee can also make recommendations to Samsung on its disclosure of chemical hazards and the company's standards on trade secrets. Workers have complained that trade secrets meant they

were denied information about chemicals that may have affected their health.

Paek Domyung, a professor of occupational medicine at Seoul National University who was part of the three member panel that mediated between Samsung and workers, said the agreement laid out a system to put Samsung under external oversight. But the company's capacity to prevent illnesses and improve safety depends on the commitment of its top executives, he said.

The agreement, which is not legally binding, is the first of its kind between Samsung and Banolim since the death of 22-year-old chip worker Hwang Yu-mi from leukemia in 2007 ignited public debate about safety at Samsung factories and South Korea's semiconductor industry in general. [Read more](#)

Updates from Partners

Cividep India

Cividep India has been involved with electronic sector workers in the area in and around Nokia SEZ since 2009, and has been working in the field of labour education, legal awareness and workers' issues.

Cividep India conducted a training program on OHS for electronic sector workers from Salcomp, Sanmina, Dell and Samsung on November 1st 2015. The program included a hazard mapping exercise and a training on occupational safety and health by a medical professional (Dr. Sankar, Meenakshi Medical College, Kanchipuram). Several important issues such as safety procedures, ergonomics, use of PPEs, and common occupational diseases were discussed.

Prior to the training a preparatory exercise was also conducted to identify the most common problems reported by workers in relation to occupational health and safety. The workers were provided with an OHS manual prepared by AMRC (Asia Monitor Resource Centre) during the preparatory exercise.

The training was followed up with a medical check-up on December 1st, 2015, with two doctors: Dr Prasan Norman (ENT) and Dr Mohankumar (Eye

specialist), and three technicians who conducted the optometry and the audiometry tests.

Results of the medical camp (out of 34 workers who participated): One Flextronics worker was diagnosed with a deviated septum. A female worker had swelling in her ear due to post-operative modified radical mastoidectomy. Seven workers were diagnosed with eye related refractive problems. One male worker was diagnosed with anaemia.



CEPHED, Nepal

Nepal is the first country in the South Asia to ban the Import, Sale, distribution and Uses all form of Asbestos (Corrugated / Non-corrugated Sheet, Tiles, Insulators etc.) and Asbestos containing products except asbestos lining of Brake Shoe and Clutch Plates on last December 22 , 2014. The decision took effect since 20 June 2015. Since then there was virtually stopped the import but the remaining stocks from the previous import has been found to be marketed and still used in Nepal.

Due to major devastating earthquakes in Nepal in April 26 and May 12, 2015, the government focus on relief measures as well as reconstruction of the Nepal and hence not able to give prime focus on the effective monitoring of the import, sale, distribution and uses of asbestos in Nepal.

However, the Post Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA 2015) and later initiatives of Building Back Better initiative of Government of Nepal and many developing agencies have taken good initiative to ensure earthquake resilience and chemically safe reconstruction of Nepal avoiding all possible hazardous chemicals such as Asbestos, Lead, Mercury and even hazardous waste. CEPHED played an important role towards highlighting all these issues in post disaster construction and development work.

An Asbestos entrepreneur named Mr. Ammit Kumar Gupta of Rautahat District of Nepal (South flat land called Terai) has filled a court case in the Supreme Court of Nepal to void this government decision of banning import, sale, distribute and uses of the Asbestos against Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (OPMCM), Government of Nepal, Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE). He runs the entrepreneur on Asbestos Cement, Sheets and other construction materials. During the initial hearing in the court, we from CEPHED behalf and on my personal behalf intervened in the court and able to stop issuing the priority and any decision on the case. We have increased our engagement in the court cases and providing the technical backstopping to the case in favor of government decision and became allies with the case. Also providing technical and scientific feedback to a group of environmental lawyers to fight against the entrepreneur claims and support the government decision.

While increasing the engagement in the court case in one hand whereas increasingly engaging in research, awareness and monitoring in other hand by implementing a project entitled "Research and Awareness Raising about Asbestos in Terai Region of Nepal" with the support of The Takagi Fund for Citizen Science and Asia Asbestos Ban Network.

CEPHED would like to highly acknowledge the support of the Takagi Fund for Citizen Science and ABAN. We also like to acknowledge Tokyo Occupational Safety and Health Center, Tokyo, Japan who have agreed to test our asbestos sample.

CEPHED has planned to execute following activities in Nepal during this 2016 year.

- Market Monitoring and Information Collection (Visit to market, districts, Villages and Custom Offices)
- Hot spot Study & Questionnaire survey (Enlisting spots, Victim identification and Mapping)
- Sample Collection and Testing of Asbestos for its type and content
- National Asbestos Profile development and publication
- Organization of Dissemination of National Asbestos Profile
- Public Awareness (Electronic & Print mass media news articles, social media).
- Prepare production and broadcasting of the radio jingle to popularize the government decision of Asbestos banning and its health as well as environmental implications etc.

We have also displayed and disseminated the government decision about the Asbestos Banning and Lead Paint Standard enactment during the "Exhibition of Design Competition on Rural Housing", December 30, 2015 to January 2, 2016 organized by Nepal Engineering Association in association with the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of Nepal and UNDP in Kathmandu.

We aimed effective implementation of the government decision with increased awareness and capacity of the people about the Asbestos and its health & environmental implications in Nepal.

IOHSAD, Philippines

The Institute for Occupational Health and Safety for Development (IOHSAD) launched **Women WORKSHOPS** (Women to **Work** for **Safety**, **Health**, **Organization** and **Policies**) last October 22, 2015 at

the Asian Social Institute in Manila. Women WORKSHOPS is a series of discussions among women workers, medical professionals, policy makers, labor and occupational health and safety (OHS) advocates aimed to identify, investigate and analyze current issues on women's right to safe and healthy workplaces. This series of discussions also aims to empower women to confront, resolve health and safety issues at work and improve their working conditions.

During its first meeting, Women WORKSHOPS focused on the reproductive health issues faced by women workers in the electronics sector. Women committee leaders from NXP Semiconductors Workers' Union and SMT Workers' Union shared the working conditions and hazards in their respective workplaces.

Dra. Sylvia dela Paz, an obstetrician-gynecologist, women's rights and health advocate joined the discussion and shared valuable insights and points on how workers can address the various reproductive health issues in the workplace. She stressed the need for further documentation of the identified cases of miscarriages and infertility among women workers. She also recommended an in-depth study of the chemicals used in the workplace and to seek help from experts to determine its effects on workers.

Rep. Emmi de Jesus of Gabriela Women's Partylist (GWP) shared the recent developments on Worker's SHIELD (Safety and Health Inspection and Employers' Liability Decree), the proposed bill filed by GWP to criminalize occupational health and safety standards violations and push for the government's mandatory inspection of workplaces. She gladly reported the approval of a consolidated bill, which included the major provisions of Worker's SHIELD by the Committee on Labor and Employment of the House of Representatives last August. She urged the workers to continue their lobbying efforts in Congress and organize more activities to pressure legislators to mark this proposed bill as top priority in the next plenary sessions.

Last November 17, IOHSAD together with the Justice for Kentex Workers Alliance and Kilusang

Mayo Uno – Women set up a photo exhibit at the International Festival for People's Rights and Struggles (IFPRS) held in Bahay ng Alumni, University of the Philippines, Quezon City. The exhibit featured the Kentex workers' struggle for justice and safe workplaces. IOHSAD's festival booth encouraged the delegates from different countries to express their support to the Kentex workers' campaign by writing solidarity messages which were displayed along with the photos at the exhibit.



International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS)

During the last quarter of 2015, IBAS worked closely with colleagues in Asia and around the world to expose the latest manoeuvres by asbestos profiteers to disseminate discredited propaganda in order to expand asbestos sales in Asia. Research undertaken in November into the bona fides of Dr. John Hoskins (UK), a scheduled speaker at a November 18th asbestos industry seminar in Hanoi, proved useful to colleagues from VN-BAN.¹ On December 8, 2015, an Open Letter to the Global

¹ Kazan-Allen L. Vietnam Asbestos Offensive. November 25, 2015. [Read More](#)

Asbestos Industry was uploaded; this document, which was supported by asbestos victims' groups, non-governmental organisations, trade unions and independent agencies in Asia, Australia and Europe, warned asbestos pushers that "If you profit from the sale of asbestos, you will be held liable for the diseases you have caused and the damage you have done..."² The following week, a public health alert was issued by asbestos victims' groups and environmental campaigners from China, Brazil, Russia and the UK which considered the importance of a new text documenting the elevated asbestos disease risk to the public and provided links to translations of this key text into Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese and English. These initiatives are evidence of the effectiveness and determination of ban asbestos campaigners to address the multi-faceted asbestos challenge at every level and in every area. The struggle continues!

OSHE, Bangladesh

MEDIA RELEASE - 951 Workers Lost Lives on Various Occupational Accidents in 2015- In 2015 a total of 951 workers lost lives in workplace both in formal and informal sector, among them 276 in formal sector and 675 in informal sector, while 907 workers were critically injured.

Highest number of accidents occurred in RMG, construction sector, ship breaking and cement manufacturing industry according to a survey conducted by Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE).

The survey report was disclosed in a press briefing titled State of Workplace Safety in Bangladesh in Dhaka Reporters Unity on Friday. Dr. S M Morshed, Vice Chairperson of OSHE Foundation presented the survey findings. OSHE Program Officer Taherul Islam and Arifa S Alom were also present on the occasion.

Due to various road accidents, 347 transport workers lost lives and 155 received serious injury. 47 domestic workers were killed and 68 agriculture

² Open Letter to Global Asbestos Industry. December 8, 2015 [Read More](#)

workers lost lives due to lighting /thunderstorm, the report added.

The report recommended for well enforcement of labor laws and ensure quality transparent and regular labour inspection at the workplaces level, speeding-up collaborative effort on establishment of OSH Committees at various factory/enterprise level, facilitate capacity building training for workers and employers on well dealing of health and safety issues at workplaces level and extensive awareness rising actions on OSH rights issues and promotion of safety culture nationally etc.

