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, Victim’s Organising, Lung Diseases, and Electronics.

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All readers are welcome to provide feedback 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.
Commemorating 1 Year Anniversary of Rana Plaza Industrial Homicide

Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions Accident Victims Rights Network organized a Special Conference of Rana Plaza Victims with the support of Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) commemorating the 1 Year Anniversary of Rana Plaza Industrial Homicide on April 24, 2014 at Savar, Dhaka.

The conference started with the recitation of the Holy Quran and praying for the departed souls. One minute silence was observed in memory of ill-fated deceased workers.

OSHE Executive Director Mr. AR Chowdhury Repon presided over the session. Mrs. Kohinoor Akhter, Convener, Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions Accident Victims Rights Network delivered the welcome speech. A special Documentary was screened on RMG’s present scenario named “Day of Mourning”. The member secretary of the network (Zarina Begum, victim of Tazreen Fashions Fire Accident) describing their present condition stated, “We are very sorry and sympathize about Rana Plaza incident and its victims. I, as a member secretary of the network committee strongly demand the logical and legal compensation and welfare settlement for the victims of Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions as well. Besides, we, Tazreen Fashions victims have been passing our days with untold and inhuman sufferings. At present, there is nobody to hear Tazreen accident victims.”

AMRC Representative - Ms. Omana George and ANROEV Representative - Mr. Mohit Gupta presented on AMRC and ANROEV activities throughout Asia about how they are working with occupational accident victims through introducing victims’ rights networks in different countries.

Mr. Abdul Mannan, father of a dead worker, Md. Rafique added “My family has now been in a dilapidated condition. We did not get any compensation.”

Alif who has lost his mother and his grandmother described their sufferings. “Alif keeps asking for his mother” The grandmother stated. “The child is now living with me. I am unable to fulfill all basic needs of this child. If we get compensation properly, it would help the child and our family a lot.”

Md. Taherul Islam Taher, PO, OSHE highlighted the contribution of garments industry to the economy of Bangladesh, previous garments industries accidents, current compensation and rehabilitation status of Rana Plaza victims through a power-point presentation.

Mr. AR Chowdhury REPON released the Data Base of Rana Plaza Disaster and Tazreen Fashions Accident Victims’ Children.

The network committee convener, Mrs. Kohinoor Akhter read out the demands of network on behalf of network members.
Photos of the flower laying ceremony at the Rana Plaza tragedy Memorial and Special conference commemorating the 1 year of Rana Plaza Industrial Homicide at Savar, Dhaka
In the morning flowers were laid at the memorial for the Rana Plaza victims created at the factory site. There were large number of workers, victims and their families present at the site. Even after 1 year of the tragedy, there were family members looking for their loved ones who kept approaching us for help. More than 300 workers are still missing and more than 100 unidentified bodies remain. More than 1130 workers died

**Government welcomes passage of Air Pollution Control (Amendment) (No. 2) Ordinance 2013 – Ban asbestos in Hong Kong**

The Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, said he was pleased to see the passage of the Air Pollution Control (Amendment) (No. 2) Ordinance 2013 (Amendment Ordinance) through the Legislative Council today (January 22). The Amendment Ordinance, which seeks to ban the import, transhipment, supply and use of all forms of asbestos so as to further protect public health, will come into operation on April 4, 2014.

"To reduce the risk of public exposure to asbestos fibres, the Air Pollution Control Ordinance (APCO) has banned the import and sale of the more hazardous amosite and crocidolite starting from 1996. To prevent release of asbestos fibres into the environment, the APCO also requires asbestos abatement works and related activities to be conducted by registered asbestos professionals in accordance with the requirements of the APCO and the codes of practice on asbestos control," said Mr Wong.

"The Amendment Ordinance will further reduce the risk of public exposure to environmental asbestos by imposing a total ban on asbestos. Except for goods in transit and registered proprietary Chinese medicine, the import, transhipment, supply and use of all forms of asbestos will be banned to prevent asbestos from entering Hong Kong. It also makes related amendments to the Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Asbestos) Regulation to ban works with all types of asbestos in industrial undertakings," he said.

