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Proof of cancer among men in asbestos units

By R. K. RANGAN

BOMBAY, March 26.

THE indictment against two asbestos firms in India for flouting safety regulations and exposing workmen to hazards of cancer, published in the British journal, "New Scientist," and carried by the Indian press strengthens the campaign for improved factory working conditions.

Air pollution experts have been campaigning for quite some time now against recalcitrant managements disregarding international safety regulations but without much success.

There is already ample evidence of the incidence of a cancerlike condition among several workers in asbestos manufacturing processes.

The "New Scientist" exposes some as one more piece of evidence to highlight the neglect of workers' health.

The safety norms are laid down by Asbestos International Association which also insists on their strict observance.

While violations of these norms in the developed countries attract heavy penalties, authorities in India are said to overlook them.

FACTORY LAW

The laxity of factory law enforcement in India appears to have induced multinationals to locate offshore manufacturing sites in India.

Air pollution experts point out that asbestos, a mineral fibre of barely two to three micron thickness, penetrates human lungs with inhaled air. The arrow-like fibres erode the soft tissues causing abrasion of lining and generally, enervate the patient.

The condition is described as asbestosis. "It is not exactly cancer but far worse than that," observed a chest consultant.

Once inside the body, the asbestos fibre cannot be removed. All the time it darts from one part of the lung to another, eventually impairing the oxygen exchange function in the body.

Some seven years ago, a medical examination of workers in the Bombay-based asbestos firm was conducted to screen the operators and check for asbestosis proneness. A number of workers were said to have been discharged on being found positive.

Significantly, neither the discharged men nor the ones in continued employment were given their X-ray plates.

It is said that at least 35 per cent

of those still on their jobs are afflicted and yet are neither discharged nor duly compensated.

A proper investigation of the health of the workmen is likely to force the company to earmark compensation liabilities of a huge order.

Interestingly, the trade unions, which are active in making higher wage demands, are silent in claiming compensations for industrial workers.

Most trade unions abroad carry out sustained campaigns for wresting compensations payable to victims of occupational hazards.

Since the strength and popularity of unions in India are largely determined by their ability to realise higher money wages for constituent workers, they are somewhat indifferent to claiming compensations for on-job sickness.

It is also pointed out that if the management is forced to defray the compensation, the union functionaries might take a cut out of it, workers feel.

Canada, Europe and South Africa are considered major asbestos-producing countries. In India, asbestos mineral is mined in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa with prospecting being reported in Bihar.

From the stage of mining and ore handling to fabricating asbestos products there is a hazard of asbestosis. There are eight varieties of mineral but the Crocidolite type is considered the most vicious.

Asbestos is used as an insulating agent in house construction as a roofing material, in ships, electrical insulation, railway carriages and packages.

Its usage is increasing resulting in one more firm taking up its processing in Hyderabad.

Binny mills accord to be signed today

NEW DELHI, March 26 (UNI) :

An agreement setting out terms for the reopening of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills in Madras is to be signed here tomorrow between the mill's labour leaders and officials of the commerce ministry.

The decks were cleared today for reaching the agreement with the finance ministry giving clearance to the draft memorandum prepared by the commerce ministry.

The deputy speaker of the Lok Sabha, Mr. G. Lakshmanan, who led a deputation of members of Parliament belonging to all parties to the finance minister in this regard, told newsmen: "There is no hitch now

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