For more information: Pl. contact with Repon Chowdhury, OSHE <oshe@agni.com>

PTRC

On January 5, Gujarat Government officials distributed relief amount to 37 bereaved families of agate workers who lost their lives in Silicosis. Earlier, on June 5, 2015, 20 families were paid the amount. Around 100 have applied for the relief. Jayesh Dave represented PTRC on the occasion



A seminar on Environment and Cancer was organized in Vadodara in which over 250 people from various fields participated.

Training for the women from marginalized class was organized in Khambat

ABAN

2015 winner of Rachel LEE Jung-Lim Award

The winners of 2015 Rachel LEE Jung-Lim Award are the 3 key players of Kubota Shock, a historic asbestos issue in Japan - Furukawa Kazuko, Kataoka Akihiko, Iida Hiroshi.

A ceremony for this was held on Dec 21, Monday at 6pm in Seoul. Ms Furukawa was invited from Japan.

In 2005, Ms. and Mrs. Furukawa, Kataoka and Iida together had a decisive role of finding cases of local residents with mesothelioma and indicating, as the cause of asbestos cancer, the Kubota company in downtown Amagasaki city, Hyogo Prefecture. Their activities led to establishment of a good model of civil group initiated victim registration process by persuading the company to acknowledge its responsibility for the environmental victims. Kubota Shock, as mass media had named their activities, brought a momentum for Japanese government to bring the national ban of asbestos earlier and introduce the relief system for the asbestos victims. Over the last 10 years, being a victim's family, an occupational health activist, and former council member, respectively, they have devoted themselves for the ban asbestos campaigns both domestically and internationally, as well as for the struggle of victim's right. On this 10 year anniversary of Kubota Shock, we do hope their dream of asbestos-free and victim's right come true as Rachel LEE Jung-Lim wished too.

Rachel LEE JUNG-LIM Award- Appreciation plaque

- Furukawa Kazuko (古川和子)
- Kataoka Akihiko (片岡明彦)
- Iida Hiroshi (飯田浩)



Map of plants and offices with ARDs in Japan

In Japan the ministry of labour has disclosed information on all business establishments (plants and offices) where workers' asbestos diseases had been recognized as occupational diseases annually since 2005.

The numbers of such business establishments at the end of fiscal year 2013:

- other than construction industry - 3,367
- construction industry (information on construction companies not about construction sites) - 4,668
- total - 9,035

The Japanese Ministry of Labour published information on asbestos-related diseases recognized as occupational diseases by the workers compensation insurance in fiscal year 2014. Total number of ARDs was 1,100 out of which mesothelioma numbers was 535, asbestos-related lung cancer numbers were 404 and other was 161³

MOL also disclosed information on business establishments (plants and offices) where workers' ARDs were recognized as occupational diseases during same period.

- Total number of such was 939 (newly 710);
- other than construction 404 (newly 229)
- Construction (construction companies not construction sites) 535 (newly 481). Cumulative

³ <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/houdou/0000106872.html>

number of such business establishments became 10,510⁴

Database compiled by BANJAN and JOSHRHC can be viewed by [Clicking Here](#)

A map showing all the locations on Google map can be viewed [here](#)



Campaigns and Support

Union Joint statement to support beer promotion women struggle

On January 19, 2016, 18 independent unions and NGOs issues their interesting and support to the struggle of beer promotion women who are go on strike since January 16 until now. Since 16 January, 23 of promotion women of Angkor Beer, which own by Cambrew Limited Company one of the biggest brewery in Cambodia, to demand for maintain their working hours as recently just change their working to until late at night what they understand that it is not safe for their way back home. They also demand company to stop using short term contract as it serious violate to basic right of the workers.

The unions group and NGO call to company to stop all kind of labour right abuse, provide safe working hours for all beer promotion women, and condemn for all any of attempt to use short term contract to deprive workers right.

For more detail please click link for for Union Join statement. [Read More](#)

⁴ <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/houdou/0000106859.html>

Upcoming Events

- Sub Regional Meeting in South Asia on OSH being organized by AMRC in April 2016. Venue Dhaka
- Rana Plaza third Anniversary meeting by the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fire Victims network organized by OSHE in April
- Training for Ship Building workers on OSH in India by AMRC
- Training of Trainers for electronics workers in Malaysia by AMRC in March 2016

Tributes

Lee Ji-hye, aged 29, died on December 27, 2015, after three years of suffering from lung cancer. Her death is the sixth this year and the 76th of the Samsung cluster tracked by SHARPS. In Dec. 2003, two months before her high school graduation, Ms. Lee began to work at a Samsung liquid crystal



display lab, where she ran quality tests on LCDs and edged displays to size for seven years and six months, until May 2011.

During the 90 months, she frequently worked the night shift. Ms. Lee's job involved industrial-grade acetone and isopropyl alcohol. She used chemicals unknown to her when cleaning and maintaining her equipment and the shop floor. She was routinely exposed to chemical fumes when power outages or equipment repairs and replacements disabled the ventilation system. A lifelong non-smoker, Ms. Lee was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2013.

Deaths due to Silicosis in Khambhat

In 2015 20 workers have lost their lives due to Silicosis in Khambhat, India



Naresh M Rathod (42)



Rafik Husen Malek (43)

Articles of Interest

How the world's biggest asbestos factory tried to stop campaigners exposing the killer dust's dangers

Executives at the world's biggest asbestos factory spied on journalists and environmental campaigners who exposed the killer dust's dangers and then launched a covert campaign to accuse them of being communists, it can be revealed.

Secret industry documents seen by The Independent reveal that the executives at Rochdale-based asbestos giant Turner and Newall monitored people they considered to be "subversive" and kept a dossier on their activities at the height of the debate about the mineral's safety in the 1980s.

They also enlisted the help of disgraced Rochdale MP Cyril Smith in a clandestine but ultimately unsuccessful bid to discredit the makers of an

award-winning documentary that told how asbestos workers were dying from cancer.

Leading campaigners are now calling for a full-scale inquiry into what they describe as "decades" of espionage against campaign groups in the UK.

The revelations also raise further concerns about Smith's links to the asbestos industry after it emerged some years ago that executives at Turner and Newall wrote the speech he made about asbestos safety in Parliament.

Craig Bennett, the chief executive of Friends of the Earth, which it has emerged was listed in the Turner and Newall files, said the latest revelations are "shocking".

Asbestos: The slow clean-up

- **1898** Factory inspectors express concern about the "evil effects" of asbestos dust.
- **1911** The first cases of asbestos deaths in factories are confirmed and recommendations made for improved ventilation.
- **1924** The death of a textile worker in Rochdale is the first published case of asbestosis. The firm pays no compensation to the bereaved family.
- **1931** Asbestos industry regulations introduced. Home Office survey finds widespread asbestos disease in the UK.
- **1967** The asbestos register is established. Safety limits are proposed the following year.
- **1972** The first personal injury claim succeeds.
- **1983** Asbestos licensing regulations are introduced.
- **1985** Regulations introduce a ban on crocidolite (blue) asbestos and amosite (brown) asbestos.
- **1987** Control of asbestos at work regulations introduced to protect workers from fibre exposure.
- **1992** Laws are amended to ban rarer forms of amphibole asbestos. Later followed by a ban on chrysotile asbestos.
- **1995** A report shows that asbestos deaths are increasing at an alarming rate. A quarter are away from asbestos manufacturing industries.

- **1996** A report claims asbestos protection is vastly inferior to the claims stated by its manufacturers.
- **1999** Asbestos regulations introduce a final, comprehensive ban on asbestos.
- **2002** New regulations mean businesses have to start identifying and managing asbestos in their properties.
- **2006** Previous regulations are brought together in the new Control of Asbestos Regulations.

“It is clear that as long as people have campaigned for a better world, corrupt sections of the elite have tried to undermine their activities and misrepresent their arguments. It is very clear now that there has been spying on organisations such as Friends of the Earth over many decades by government and commercial forces,” he said.

“It is shocking that business leaders who realised they were losing the argument on a vital issue like as asbestos resorted to these methods. There needs to be an inquiry into how public authorities and companies spent money investigating peaceful organisations campaigning for the public good in a democracy.”

A letter dated 11 January 1983 in the Turner and Newall archives reveals that executives had sent a staff member to an asbestos campaign meeting posing as a member of the public, who then sent back a three-page report detailing everything that was said.

The executives also revealed they had ordered a “very confidential report” to be made on researchers involved in a Yorkshire TV documentary, *Alice: A Fight for Life*, which told the story of 47-year-old former asbestos worker Alice Jefferson, who was dying from malignant pleural mesothelioma. The film, directed by award-winning film maker John Willis, explicitly linked asbestos to cancer and attacked the Government’s perceived complacency in limiting the manufacture of asbestos in Britain.

At the time of the film, asbestos as a health hazard was not widely known to the public, and mesothelioma, the cancer caused by asbestos, was even less well known. The Government and leading

doctors told people that asbestos was a vital industry and that its manufacture was safe. [Read More](#)

Asbestos roofing prohibited as of 2024 in Netherlands

As of 2024, asbestos roofing will be prohibited in the Netherlands. This means owners of buildings that have asbestos roofing are required to have it removed prior to that date. Owners are responsible to do so themselves. To this end a subsidy scheme will open on 4 January 2016.

The ban on asbestos roofing is restricted to sheeting that is in direct contact with open air, such as corrugated roof sheeting or roof slate. This material was used in agricultural buildings predominantly. [Read More](#)

High-Tech Manufacturing’s Disposable Workers

The global electronics industry boasts of technical perfection and seamless production. But look closer and you can spot assembly lines tangled with rotten nerve endings and veins swollen with toxins. Workers of the high-tech economy face hazards that echo the lethal smokestacks of Dickensian England.