To increase public knowledge of materials that contain asbestos, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) will work with the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board to publish a booklet about the most common sources of asbestos-containing materials. In addition, to enhance asbestos awareness of personnel engaged in construction activities, the EPD has uploaded a list of machinery/products which may contain asbestos to the department’s webpage (www.epd.gov.hk) for their reference.

**International Workers Memorial Day (April 28, 2014)**

The International Workers Memorial Day was observed across the world on April 28, 2014. Events were organized, protests were held, memorandums were given and workers expressed their right for a safe and healthy working environment and just and fair Labour laws across the world.

Details of the events can be seen at the Facebook page of Workers Memorial Day by clicking here.

**Update from Partners**

**OSHE**

OSHE has published a book of “Bangladesh Labour Law with amendments till 2013”. This book is expected to help persons and organizations working on labour rights issue to focus on rights to workers lawfully and precisely.

A meeting of the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions Accident Victims network was organized wherein convenor and member secretary were elected. Data Collection procedure of children affected by these tragedies was presented and discussed.

7 indoor camps were organized for Ship breaking workers at Sitakunda, Chittagong. The objectives were to provide basic medical health care and to ensure health services at doors of the workers. About 100 workers received treatment and free medicines were distributed.

**Environics Trust**

A two and half day meeting cum workshop had been arranged in Anugul from April 20-22 which is a coal mining belt and have some known names of steel manufacturing giants like Adani, Jindal, Mandakini and Monnet. About 100 participants
were present from all over the country, who are actively working on such issues at grass-root level. People from around the country discussed their issues and agendas. Apart from the local villagers who are the direct affected group many people from around the area also came to ingress the gathering.

Issues raised ranged from Pollution, no land for cultivation, temperature has increased in recent past, local people are migrating to other parts and migrant labors are taking their place. Local youths don’t have any work, the traditional knowledge and handicrafts are getting extinct. No developmental plan for people by the state/central government. There was severe opposition to forceful eviction of people from their lands

Participants and experts provided information on various subjects like the National Green Tribunal, new Land acquisition law, SAMATA judgement, data about mining in the country and more.

A field visit to the nearby NTPC thermal power plant presented a sad picture. The ash pond was un-wet and the ash was flying all over.

**PTRC**

Workers from Waghodia Industrial area visited Assistant Director (Medical Services), Vadodara and Joint Director ESI Corporation, Vadodara on 28 April to present Memorandum demanding facility of Hospital for secondary care in Waghodia area. Earlier representations have not been considered by State Govt. Both Officers were sympathetic and replied that they have already recommended higher office in favor but it is the Govt. in Gandhinagar that has turned down proposal without giving any reason.

**IBAS**

During the first quarter of 2014, Dr Helen Clayson and Dr Abhijeet Jadhav continued work on the “SHWAAS” asbestosis outreach project in India; IBAS, a supporter of their efforts, remains committed to this innovative grassroots evidence-based intervention.

Negotiations which had been ongoing regarding another pioneering project in a major asbestos-consuming Asian nation have been successfully completed with the award of substantial IBAS funding. Work is due to begin shortly. In February 2014, IBAS was delighted to participate in a series of activities organized by the German Federal Association of Asbestos Victims Groups including a seminar at the annual German Cancer Congress (Read More). The following month, during a fact-finding trip to Western Australia, the IBAS Coordinator addressed the Annual General Meeting of the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (ADSA), engaged in a series of discussions with ADSA officers and staff and visited the premises of the National Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases
A Fact-Finding Report on the General Strike and Violent Crackdown in Cambodia


“The demand of Cambodian workers to lift the minimum wage to US$ 160 is fair and reasonable, as their real wages have been stagnant despite their tremendous contribution to Cambodia’s economic growth. The ineffective response of the Labour Advisory Committee in meeting this demand has compelled the majority of workers to strike and protest. The disproportionate use of force by the government to suppress these legitimate protests demonstrate that the government is more concerned with protecting the interests and profits of the employers of the Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia than protecting the workers’ rights to a decent living wage, freedom of association and other basic human rights”