This time, however, it’s not Manchester where workers are ailing, but the semiconductor capitals of the world in East Asia. South Korea, which together with China leads the world in production of brand-name electronics, has been slowly awakening to the public health fallout of workplace poisoning. Two of South Korea’s major semiconductor producers, SK Hynix and Samsung, are coming under heavy pressure to investigate and pay for an epidemic of occupational illness that many trace back to their production lines.

A 2014 analysis by Hankoryeah newspaper found that “at least 13 people who worked at SK Hynix between 1995 and 2010 died of lympho-hematopoietic malignancies (five from leukemia and five from non-Hodgkin lymphomas), while at least 11 people working at the semiconductor

division at Samsung Electronics during the same period died of the same diseases.”

At both SK Hynix and Samsung, over a 15-year period, “around 80 people altogether fell ill with lympho-hematopoietic diseases. Non-Hodgkin lymphoma rates were particularly elevated among women.

Though proving a direct causal link to either of the firms is difficult, SK Hynix is now moving forward with a precautionary approach by implementing an independent investigation committee’s recommendations for long-term compensation. Advocates hope the measures will lead to strengthened chemical safeguards across the manufacturing process.

Meanwhile, the South Korea-based No More Deaths campaign has for years sought to hold Samsung accountable for a spate of cancers, which the group says has resulted in more than 70 worker deaths. Although the company recently relented to years of pressure from victims’ advocates by allowing workers to apply for compensation from a special \$85.8 million fund, survivors have rejected the plan, arguing that it has stonewalled victims, and that even the latest promises of compensation and reform are whitewashed and lacking transparency. They also object to the restrictions Samsung sought to place on the fund, such as rules limiting the number of diseases covered or requiring several years of employment with the company. [Read More](#)

China’s Notorious E-Waste Village Disappears Almost Overnight

Dec. 16 — Just days after the Dec. 1 order for all 3,000 remaining unregulated electronic-waste workshops to move to a newly built industrial park or face power cuts, the smell of burning plastic from the few waste fires smoldering on the roadside still hangs heavy in the air around Guiyu.

Yet the visual reminders of the notorious village are largely absent.

Gone are the trucks loaded beyond capacity with old cathode-ray tube television sets, boulder-size burlap bags overflowing with printed circuit boards,

acid smoke wafting from improvised aluminum chimneys jutting out of the first-floor workshops where the world’s electronic waste was cooked over a chemical broth in metal woks by thousands of migrant workers.

Guiyu, the village in eastern Guangdong province known infamously for over a decade as the “e-waste capital of the world,” is now a ghost town.

‘The Place Is Dead.’

On Dec. 8, Bloomberg BNA visited Guiyu with Jim Puckett, executive director of the Basel Action Network, a Seattle-based group pushing for better regulation and recycling of e-waste, in part to keep it from ending up in places like Guiyu where it is dismantled in ways that expose often underpaid workers to toxic fumes and materials. Puckett was making his seventh visit to the village.

Also on the trip was Lai Yun, a campaigner for Greenpeace based out of Hong Kong.

“It is amazing how much of this has moved,” Puckett said during the drive around Guiyu, as the total transformation of the town began to sink in. “The place is dead. Boarded up.”

What at its height was a bustling yet heavily polluted town with 5,000 or more informal e-waste workshops and dismantling facilities, has been cleared out as part of China’s “war on pollution” and move toward better regulating electronic waste as it becomes more of a domestic, rather than imported, problem. [Read More](#)

Collective bargaining and labour relations

Collective bargaining is a fundamental right. It is rooted in the ILO Constitution and reaffirmed as such in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Collective bargaining is a key means through which employers and their organizations and trade unions can establish fair wages and working conditions. It also provides the basis for sound labour relations. Typical issues on the bargaining agenda include wages, working time, training, occupational health and safety and equal treatment. The objective of these negotiations is to arrive at a collective agreement

that regulates terms and conditions of employment. Collective agreements may also address the rights and responsibilities of the parties thus ensuring harmonious and productive industries and workplaces. Enhancing the inclusiveness of collective bargaining and collective agreements is a key means for reducing inequality and extending labour protection.

The ILO has recently published a new policy guide and four factsheets on collective bargaining. The factsheets in particular are potentially very useful teaching materials, using plain language to introduce collective bargaining from a comparative perspective.

All of these materials plus many other useful resources are available to download from the ILO's collective bargaining and labour relations portal: [Read More](#)

Samarco mine tragedy: Toxic mud from Brazil mine spill reaches Atlantic Ocean

A torrent of toxic mud from a deadly mine spill in south-west Brazil that buried a village and contaminated a river basin has reached the Atlantic Ocean.

The waste has travelled at least 500 kilometres since the dam burst more than two weeks ago, killing at least 12 people and leaving 280,000 without water.

"Our objective is to reduce the environmental damage, to mitigate as much as we can," said Luciano Cabral, a municipal biologist working in the area.



PHOTO: The Doce River was flooded with mud after a dam owned by Vale SA and BHP Billiton burst. (Reuters: Ricardo Moraes)

"We're united with the same objective to minimise the inevitable impact."

The disaster struck when a dam collapsed at the waste reservoirs of an iron ore mine owned by Samarco, a joint venture between the mining giants BHP Billiton of Australia and Brazil's Vale.

A torrent of yellowish muck burst from the tailings pond, mostly destroying the nearby village of Bento Rodrigues and contaminating the water supply to more than 200 towns. Twelve people are still missing.

The mine consortium has laid nine kilometres of floating barriers to try to protect plants and animals from the mud, which is full of heavy metals. [Read More](#)

Brazil toxic mudslide devastates local water supply – in pictures

Iron ore residue from the collapse of a mining dam, part-owned by BHP Billiton, has been passing down the Rio Doce in south-east Brazil. Pollutants have killed aquatic life and left residents of the towns of Resplendor and Baixo Guandu without clean water. [Read More](#)

Apple and Samsung suppliers linked to child labor in Africa, report says

Cobalt mined by child laborers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo may be entering the supply chains of major tech companies like Apple, Samsung, and Microsoft, as well as auto manufacturers like Volkswagen and Daimler AG, according to an investigation from Amnesty International and Afreewatch, a DRC-based non-government organization.

The report, released today, lays out how cobalt mined by children as young as seven is sold to a DRC-based subsidiary of Huayou Cobalt, a Chinese company. The subsidiary, Congo Dongfang Mining International (CDM), processes cobalt ore and sells it to companies in China and South Korea, where it is used to manufacture lithium-ion batteries for use

in smartphones and electric cars. Amnesty contacted 16 multinational companies listed as customers of the battery makers, based on investor documents and public records. Most said they were unaware of any links to the companies cited in the report, while others, like Apple and Microsoft, said they were evaluating their supply chains. Amnesty says that none of the companies provided enough information to independently verify the origin of their cobalt supply.

The investigation is based on interviews with 87 people who work or have worked in informal, artisanal cobalt mines in the DRC, including 17 children between the ages of 9 and 17. Amnesty and Afreewatch obtained photographic and video evidence of the hazardous conditions in which many of the miners work, often without basic protective gear or safety guidelines. The children interviewed for the report said they work up to 12 hours a day to earn between \$1 and \$2, and typically work above ground, gathering and washing rocks from defunct industrial sites or nearby lakes and rivers.

They carry heavy loads, face physical abuse, and are regularly exposed to dangerous chemicals and dust, the report says, risking long-term lung disease and in some cases, death. Prolonged exposure to cobalt dust has been linked to "hard metal lung disease," which is potentially fatal, and many artisanal mines are poorly constructed and ventilated. At least 80 artisanal miners died in the DRC between September 2014 and December 2015, according to information gathered from a UN-operated radio station, though the report notes that the true figure is likely much higher since many accidents are not reported. [Read More](#)

Deaths, Injuries and Enormous Environmental Damage in Bangladesh's Ship breaking Yards

For 40 years, shipbreaking has been done on the beaches on the Bay of Bengal. It is one of the most dangerous jobs and also one of the dirtiest. Bangladesh desperately needs steel for construction, since the country has no domestic source of iron. Everything on the ship is recycled.

The 12,500 workers who break up giant ships using blowtorches are Bangladesh's steelworkers. But they still have no rights, no safety gear, job security or proper wages.

Forty years later, Bangladesh's shipbreaking workers still have nothing, working 12-hour shifts, seven days a week with no overtime pay. The workers still live in miserable hovels, 3 or 4 workers sharing each tiny room. It is time for a change!

Shital Enterprise workers, like the rest of the shipbreakers, do not receive adequate protective equipment—no steel-toe boots, protective masks, goggles or welding vests to protect them from being burned. [Read More](#)

Work-life balance: flexible working can make you ill, experts say

Flexible working practices can do more harm than good to workers because they encourage an "always on" culture that can have a heavy psychological toll, experts have warned.

Working away from the office or part-time can isolate employees from social networks and career opportunities while fostering a "grazing" instinct that keeps dangerous stress hormones at persistently high levels, they said.

Flexible working policies can also raise the risk of poor working conditions, and create resentment among colleagues, while the blurring of lines between work and home life is stressful for some people.

The findings are a blow to advocates of more sophisticated measures for enabling people to achieve a work-life balance in rich economies that tend to overwork some people while underutilising millions of others.

With an estimated 10m working days lost to work-related stress in the UK last year, finding a good balance between the demands of home and the job now dominates concerns about the impact of work on health.

Companies and the government have responded by encouraging teleworking and working from home, flexible hours, part-time contracts, unpaid time off

to look after children, and more recently experiments in shutting down emails out of working hours or shortening the working day. In 2013, two thirds of companies reported plans to increase spending on health and wellbeing policies.

But there is growing concern about the risks of such policies, said Prof Gail Kinman, an occupational health psychologist from the University of Bedfordshire and the British Psychological Association.

A particular problem is people “grazing” through work by refreshing emails and taking calls outside office hours: recent research found every time somebody performed a work task stress levels went back up.

“If you keep picking at work, worrying about it, your systems never really go down to baseline so you don’t recover properly,” said Kinman. “You might sleep, but you don’t sleep properly, the effectiveness of your immune system reduces.

“There are [also] studies that suggest people want a quick way to relax, which is when they tend to drink alcohol and might turn to comfort food.” Time for personal hobbies, exercise and healthy cooking and eating are squeezed out by work, too.

[Read More](#)

Silicosis case: SA mine workers playing in uneven field

Gold miners in South Africa are among the worst affected in the world by silicosis and other occupational lung diseases.

Recently, former mine workers have come out in numbers seeking damages from about 32 mining companies for the silicosis and TB they have contracted, allegedly as a result of company negligence.

The complicated compensation system and the divergent benefits for industrial or construction workers versus mine workers has made matters worse, placing pressure on gold mining companies and to some extent the South African government.

“Previously, once the older men left the mines, they were out of sight, unemployed, and not

well...you would find them in the villages. Now, they are coming forward,” says Dr Rodney Ehrlich, an occupational health expert from the University of Cape Town.

Silicosis is the primary occupational disease as a result of grinding rock, blasting and drilling. According to goldminersilicosis.co.za, the effects of the disease are severe and ultimately fatal. The symptoms, which are sometimes misdiagnosed as TB, include pulmonary edema (fluid in the lungs) or pneumonia, chest pain, a persistent dry cough, cyanosis (bluish skin) and difficulty breathing, to name a few.

Dr Elrich says that diagnosed patients are more likely to develop TB and are more prone to suffer from respiratory failure, lung infections and progressive massive fibrosis (severe scarring and stiffening of the lung).

The Occupational Diseases in Mines and Works Act entitles workers with occupational diseases to receive compensation from the state. The Medical Bureau for Occupational Diseases (MBOD), together with the Compensation Commissioner for Occupational Diseases (CCOD), works with Department of Health (DOH) to provide services for current and ex-mine workers.

The CCOD’s key objective is to compensate workers for occupational lung diseases. But the system doesn’t seem to apply to everyone. There is a wide range of statutes involved in providing benefits and the technical and complicated methods for calculating such benefits leave workers confused and often distrusting in the benefits they receive.

[Read More](#)

‘Black lung’ disease returns to Queensland mines

The potentially deadly black lung disease has re-emerged in Australian coalmines for the first time in more than three decades.

Queensland Mines Minister Anthony Lynham confirmed in parliament on Tuesday that three cases of pneumoconiosis - or black lung - had been reported by the state's coal industry.

The disease, caused by long-term exposure to fine airborne coal dust in areas with poor ventilation, was thought to have been wiped out in Australia.

Since 1947, X-rays and lung tests have been used to detect early signs of pneumoconiosis.

Dr Lynham said the Monash University Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health will now review current medical assessment methodologies.

Mining union CFMEU Queensland district president Stephen Smyth was incensed by the disease's return, criticising mining companies for allowing health standards to deteriorate.

Mr Smyth warned the three cases could be the tip of the iceberg and feared the regulatory system set up to monitor and detect health issues for miners had been compromised. [Read More](#)

Village on sale as sand mafia leaves residents sleepless, breathless

Residents of a tiny village on the outskirts of Mumbai have put it up for sale after being kept awake every night by the noises of sand mafia chipping away at a nearby hill.

Controlled explosions are triggered on the hill and illegal diggers spend entire nights breaking rocks and carting away sand — activities that send huge amounts of dust towards Chirapada village, about 6 km from Bhiwandi.

Every second person in the hamlet of 200 has developed respiratory infections and many are now complaining of rashes, but government and local-body officials have done little to stop the sand mafia despite repeated complaints. Locals say selling their land and moving out is the only option left. A hand-written sign inviting buyers for the entire village has been stuck on a tree on a road leading to Chirapada. "There's so much dust here that we have forgotten what fresh air is. Many people are suffering from lung problems and have rashes. We cannot afford to make frequent hospital trips," said resident Prashant Dandekar.

"We have been living in terrible conditions for the past few years, but it's now time to leave as officials just won't listen to us. We are a poor

community so no one cares if we live or die." The sand mafia, which thrives because of the demand from certain builders, has already reduced one hill behind the village to a mound. The illegal diggers left many ditches uncovered, creating a hazard for children who play nearby. "We can hardly sleep at night because there is constant noise of stone-crushing machines and there are often small explosions on the hill, which cause the ground to shake. We fear that our houses will collapse one day," said another resident Rahul Dhamne. "Just spend a night in Chirapada and you will realise how bad it is."

Before the residents decided to put up the village for sale, they staged an unusual protest: every day, a person would visit the office of the Thane Municipal Corporation with a complaint letter. "We have approached municipal officials so many times, but nothing has been done," Dhamne said.

Some residents claimed that blast waves had caused cracks in their homes. Phoolavanti, 67, said that she and her son briefly moved out of their house after "tremors" caused by the blasts led to two wall collapses. "We had to rebuild the wall twice, but new cracks have appeared. We can't sleep now because we fear that the walls will crumble and the roof will collapse," she said. [Read More](#)

Over 1,000 coal mines in China to be shut down

China will shut down more than 1,000 coal mines in Guizhou, Yunnan, Heilongjiang and Jiangxi provinces as parts of efforts to trim production capacity, a top work safety watchdog said on Friday.

Huang Yuzhi, deputy director of State Administration of Work Safety, the country's top safety regulator, said that China reached its target by controlling the total number of coal mines within 10,000m and will continue its efforts to reduce outdated capacity this year.

"More than 1,300 coal mines were closed last year, and small coal mines with a scale of annual production of less than 300,000 tons that had

major accidents will be gradually closed this year, as well as those mines that are operating illegally," Huang said.

The total number of coal mines in China stands at 9,624.

China, the world's largest energy consumer, plans to stop approving new coal mines for the next three years. [Read More](#)

Return to work with musculo skeletal disorders: a multi-disciplinary approach

An award-winning approach to returning to work with musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) is getting results. Occupational health physiotherapist Heather Watson explains the strategy behind this effective multi-disciplinary intervention.

The biopsychosocial (BPS) model of health was first suggested by psychiatrist George L Engel in 1977. He highlighted that the wider personal perspective of the patient and the socio-economic context can influence the outcome of a health condition.

This means that how the person responds to the situation can determine the outcome, as much as the health condition itself; and it can lead to many possible results.

Engel's first paper was: "The need for a new medical model: A challenge for biomedicine", and, almost 40 years on, it remains a challenge to biomedicine, and to clinicians managing a wide variety of health conditions.

In some circles it has become widely accepted as best practice, but in others it is still an anomaly. Nationally and internationally, healthcare professionals disagree on the use of the BPS model across all health conditions and stages of the care pathway.

In the UK, there is mounting scientific evidence (Waddell, Burton, Kendall, 2008) that employing a BPS approach can be an effective alternative to the biomedical model for a number of health conditions for functional work-related outcomes.

But its application is variable, at best used in circumstances where it is widely accepted for certain types of conditions, such as long-term health conditions and persistent pain, but at worst reserved only for those conditions, and not utilised earlier in the patient journey to reduce the likelihood of future disability. [Read More](#)

Heat stress: the next global public health crisis?

When rural labourers first started turning up at the Rosales National Hospital in the El Salvadorian capital of San Salvador with advanced symptoms of chronic kidney disease (CKD), doctors put the phenomenon down to pesticides. Their latest thinking is simpler: it's the heat.

Ramón García Trabanino, president of the Association of Nephrology of El Salvador and a leading expert on CKD, describes it as a "silent disease" as it presents no symptoms until it's at an advanced stage. CKD, which has no known cure, is affecting thousands of people in Central America, with an estimated 20,000 deaths in the last two decades.



The sugar cane workers of Nicaragua and El Salvador

The connection between CKD and heat stress is the subject of a number of recent academic papers published in leading journals, including the American Journal of Kidney Disease and Environmental Research. The latter reveals how sugar cane workers are exposed to temperatures of up to 42°C, resulting in decreased blood flow to the kidneys and increased levels of uric acid.

There is not yet consensus that CKD is the result of hot conditions. Some epidemiologists point to other causes, such as infectious diseases including leptospirosis and dengue. Yet according to Catharina Wesseling, a CKD specialist at Sweden's Karolinska Institutet, a medical university in Stockholm and co-author of the above studies, the link to heat exposure is "increasingly clear".

Trabanino agrees. As the planet warms, he says, the current situation threatens to be "the very tip of the iceberg". "If the research demonstrates that CKD is unequivocally related to heat stress, then we will have a severe public health problem because global warming will affect everyone," he says.

CKD may be one of the most devastating impacts of rising temperatures, but increased heat is likely to have other negative impacts. Dizziness, fatigue, muscle aches, headaches and nausea are all common symptoms of heat stress, especially when linked to dehydration. Similarly, crops and livestock are affected by extreme heat, resulting in failed harvests and weakened animals. [Read More](#)

A 'decent' proposal: Not-for-profits should raise job standards, report says

With whole hordes of the Greater Toronto Area's workforce plying away in unstable jobs that typically pay less and afford no benefits — so-called "precarious work" — a new report argues that the province's sizable not-for-profit sector can lead the way in putting things right.

Published Wednesday by the Mowat Centre's not-for-profit research branch, the *Change Work* report outlines the need for a "decent work" agenda that can serve as the "flip side" to precarious employment. The report argues that if the not-for-profit sector were to adopt wage standards and ensure better work-life balance and predictable schedules, they could more easily accomplish their goals and set an example for the broader job market.

"It's meant to be a jumpoff point," said report co-author Lisa Lalande, executive lead at the Mowat research hub on University Ave.

"Rather than focusing on precariousness, it's about 'how do we ensure that work in this sector is decent, and if we're able to do it here, then what's the potential for it to be adopted in other places?'"