Download the report by clicking here

Pakistan: Nurses Strike for Rights

[16 March 2014: Hundreds of nurses are still occupying Lahore main Mall Road Lahore. They are demanding permanent jobs instead of adhoc appointments. Yesterday police had lathi charged but nurses fought back. Today most of the trade unions and political parties came to express solidarity. Punjab government has not yet accepted their demands and nurses have announced to continue struggle. All Pakistan Para Medical Staff Federation and young doctors are here to be with them. See report below from Pakistan Today, an editorial from Daily Times and URLs to other reports]

As government announces three-year extension in contracts of ad-hoc nurses, nurses continue sit-in, say it’s not enough. Nurses’ representative says they do not trust government, demand nothing less than regularisation

Nurses’ prayers were partially answered Saturday when the government offered them a three-year extension in their service contracts, however, till the filing of this report, they denied ending the protest at Charring Cross in the city, demanding an “absolutely permanent” place in the Health Department.

The announcement came as their violence-marred protest entered its sixth day. Nurses have been protesting against the Health Department for firing those who had been working on ad-hoc basis and for the regularisation of their services.

As per the government’s announcement made by Advisor to Punjab Chief Minister on Health Khwaja Salman Rafique, the nurses will be required to pass the Public Service Commission (PSC) exams at the end of the three-year contract to become eligible for a permanent post.

Rafique had proposed that in the event that the nurses under this contract fail to pass PCS exam, their contract will stand dissolved at the end of the three years.

However, after observing that the nurses were not buying the deal, the government representative assured the nurses that they will be given a permanent place upon the termination of their three-year contract.

Khalid Bhai from LEF, Pakistan adds that the strike ended on 17th March after government announced an initial 3 year contract and then to regularize the jobs of nurses. These were 2,800 contract nurses in Punjab province government hospital who went on strike when Punjab government started sacking them and asked them to apply again for jobs through Public Service Commission. These nurses were hired in last few years as the need for new nurses arose in government hospitals.

These brave nurses were on roads day and night for 8 consecutive days, which is a historical struggle in
Pakistan. A few pictures of their sit-in on The Mall Road in Lahore can be found [here](#) (Courtesy Khalid Bhai)

**ABAN Visit to Pakistan**

Sugio Furuya, Coordinator of ABAN network attended the Ban Asbestos Pakistan Conference on February 1, 2014 in Karachi. There were approx 160 participants from wide range of social parties including at least 30 medical students from some universities.

Sugio Furuya, Syed Fareed Ahmed, His Highness Barrister Samin Khan Lord of Sherpur, and Syed Mezab Ahmed

President Mamnoon Hussain of Pakistan sent a letter to the organizers. “I … wish to congratulate Syed Haroon Ahmed, Syed Mezab Ahmed and the organizers of this conference for their efforts to raise greater awareness about asbestos and various health issues involved with its use,” commented President Mamnoon Hussain. “Scientific research has proved that asbestos is a human carcinogen and there is no safe level of asbestos exposure.”

The International News reported, in response to the Pakistan conference, that Muhammed Yaseen Azad, a former president of Supreme Court Bar Council, said: “We need to value human lives. I do not care if a factory employing hundreds closes down if it is responsible for taking even one life.”

Syed Haroon Ahmed continued the ongoing fight to ban asbestos in Pakistan by filing a complaint in 2009 within the Pakistani judicial system in regards to the death of his brother, Syed Fareed Ahmed. His case has been taken all the way to the Supreme Court and the judgement is awaited

**Ban Asbestos Campaign gets a boost in Pakistan**

Pakistan is the latest country where the Ban Asbestos Campaign is making inroads. More than 170 dignitaries, experts and members of the general public took part in the Ban Asbestos Conference held on 1st February 2014 in Karachi. The Conference got a big boost with no less than the President of Pakistan Mamnoon Hussain stating in his message “Scientific research has proved that asbestos is a human carcinogen and there is no safe level of Asbestos exposure”.

One of the key organisers of the Conference was Mr. Syed Haroon Ahmed who lost his brother Syed Fareed in 2007 due to Asbestos exposure at the Dadex Eternit factory, which has been manufacturing Asbestos cement pipes for over 50 years. Mr. Ahmed initiated his fight to ban Asbestos in Pakistan by filing a petition in the Sindh High Court and the case now awaits decision at the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Addressing the delegates, the ACEEU President and BWI Asia Pacific Regional Committee Titular Member Bro. Md. Ishtiaq Virk mentioned “The world over, millions of people have suffered due to Asbestos exposure and, like several other countries, we also need to get asbestos banned in Pakistan”.