The concept of "decent work" is meant to serve as an antidote to a job market in which many people land only intermittent work that pays slightly more than half as much as secure, full-time employment, the report says. The International Labour Organization adopted the principle this year as part of its 2030 development goals, noting that an increasingly competitive worldwide job market has contributed to a widening income gap and led to a decline in permanent, full-time jobs with benefits in some sectors.

A United Way study published earlier this year concluded 52 per cent of workers in the GTA and Hamilton are in temporary, contract or part-time positions.

As Lalande explained, the Mowat report zoomed in on the not-for-profit industry in Ontario to see how the concepts of decent work could apply. Over 18 months, researchers pored over existing literature, surveyed more than 800 industry leaders and conducted nine focus-group sessions to ask not-for-profit staffers to define decent work.

The results, Lalande said, included the desire to establish benchmarks for fair pay, making sure even part-time workers receive some health and retirement benefits and emphasizing the need for managers who value such principles in the workplace. [Read More](#)

Eighty-eight factory workers fired for 'demanding rights'

KARACHI: With the cold winds of Karachi's winter expected to set in soon, Abdul Jabbar thought of buying warm clothes for his newborn daughter. He was waiting for the pay day before he went to make the purchase. Times had been tough and he was struggling to make ends meet.

One day, he and his colleagues decided to talk to the management of the factory they worked at to pay them on time. They approached the management with high hopes but were instead told they were not welcome at the factory anymore.

This happened with 88 workers of the Denim Clothing Company (DCC) — a factory that manufactures clothes for international brands such as H&M and Primark — in the last week of November. According to the workers, they were sacked for demanding their rights.

“Fed up with no social security, no insurance, no medical facilities and low salaries that came on no specific date, we [the workers] decided to take up our concerns before the management,” Jabbar told The Express Tribune.

On November 26, a meeting was held among the workers in which they chose five representatives to hold talks with the management. At noon, the team went to the manager’s chamber. They never returned to their stations. They had been fired on the spot.

“The other workers decided to stand up for their colleagues. Thus in a cluster of 83, they knocked on the management’s door again, demanding the reinstatement of their five fellows,” he described. They, however, met the same fate and were told to leave the factory immediately and not come back.

[Read More](#)

Will a government study confirm what we always knew: Indian women work more hours than men

The average Indian man spends about 42 hours a week “working”, while the average Indian woman works for just 19 hours a week. “Work” in this case refers to economic, market-oriented and largely paid activities as recognised by the Indian government. But shift the focus to non-economic, household activities and the numbers change drastically: women spend nearly 35 hours on such largely unpaid work, and men barely 4 hours.

These statistics are from a landmark pilot survey of time use conducted by the Indian government in 1998-'99. Surveying men, women and children in

six states, it recorded how different demographic groups distribute their time between economic, non-economic and personal work. For 15 years, no policies were adopted or changed based on that study.

Now, there is hope again: in January, the Central Statistics Office announced a large-scale time use survey across India. The aim of this will be to collect comprehensive data on the amount of time Indians spend on different kinds of work, analyse data trends based on gender, age, class and region, and finally use the data to influence policies on labour and economy.

Although the expert committee designing the survey was set up more than two years ago, conducting the study on the ground is likely to take another two years or more.

Need for a survey

“A time use survey is an important economic necessity that can provide crucial information on work not included in the country’s statistical data,” said Indira Hirway, director and professor of economics at the Centre for Development Alternatives in Ahmedabad. Hirway is a member of the expert committee for the all-India time use survey and was also the head of the technical committee that designed the pilot survey in 1998.

Through the new survey, the Central government wants to answer a range of questions. How much time do people spend on unpaid work? How prevalent is child labour? Do boys and girls spend different amounts of time studying? What is the difference in the lifestyle of the rich and the poor?

Most prominent, however, are questions of gender imbalance. How much time do women spend on household work compared to men? Is women’s participation rate in the economy underrepresented? [Read More](#)

A Factory Killing Verdict That Makes Little Sense

In early December, as Tamil Nadu went under water with unprecedented floods, one news that got submerged alongside, was the sentencing of

eight autoworkers of Pricol Limited to a 'double life' term in prison.

The sentences, to run concurrently, were pronounced by a sessions court judge in Coimbatore, who held them 'guilty' of clubbing to death Roy George, the vice president (HR) of the company on September 21, 2009 in Pricol's Perianaickenpalayam unit. The two life sentences – one under IPC 302 (for murder) and another under IPC 449 (trespass in order to commit offense) came at the culmination of the trial which began in 2011.

The workers are also charged with rioting with lethal weapons, mischief, damaging property etc. under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), punishments for which will run concurrently with the life sentences. A total of 27 people were booked in the case under Section 302 of the IPC and other charges, out of which 25 were workers, including four women and two union leaders from the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU). The workers were jailed for 120 days in 2009 till they came out on bail. On December 3, 2015, the trial judge acquitted 19 people and convicted 8 workers.

Missing links

So who are these workers who allegedly entered the cabin of the HR manager on that fateful day, each wielding an iron rod, and clubbed him to death? These are men aged between 35-45 years who had worked in the factory for over 15-20 years; four of them hold technical diplomas from ITIs and four have school pass certificates. They come from the rural areas of Thiruvannamalai, Salem and Coimbatore.

The prosecution had claimed that there was a conspiracy to kill the manager in retaliation for the dismissal of 42 workers on September 19, 2009 and that the person who plotted this horrendous crime was none other than the national president of AICCTU, Advocate S. Kumarasamy, who is also a politburo member of the CPI(ML) (Liberation). According to the prosecution, based on eyewitness accounts of the management staff, these workers, as they hit the manager repeatedly with the iron rods said over and over again – 'We are killing you

since you dismissed us. Kumarasamy asked us to kill you'. [Read More](#)

Regional News

Silicosis threat looms large in mining area: 10 deaths in 2015

BUNDI: Ten persons died from silicosis in 2015 while 119 others were diagnosed with the lung disease in Dabi mining area of the district, an NGO working for mining labour rights in Rajasthan has claimed.

Silicosis is an incurable lung disease caused by the inhalation of silica dust and is marked by inflammation and scarring in the lungs. Labourers working in mines are the worst affected by it.

While ten persons died, 119 others were diagnosed to be suffering from silicosis by December 31, 2015. One more person suffering from the disease died in January, said Ramesh Gujjar, Bundi district Coordinator of Jodhpur-based NGO Khan Majdur Sureksha Abhiyan.

The state government had sanctioned some compensation to the tune of Rs 60 lakh in September, 2015 but the district administration has not allotted the same to the patients and kin of the deceased so far, Gujjar claimed.

A memorandum regarding the same was submitted to the district collector on Thursday following which he assured to distribute the compensation cheques on January 18, he said.

When asked about a rise in the number of those suffering from the disease, Gujjar said earlier the tests for silicosis were not conducted properly. It was only after the intervention of Human Right Commission in March, 2014 that accurate tests were conducted due to which there was a rise in the number of cases.

In 2014, two persons died of silicosis while 14 others were diagnosed with the disease.

He further claimed that no security and or safety measures were in place in the mines which led to the occurrence of the fatal disease in labourers. [Read More](#)

ILO to train 0.8m garment workers on safety by 2017

The International Labour Organization (ILO) will train up a total of 0.8 million garment workers on occupational safety and health (OSH) in the next two years.

The UN agency in May teamed up with Bangladesh Employers Federation (BEF) to enhance OSH knowledge among workers under its 'Improving Working Conditions in the RMG sector' project. "The joint collaboration has already created a team of 114 master OSH trainers who will pass the OSH knowledge on to 8000 mid level and line supervisors by March 2016," Secretary General of BEF Farooq Ahmed said after the evaluation session of the master trainers meeting held on Sunday in the city.

The second-phase of the training is going on, while the mid-level trained people will provide training to a total of 0.8 million workers in the garment factories in Dhaka, he said. He added the programme would later be expanded to the factories in Chittagong. [Read More](#)

Working Overtime, but Not Getting Paid for It

About three months ago, Alejandro Gutierrez Vega went to a construction site on the property of the Domain shopping center in search of a job. Gutierrez Vega, a Mexican immigrant, has lived and worked in Austin for 20 years. For a long time, he worked for various large companies, doing things like pouring cement and working with heavy machinery. But recently he wanted to change his line of work, because working those jobs was hard for someone reaching middle age. He had been instead doing remodeling and painting, but at the time he went to the Domain, he had lost his last job and needed to find something immediately. "I have to pay my bills," he told the Chronicle, in Spanish.

Gutierrez Vega began working at the site, building the base of a building's second floor. He said the work was very dangerous. He was given no safety precautions and no harness; "no one uses anything for safety," he said. "They don't tell you anything,

except you need to bring your own helmet" (according to federal law, helmets are supposed to be provided by the employer).

After a few days on the job, the section Gutierrez Vega and the others had been working on was finished, and another group of workers was set to begin framing. Wanting to continue to work, Gutierrez Vega again went directly to the subcontractor, Marcos Don Juan Velazquez.

Gutierrez Vega was paid in cash each week. He worked in a team of three, and one person was in charge of keeping track of hours for the trio, but nothing was written down. Instead, that person kept track of the team's hours in his head, and Gutierrez Vega was paid for approximately the amount of time he worked. Except: Although Gutierrez Vega worked about 45-50 hours each week, he said he received no overtime pay, but was instead paid \$11 for each hour he worked. (For example, if he worked 50 hours one week, he received \$550.) There was no talk among the workers about overtime, but Gutierrez Vega knew that he was supposed to be paid time-and-a-half for each hour he worked after hitting 40 hours per week because "I've worked in other places and I knew about overtime." He was taken aback that his employer would treat him and his fellow workers this way. "The job is a commercial project, it can't be possible that they pay like we're building a little house." [Read More](#)

Sri Lanka to set standards for red clay roofing tiles upon asbestos ban

Nov 19 (LBO) – Sri Lanka is in the process of setting quality standards for red clay roofing tiles while increasing productivity to reduce cost of production upon the ban of asbestos roofing by 2018, an official said.

"We have developed standards to cover red clay roofing tiles industry. We presented the draft standards to the President of Sri Lanka and those standards will be open for public comments," Mahendra Jayasekara, president of Lanka Ceramic Council said at a press briefing held in Colombo.

“We hope these standards will be implemented in the near future and red clay industry will be benefited by implementing those standards.”

Sri Lanka plans to ban importing or manufacturing of asbestos roofing by 2018, as it generates health issues to the users.

World Health Organization has said that all types of asbestos cause lung cancer, mesothelioma, cancer of the larynx and ovary, and asbestosis (fibrosis of the lungs).

But asbestos is a cheaper roofing option, which is one of the most expensive parts of building a house, compared with wood and clay tiles.

According to WHO currently about 125 million people in the world are exposed to asbestos at the workplace.

In 2004, asbestos-related lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis from occupational exposures resulted in 107,000 deaths and 1,523,000 Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs).

In addition, several thousands of deaths can be attributed to other asbestos-related diseases, as well as to non-occupational exposures to asbestos.

However, experts argue even though red clay roofing provides better health conditions the cost is much higher and will cost even more for replacing as its life cycle is comparably low to asbestos roofing.

“I think at the moment the cost is higher. But we can come to a very good cost of production through increasing the yields and productivity. With that I do not think it will be much higher than the asbestos roofing sheets in the future,” Jayasekara said.

“And if you make a good product it will be long lasting.”

One of the main problem with the current red clay roofing tiles is its higher water absorption Jayasekara said.

“If we can reduce the water absorption and make it a quality tile then it will last a life time. So there won’t be a need for repairs or replace,” he added.

[Read More](#)

Articles on IBAS website

Vietnam Asbestos Offensive

A workshop entitled “Using Chrysotile Safe (sic) and Under Control” was held in Hanoi, Vietnam on November 18, 2015. The title is a poorly translated adaptation of discredited asbestos industry rhetoric extolling the “safe use of asbestos.” The subjects of the presentations made at the event organized by the Roofing Sheet Association, a trade association representing the interests of the asbestos sector, were informative:

- “Research on affect (sic) of chrysotile on human health”;
- “Research on affect (sic) of chrysotile on human health and longevity of workers at chrysotile production factories”;
- “Chrysotile dust concentration report and measures to ensure the safety in installing and removing chrysotile house roof sheet”;
- “Research on chrysotile house roof-sheet quality control – Assessing health risks”;
- “Economic impact of chrysotile ban in Vietnam – A case study of Chrysotile house roof-sheet”;
- “Using chrysotile safe and under control – A comparative policy and legislative perspective.”

Author - Laurie Kazan-Allen [Read More](#)

Who is at Risk from Toxic Exposures?

On Saturday, December 12, 2015, Belgian demographers from The Association for the Development of Applied Research in Social Sciences presented research findings which substantiated reports by the Belgian Association of the Asbestos Victims (ABEVA) about the human impact of asbestos processing operations in the Belgian towns of Harmignies and Kapelle-op-den-Bos.¹ Having studied cohorts of workers from the asbestos-cement factories in these areas, it was concluded that, on average, more than twenty years of life were lost to those who succumbed to asbestos-related diseases due to occupational exposures at the Coverit and Eternit companies.

Reflecting on this catastrophic loss of life, the ABEVA press release issued on December 12th

considered the risk to members of the public and family members whose toxic exposures were non-occupational. Acknowledging that under Belgian law, these victims remain uncompensated, ABEVA urged the authorities to act on the injustices which continue to deprive the injured of their rights.

Joint press release by civil society groups issued December 15, 2015 – [Read More](#)

by Laurie Kazan-Allen [Read More](#)

Censorship of Italy's Asbestos Dialogue

In recent days, articles have appeared in the Italian media which detail how Swiss billionaire Stephan Schmidheiny continues to exert his financial and legal muscle to protect his public image from accusations relating to his former asbestos businesses.¹ Journalists writing for La Repubblica, La Stampa and others have reported the pressure brought to bear on authors and publishers to withdraw a book which Schmidheiny's lawyers say present him as “a ruthless industrialist who values his own profit higher than the security and life of his employees.”

The text at the center of this controversy was an English translation of an Italian book called: Dossier Eternit: Il grande processo [Dossier Eternit: The Big Trial] by Rosalba Altopiedi and Sara Panelli.

By Laurie Kazan-Allen; [Read More](#)

Concordia prof under pressure to denounce colleague's pro-asbestos paper

Anti-asbestos activists are turning up the heat on Concordia University by demanding a high-profile faculty member at the university's John Molson School of Business join international scientists and health experts in calling for an official retraction of a pro-asbestos report.

The report was commissioned by The Luc Beauregard Centre Of Excellence in Communications Research at the Concordia's John Molson School of Business.

Concordia has so far only removed the controversial report by JMSB lecturer John Aylen

from its website and acknowledged that Aylen's past ties to the asbestos industry should have been divulged in the report itself.

Without an official retraction though, anti-asbestos activists say the paper can be used by asbestos industry proponents to persuade countries in the developing world to continue to import their deadly product.

“I think everyone in Quebec and across Canada should be greatly concerned that a major Canadian university funded and published a supposedly reputable report that was intended to influence public policy, but that is in total contradiction to the scientific evidence, was written by an industry consultant and promotes industry interests,” said Kathleen Ruff, human rights adviser to the Rideau Institute on International Affairs.

Aylen is a public relations specialist who lectures on communications and marketing at Concordia. He previously worked as a paid spokesperson for Baljit Chadha, the Westmount businessman behind a failed project to expand and reopen the Jeffrey Mine, a chrysotile asbestos mine in southeastern Quebec.

Chadha, a major donor and governor emeritus to Concordia University, was an asbestos middleman for more than 15 years, buying chrysotile asbestos from the Jeffrey Mine and selling it to about a dozen large cement manufacturers in India through his firm, Balcop Ltd.

The 102-page report Aylen published this year is called “Lessons from the Quebec Asbestos Industry: Can there be meaningful dialogue and consensus when facts come up against feelings?” The report, Ruff and others charge, contains misinformation that comes directly from the asbestos industry and that has been rejected by scientists and health authorities around the world, including the World Health Organization.

By Michelle Lalonde, Montreal Gazette, November 29, 2015 [Read More](#)

EPA uses drone to inspect Pennsylvania's Ambler Asbestos Piles Superfund Site

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) plans to use a drone-mounted camera to photograph isolated areas of the Ambler Asbestos Piles Superfund Site in Ambler, Pennsylvania on December 7. The photographs will allow the agency to better judge the efficacy of its site remedy.

The drone, which is owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Philadelphia District, has a wingspan of two feet and is two feet long by one foot high. It will fly exclusively over the Superfund site, an area of approximately 25 acres that is contained by Wissahickon Creek, Butler Pike, Locust Street and Church Street.

This was the first time the EPA has used a drone for the Ambler Asbestos Piles site, and it allowed the agency to garner valuable information about areas that are not easily accessible. With this new information, the EPA is better equipped to determine if its efforts at the site are still effectively benefiting human and environmental health. The EPA also recently hosted an informational outreach session with local residents. [Read More](#)

Schools fail to keep track of asbestos

Without sealing off the area, contractors used ice scrapers to remove the tiled floor of three classrooms, loaded the splintered remains into a wheelbarrow, and carted them through hallways to the dumpster behind the school, where the dusty refuse remained for more than a month.

Only weeks later did officials at the McCloskey Middle School in Uxbridge realize that the tiles contained asbestos, toxic minerals that can cause cancer when inhaled.

It was the kind of worst-case outcome — the contamination of a building used by hundreds of children each day — that Congress sought to prevent when it passed a law requiring schools to conduct routine inspections of areas with asbestos, provide special training to custodians and other

school staff, and follow strict procedures when removing the fibrous material.



Photo by- Department of labor standards

Cape Cod Regional Technical School in Harwich, where in 2012 students and a teacher used shovels to chip up a tile floor in a building on campus property.

Nearly 30 years later, the state recently revealed, schools in Massachusetts appear to be ignoring the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act and the state is doing little to enforce it, setting aside only enough money to conduct 40 inspections a year.

[Read More](#)

Asbestos warning for NT schools after dangerous substance found in science kits

An asbestos safety alert has been issued after the potentially dangerous rock samples contained in some science education kits were purchased by 24 NT schools.

NT Worksafe said the warning came from the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency after asbestos, under a variety of names, was found in some of the mineral kits which have been sold throughout Australia and continue to be available for sale online.

"Kits [dating from the 1970s] produced by the former Geological Specimen Supplies company may also contain asbestos," the alert said.

The kits have been found to contain asbestos under a variety of names and schools are advised to "immediately withdraw the kits from use".

Schools should "not assume that kits are asbestos-free. Therefore, before purchasing kits or samples, schools should request certification confirming that the product has been tested and does not contain asbestos." [Read More](#)

Crime detective novel by award-winning Quebec author targets Quebec-India asbestos lobby

A crime detective novel just published in Quebec by award-winning Quebec author, Maureen Martineau, focuses on the criminal activities of the international asbestos lobby.

The novel, entitled *L'Activiste: Le Jour des Morts* (*The Activist: the Day of the Dead*) features Detective Sergeant Judith Allison, who, in November 2013, is assigned to investigate the explosion of a bomb in the small community of Tingwick in central Quebec. The detective discovers that the man who masterminded the explosion is pursuing his final target: the former head of the Quebec asbestos industry. When the ex-manager of a major Quebec asbestos mine disappears, the investigation takes on an international scale, involving both chrysotile asbestos lobbyists and human rights defenders who are fighting them. The investigation takes the detective to Jharkhand in India, to the Roro valley, where thousands of villagers, living alongside a abandoned asbestos mine, live with a bomb in their lungs. [Read More](#)

America's 'Third Wave' Of Asbestos Disease Upends Lives

Until the morning of Sept. 25, 2014, life was treating Kris Penny well. His flooring company had just secured its first big contract.