The Asian Ban Asbestos Network* (A-BAN) Coordinator, Sugio Furuya made a presentation on the Ban Asbestos campaign and reported on the global and regional progress made to date.

Asbestos is the biggest industrial killer of modern times. After leaving its devastating legacy in Europe, the asbestos trade has been thriving in developing economies. According to the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database, Pakistan’s Asbestos consumption is more than 10,000 metric tons per year as of 2012.

BWI is a founding member of A-BAN launched in 2009. Read More
NHRC wants report on asbestos' health effects

The National Human Rights Commission has taken cognizance of a complaint alleging that over 50,000 people die every year due to asbestos-related cancer in India and asked all state governments including Delhi to submit their reports on the issue.

The complainant Gopal Krishna of Toxics Watch Alliance has alleged that though mining of asbestos has been technically banned by the government, but it allows its import and that too from countries which do not prefer its domestic use. The complainant has sought NHRC’s intervention for a ban on the use of white asbestos. It is a fibrous material used for building roofs and walls.

Delhi government in its report has said there are three factories in the capital that require handling of asbestos. It said the government maintains health records of all workers at these factories.

Read More

Domestically-made non-asbestos roofing pieces

(VEN) – Doctor of Science Do Quoc Quang and his co-workers at the Research Institute of Technology for Machinery under the Ministry of Industry and Trade have successfully researched and developed a non-asbestos roofing production line. This technology has created a new breakthrough to replace imported non-asbestos roofing pieces and most importantly, protect people’s health and avoid toxic materials.

Production of non-asbestos roofing pieces in Tan Thuan Cuong Production and Trade JSC

Ninety-five percent of equipment manufactured domestically

DSc Do Quoc Quang said the biggest difficulty was to find a substitute for asbestos as most of the materials to consolidate cement foundation did not have the specific features like durability and stickiness of asbestos. Read More

NIOH, Ahmedabad, "not competent" to judge if workers suffering from occupational disease be compensated

Strongly responding to Gujarat government’s decision not to accede to its demand for including two important occupational diseases in the list of those that can invite compensation under the employees’ compensation Act, Vadodara-based NGO People’s Training and Research Centre (PTRC) has protested against the manner in which the decision was taken.

In a letter to Gujarat’s labour secretary, PTRC director Jagdish Patel has especially found it strange that the matter of paying compensation -- to those suffering from musculoskeletal diseases (MSD) and the diseases caused due to exposure to polyacrylate -- was referred to the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), Ahmedabad. “NIOH carries out scientific research in occupational health. It does not work on social impact of occupational diseases”, Patel has asserted.

In its two-liner, Patel was informed by the Gujarat government a few days back that the director, industrial safety and health, had taken the opinion of the NIOH, Ahmedabad, which “refused to recommend” on the matter. Polyacrylate is found several of applications of Gujarat’s pharmaceutical and cosmetic industry, leading to serious lung diseases, which are caused on exposure to polyacrylate.

As for MSD, it is caused to different types of workers, ranging from computer operators in printing industry, construction workers, agriculture workers, workers in manufacturing, drivers, mine workers and others, who become prey to spondylitis and other disabilities. Workers of General Motors, Halol, went on strike in 2010 against refusal of the company to give compensation to those suffering from MSD. Read More

Our culture is consumed with various devices that somehow magically appear in neat little boxes at the store or at our front door. But guess what? Those devices come at a human cost. Here's just one aspect of that.

FACT CHECK TIME:

1. Ever year in China, over 12 million teens leave home to find work. CNN reports 17 million, though their story focuses on farms, not factories.
2. They're part of 260 million Chinese who must travel far from home just to make a living, CNN reports, citing the China Labour Bulletin.
3. This Fast Company article has a first-person account of days being 8 a.m. to about 9 p.m., not including travel. Global Labour Rights reports long hours and seven-days-a-week work for factory workers. China Labor Watch reports working 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. with one day off a month when production is heavy.
4. Benzene causes leukemia. Benzene is a category 1 carcinogen banned in most Western countries for industrial use.
5. The BBC and The Guardian report on n-hexane poisoning.
6. In China, over 200 million people are working in hazardous environments.