But that morning, Penny, of Clermont, Fla., was feeling lethargic. He pulled into a McDonald's for a cup of orange juice. Seconds after he drank it, he doubled over in pain. "It felt like someone stabbed me in the stomach with a machete," he said. A co-worker drove him to the emergency room.

When he awoke in the hospital, his wife, Lori McNamara, was beside him, crying. "I go, 'What's the matter? I'm still here,' " Penny said. The surgeon who'd opened up his abdomen had found it full of cancer — type to be determined. The doctor "pretty much told me to get my affairs in order, right there on the spot."

The pathology results came in four days later. Penny, 39, learned that he had peritoneal mesothelioma — a rare cancer of the lining of the abdomen almost always tied to asbestos exposure. He concluded, after consulting with a lawyer, that he'd inhaled microscopic asbestos fibers about a decade earlier while installing fiber-optic cable underground. He sued telecommunications giant AT&T. [Read More](#)

Labor advocacy groups call for ban on asbestos

Several labor advocacy groups yesterday called for a complete ban on the use of asbestos, a highly toxic mineral commonly used in construction and to fireproof materials, as occupational exposure to it has caused an increase in asbestos-related diseases.

Asbestos-induced lung cancer has increased among men and women and people who work in professions with high levels of exposure to asbestos dust are between 2.86 and 5.78 times more likely to develop asbestos-related cancer, National Health Research Institutes researcher and physician Lee Jyuhn-hsiarn (李俊賢) said.

The occurrence of malignant mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer of the cells that form a protective lining that covers many internal organs, has been increasing rapidly, from 40 cases per year from 1997 to 2008 to more than 73 in 2010, suggesting that asbestos-related occupational diseases have peaked, Lee said.

Taiwan Labor Front secretary-general Son Yu-liam (孫友聯) said asbestos is banned in more than 50 nations, but the material is still legal in Taiwan, adding that the nation has imported more than 2,000 tonnes of asbestos in the past three years.

Taiwan Occupational Safety and Health Link director Cheng Ya-wen (鄭雅文) said that asbestos is the primary cause of occupational cancer in the world, accounting for more than 30 percent of the occupational diseases indemnified by labor insurance in Germany and Japan, while Japan has a special relief act to compensate for asbestos-related diseases due to non-occupational exposure.

However, the Bureau of Labor Insurance recognized less than five asbestos-related diseases each year, suggesting a serious underestimation, Cheng said, adding that symptoms of asbestos-related diseases generally take 20 years to develop after initial exposure and therefore a long-term tracking of high-risk groups is necessary.

“Asbestos-related diseases are not a problem of the past. It is ongoing and on the rise, but the government has not taken proper measures regarding workers’ asbestos exposure and disease management,” Cheng said. [Read More](#)

EU helps Vietnam phase out asbestos

Asbestos has been an important construction material for Vietnam and a valuable export product over the previous years, however, in 2014 the Vietnamese government decided to phase out production and use of the material, given its adverse impact on human health.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that currently about 125 million people in the world are exposed to asbestos at their workplace and more than 107,000 people die each year from asbestos-related lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis, resulting from occupational exposure. One in every three deaths from occupational cancer is estimated to be caused by asbestos. (WHO Fact Sheet N°343, July 2014, “Asbestos: elimination of asbestos-related diseases”).

To facilitate Vietnam's efforts, the European Union (EU) is providing support to the governmental agency Vinachemia to find substitutes for this toxic substance.

Vietnamese public opinion has been divided over the issue. Based on published evidence, the

Ministry of Health acknowledges the damaging effect of asbestos on human health.

However, Vo Quang Diem, vice-chairman of the Vietnam Roof Sheet Association, while accepting that the scientific evidence regarding the toxicity of asbestos is undeniable, contends that the material can be less harmful to human health if the right mix of production procedures is used, such as “effective technology, compliance with governmental regulations and Convention 162 of the International Labour Organization on asbestos, which calls for providing appropriate work-place safety”. [Read More](#)

SK Hynix agrees to compensate workers with occupational diseases

SK Hynix announced plans on Nov. 25 to offer sweeping compensation to current and former semiconductor factory workers, and even those of its subcontractors, connected with suspected occupational diseases.

With this decision, the company is accepting the recommendation of an industrial and public health review committee that conducted a yearlong inspection of Hynix semiconductor working environments.

The SK Hynix investigation committee for workplace health and safety, headed by Ajou University preventive medicine professor Jang Jae-yeon, held a press conference in Seoul on Nov. 25 to propose the support and compensation measures to the company - while conceding that the causal relationship between the semiconductor working environment and suspected occupational diseases was “difficult to prove.”

In response, SK Hynix said it would accept the independent committee’s recommendations “immediately.”

The committee was formed in the wake of a 2014 report in the Hankyoreh on suspected occupational ailments among Hynix semiconductor factory workers. That October, a team of seven outside independent experts was formed to conduct on-site inspections.

The committee subsequently said that 18 carcinogenic or toxic substances, such as ethylbenzene, were present among the 860 chemicals used at the workplace, but that workers had not been exposed to them. [Read More](#)

Electronic waste proves to be a challenge for civic body

Chennai: While torrential rains and flooding have brought a mountain of garbage to the city and suburbs, electronic waste generated proves to be a new threat to the environment. Flood water that invaded houses rendered electronic items like television sets, washing machines and fridge useless.

Speaking on the how electronic waste (e-waste) is proving to be a headache, Environmentalist Foundation of India founder Arun Krishnamurthy says, 'When rain and accompanying floods created havoc in the city. There was widespread talk about relief and rescue operations. Now that rehabilitation mode is on, everybody has started speaking about mountain of garbage to dispose, e-waste came into the picture. We must note that there are many types - degradable and non-degradable waste. Again in the non-degradable segment there is e-waste and medical waste, which are very hazardous.'

Explaining, Arun points out, 'For the past few days, we have disposed around six to eight truckloads of waste lying at the beaches. Each truck can carry around 1.5- 1.8 tonnes of garbage. If such waste are found in beaches, imagine how much of waste would be found inland? And how much e-waste generated due to flood? So instead of depending on the government for disposal, people must take responsibility.' Apart from e-waste generated due to damage of electronic items, environmental experts say that floods have washed already existing electronic waste dumped elsewhere. 'E-waste is not a new thing, it has already existed before floods,' says Mathew Jose, founder of Paperman, an organisation. 'Now people throw away damaged electronic items due to flood, but many of us forget the fact that we have already thrown electronic items that contain e-waste that

are very hazardous in nature. Recent floods have exposed and the water washed the already existing e-waste that was dumped on the roadsides or in dumpyards.' Experts in the recycling industry say that around 8,000 tonnes of e-waste are generated per year in Chennai. Of this, only around 5 per cent reach e-waste management companies authorised by Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board. The rest reaches wrong hands, which lack knowledge about handling the hazardous chemicals. [Read More](#)

7-Eleven: The Price of Convenience

Gold Walkley Award-winning reporter Adele Ferguson returns to Four Corners with an investigation into the 7-Eleven business empire with revelations of dodgy bookkeeping, blackmail and the mass underpayment of its workforce.

7-Eleven is the business built for our convenience: selling the staples of life like milk, bread and phone cards, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. With more than 600 stores around Australia, they serve around six customers every second and generate more than \$3 billion in sales.

"Welcome to a world of opportunity, brought to you by 7-Eleven, the brand that's world famous." 7-Eleven marketing

Thousands of people around the country are employed in 7-Eleven stores, run by franchisees.

But as this joint Four Corners/Fairfax investigation reveals, it's a business model that relies on the exploitation of its workforce.

"They can't run 7-Eleven as profitably and successfully as they have without letting this happen. The reality is it's built on something not much different from slavery." 7-Eleven insider. [Read More](#)

Screening for Chemical Contributions to Breast Cancer Risk: A Case Study for Chemical Safety Evaluation

Background: Current approaches to chemical screening, prioritization, and assessment are being reenvisioned, driven by innovations in chemical

safety testing, new chemical regulations, and demand for information on human and environmental impacts of chemicals. To conceptualize these changes through the lens of a prevalent disease, the Breast Cancer and Chemicals Policy project convened an interdisciplinary expert panel to investigate methods for identifying chemicals that may increase breast cancer risk.

Methods: Based on a review of current evidence, the panel identified key biological processes whose perturbation may alter breast cancer risk. We identified corresponding assays to develop the Hazard Identification Approach for Breast Carcinogens (HIA-BC), a method for detecting chemicals that may raise breast cancer risk. Finally, we conducted a literature-based pilot test of the HIA-BC.

Results: The HIA-BC identifies assays capable of detecting alterations to biological processes relevant to breast cancer, including cellular and molecular events, tissue changes, and factors that alter susceptibility. In the pilot test of the HIA-BC, chemicals associated with breast cancer all demonstrated genotoxic or endocrine activity, but not necessarily both. Significant data gaps persist.

Conclusions: This approach could inform the development of toxicity testing that targets mechanisms relevant to breast cancer, providing a basis for identifying safer chemicals. The study identified important end points not currently evaluated by federal testing programs, including altered mammary gland development, Her2 activation, progesterone receptor activity, prolactin effects, and aspects of estrogen receptor β activity. This approach could be extended to identify the biological processes and screening methods relevant for other common diseases. [Read More](#)

India needs to rethink proposed changes to labour laws: Here's why

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, addressing the 31st Plenary Session of INTUC on Saturday, spoke out against the “anti-labour and unimaginative economic policies of the NDA government.” The statement is significant as this INTUC conference came in the context of NDA

contemplating replacing the existing labour laws with Labour Code on Wages and amending several major Acts for labour protection.

The conference also came in the wake of a country-wide 24-hour general strike of 10 trade unions (apart from BJP's Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh) observed in September this year. The strike was a demonstration against the labour reforms planned by the NDA government which put jobs of workers at risk and made layoffs easier.

Labour reforms have long been pending in India. Almost 90 per cent of the labour community is casual and not protected by laws and regulations. On the other hand, some sections of industry and neo-liberal thought have argued for greater flexibility in labour markets and easier hire and fire policies for increased competitiveness, push in manufacturing, and greater output. Modi government's thrust on Make in India and ease of doing business directly feeds into this narrative. Yet, NDA's new Labour Code Wage bill may not be the best answer to boost economic productivity. In fact, in a country where labour health, safety, and welfare remain low priorities, industrial accidents are high, medical insurance and social security is weak, and minimum wage guidelines are routinely violated, the Labour code and proposed changes will do more harm than good.

The Labour Code on Wages may restrict the power to fix minimum wages to just the state governments and may lead to a race to the bottom among states. The changes in the Payment of Wages Act replaces power given to labour commissioners with new “authorities”, however this may weaken inspection norms and remove ability to law to deter offenders. The proposed amendment to Industrial Disputes Act will allow companies employing up to 300 workers to fire or hire employees without seeking any government permission (earlier limit was 100 workers), leaving only a tiny percentage of large companies under the government when it comes to retrenchment. Creating a labour union will become more difficult as 30 per cent of workers will be required to sign for its creation (earlier only 10 per cent). The amendments to Factories Act (which is a social

legislation aimed at ensuring occupational safety, health and welfare of workers at the workplace) propose raising the numbers of workers to 20 for firms with power supply (earlier 10) and 40 with no power supply (earlier 20). However the most significant change is in Contract Labour Act, important because contract labour forms almost half the workers and they are often poor migrants. Changes to this Act will exempt companies employing less than 50 workers from the ambit of the Act (from the earlier limit of 20). The September strike presented a charter of 13 demands and among which there was also dissatisfaction about present price rise, low generation of new employment opportunities and NDA's thrust on privatisation of railways, defence and insurance. [Read More](#)

Occupational safety integral for public sector management

Occupational safety and health is an integral part of the public sector management, which employs about 14 lakh officials across the country, the Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) has said. The apex body for PSUs has said that the public sector has structured safety departments and is better placed than others to overcome hazardous accidents.

At a national workshop on "Strategies for improving occupational safety and health in public sector enterprises" held here earlier this week, SCOPE Director-General U.D. Choubey said occupational accidents and work-related diseases cause over 2.3 million fatalities and adversely erode four per cent of the world's gross domestic product. The conference was organised by SCOPE in association with the Directorate General, Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes, and the International Labour Organisation. It was inaugurated by D.N. Sharma, member of the National Disaster Management Authority, and was attended by senior executives working in the safety departments of PSUs. Addressing the participants, Dr. Sharma laid emphasis on evolving sustainability so that the multi-stakeholder partnership works towards the unified goal of chemical safety.

"Adherence to laws and enforcement of applicable rules and regulations are the actual drivers for robust chemical disaster management in the country," he said. [Read More](#)

Dye factory under scrutiny after five workers contract rare bladder cancer

Five men in their 40s and 50s who worked for a chemical company handling dyes and pigments have developed bladder cancer, the health ministry said Friday.

The ailment is uncommon and attention has focused on the possible absorption of carcinogens at the factory.

The health ministry asked two chemical industry bodies — the Japanese Chemistry Industry Association and the Japan Dyestuff and Industrial Chemicals Association — to safeguard workers from exposure to certain chemicals by making sure they wear gas masks and get proper ventilation.

The ministry will also inspect 41 companies nationwide that deal with o-Toluidine, a particularly toxic chemical.

The ministry has declined to disclose the name or the location of the firm, which has a workforce of 40, citing ongoing investigations.

The workers, including one who has already left the company, each worked there for a period of 18 to 24 years. They were involved in the manufacturing of dyes and pigments that contain chemicals called aromatic amines. Some of the aromatic amines, such as o-Toluidine and o-Anisidine, are considered carcinogenic.

New regulations take effect in Japan in April on the handling of 24 aromatic amines. [Read More](#)

Deadly factory collapse in Pakistan 'may be linked to quake damage'

At least 18 people were killed and 51 injured when the roof of a factory collapsed near the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore on Wednesday, officials said.

The incident comes less than two weeks after a powerful 7.5-magnitude earthquake ripped across Afghanistan and Pakistan, killing nearly 390 people, levelling thousands of homes and causing structural damage to major buildings.

“We have recovered 18 dead bodies and more than 70 people alive, 51 of them are injured and have been taken to hospitals,” said Mohammad Usman, the top administration official in Lahore who was coordinating the response to the disaster in the city, the capital of Punjab province.

The collapse occurred at a Rajput Polyester plastic bag factory in the Sundar industrial estate around 30 miles (45km) south-west of the city centre.

Punjab chief minister Shahbaz Sharif said it was possible the building had been damaged after the 26 October earthquake. “I have heard about the earthquake affecting the building but according to labourers the owner continued to build an extension.”

Pakistan has a poor safety record in the construction and maintenance of buildings. In 2014 a mosque collapsed in the same city, killing at least 24 people.

More than 200 people lost their lives to collapsed roofs following torrential rainfall and flooding in 2014.

In 2012 more than 255 workers were killed when a fire tore through a clothing factory in Karachi, one of the deadliest industrial accidents in Pakistani history. A judicial probe into the blaze was damning, pointing to a lack of emergency exits, poor safety training of workers, the packing in of machinery and the failure of government inspectors to spot any of these faults. A murder case was registered against the factory owners but has not come to trial. [Read More](#)

Nearly 100 dead in Myanmar jade mine collapse

Almost 100 people have died in a huge landslide in a remote jade mining area of northern Myanmar, officials say.

Rescuers were still battling to dig through the mountains of loose rubble at the site in Hpakant on Sunday, as search teams continued to find bodies in one of the deadliest disasters to strike the country's shadowy jade industry.

Dozens are still missing, most of them villagers who were sifting through a mountain of tailings and waste.

The region is home to some of the world's highest quality jade, bringing in billions of dollars a year, though researchers say most of that money goes to individuals and companies tied to Myanmar's former military rulers.

Ninety-seven bodies have been pulled from the landslide, according to Nilar Myint, an official from the local administrative authorities in Hpakant, northern Kachin.

The death toll was expected to rise and it remains unclear exactly how many people may be buried.

Landslides are a common hazard in the area as people living off the industry's waste pick their way across perilous mounds under the cover of darkness, driven by the hope that they might find a chunk of jade worth thousands of dollars. [Read More](#)

Rampant quarrying sounds the death knell for rivulets

Kerala- Watershed management project implemented at Peruvampoil covering around 600 hectares of land vulnerable to soil erosion in Kodyathur panchayat has become a futile exercise with the rampant quarrying in the area. Not less than any 10 quarrying and crusher units are now operational in this small geographical area, which belongs to ward number 4, 5, 6 and 7 of Kodyathur grama panchayat.

Environmentalists allege that a number of small rivulets that indirectly feed the potable water sources in this Western Ghats area are on the path of slow extinction with the huge deposit of quarry waste emanating from the rubble and the particles of weathered sand. Around 10 bunds created for the agricultural purpose under the watershed management project are also on the verge of ruin

with the excess quarry silt deposit. Official records of the Kodyathur panchayat state that it has benefited from the Rs.62.47-lakh watershed project from 2005 to 2008. Though a number of conservation measures had been taken during the term, the projected benefits, especially the protection of environment from pollution and exploitation, are yet to be achieved at the ecologically important location. [Read More](#)

Toxic trouble: Chinese children fall ill after inhaling fumes from newly laid school running tracks

Toxic fumes given off by Chinese school running tracks, which have led to students falling sick, including suffering dizziness and nosebleeds, have sparked concerns that construction regulatory standards must be improved, mainland media reports.

A number of schools in Guangdong province have reported that children have felt ill after using tracks since the beginning of the new school term in September, the Shanghai-based online news outlet The Paper reported.

One running track at a school in Shenzhen was found to have been constructed using 20 times the permitted limit of the chemicals benzene and toluene, which can give off fumes causing dizziness.

Reports of children suffering nosebleeds after new running tracks were laid have also emerged in neighbouring Jiangsu province.

More than 500 pupils in Danyang have been wearing facial masks at their primary school because of the pungent odour coming from the new plastic running track.

Existing mainland regulations cover the quality and safety of track construction, to ensure the use of toxic substances, such as benzene and toluene, are controlled.

However, these regulations do not cover the use of

adhesives and other additives that are widely applied when installing the soft plastic surface of the tracks, according to an investigation by The Paper. [Read More](#)

These companies are figuring out how to take the toxics out of electronics

January 11, 2016 — On a Wednesday in late February 2010, Hewlett-Packard hosted an unusual training session at its offices in Fort Collins, Colorado. The technology company had decided to eliminate polyvinyl chloride, or PVC — a type of plastic that releases harmful chemicals during production and when burned after disposal — from its power cords. But it realized that to get PVC out of its products, it was going to have to get its suppliers to do so, too. This training was an opportunity for those supplying power cables to the company (now known as HP) to learn about a tool that could help identify alternatives to PVC: GreenScreen for Safer Chemicals. Developed by the nonprofit Clean Production Action, GreenScreen provides a means of comparing hazard assessments of chemicals in order to choose safer alternatives.

“At HP, we buy a lot of power cables. We knew that because of our buying power, we could have some influence on what the industry was doing,” says Paul Mazurkiewicz, a technologist for materials at HP. “We went really far back in the supply chain, to the people that fundamentally make these materials, and we trained them on how to use the GreenScreen and let them know that HP would be making choices based on the GreenScreen in the future.”

HP is not alone: Around the world, electronics companies are working to reduce their use of chemicals that are known to be hazardous to human health, the environment or both. [Read More](#)

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