This clip is made by "Who Pays the Price?" which is about to be a full-blown documentary. Read More

Group to file complaint against Cal/OSHA over staffing levels

SACRAMENTO — The health and safety of California workers are being threatened because of an inadequate number of state workplace inspectors, a new report says.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a nonprofit whistle-blower group in Washington, says it plans Tuesday to file a formal complaint with the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration, contending that California's version of the agency no longer meets minimum standards.

The complaint is based on a new report analyzing staffing at the California Division of Occupational Safety & Health, known as Cal/OSHA, that found that the state has fewer workplace inspectors than a quarter-century ago.

At the end of 2013, California had 170 inspectors, said the report written by a former Cal-OSHA employee. That's down 8% from 1989 totals, when the state had far fewer workers, and 11% less than in 2011, when Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown replaced Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

As a result, California has just one inspector for every 109,000 workers, compared with a ratio of 1 to 66,000 in states where the federal government is responsible for job site safety.

But the state disputes the report's estimate of 170 inspectors. Christine Baker, director of the California Department of Industrial Relations, which oversees the safety agency, said the state has 182 inspectors and is adding 41 more after July 1 as part of a restructuring.

But Garrett Brown, who wrote the report and recently retired from Cal-OSHA after 20 years with the agency, is skeptical. "Staffing levels are dangerously low," he warned in the report.

"Not having enough compliance inspectors means that Cal-OSHA is not able to respond to worker complaints in the time period Fed-OSHA wants us to," he said. Read More

Global Atlas of environmental conflicts launched in Brussels

[BRUSSELS, 17 March 2014, under embargo until 19 March 2014, 1 AM CET]

The Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade (EJOLT) project launches today its Global Atlas of Environmental Justice, a visually attractive and interactive online mapping platform detailing around 1000 environmental conflicts (and growing). It allows users to search and filter across 100 fields and to browse by commodity, company, country and type of conflict. With one click you can find a global snapshot of nuclear, waste or water conflicts, or the places where communities have an issue with a particular mining or chemical company. Click on any point to find the actors and a conflict description with the outcome and sources. Maps you create using the search and filter can be shared on your webpage or facebook. Featured maps will focus on issues ranging from fracking to conflicts over mega-infrastructure projects to maps on violent targeting of activists (and more).

The Atlas is a product of the EU-funded EJOLT project. Over 100 people from 23 universities and...
environmental justice organisations in 18 countries plus dozens of independent collaborators from all around the world have joined forces to create this huge and valuable resource. The project is coordinated by Professor Joan Martinez-Alier and his team of ecological economists from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (ICTA-UAB).

“The Atlas illustrates how ecological conflicts are increasing around the world, driven by material demands fed primarily by the rich and middle class subsections of the global population,” says Martinez-Alier. “The most impacted are poor, marginalized and indigenous communities. They usually do not have the political power to ensure access to environmental justice and health.” Over 2000 different corporations and financial institutions are involved. This includes many corporate and state actors from developed countries, but with growing participation from the emerging economies.

The atlas can be accessed at http://ejatlas.org/

[Bangladesh] Chemicals at workplace kill 63 people in three months

DHAKA, April 28, 2014 (BSS)- At least 63 people were killed in Bangladesh in last three months by the toxic chemicals used at workplace, said a survey conducted by Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) today. At least 63 people were killed by the hazardous chemicals used at their workplace in Bangladesh while as per an ILO report, about two million people are killed annually across the world and about 160 m people have chemical related diseases.

The information came out today at a seminar titled 'National Seminar on Safety and Health in the Use of Chemicals at Work: Bangladesh Prospective' at National Press Club organized by OSHE.

State Minister M Mujibul Haque Chunnu, chief guest of the seminar said, "Owners and labourers should be aware of the toxic elements associated with the chemicals at their workplace."

National expert on Chemical Safety Dr Shahriar Hossain presented the key-note paper while Member Secretary of National Center for Child Welfare Excellence (NCCWE) Chowdhury Ashikul Alam, Labour Advisor of Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BFF) Kazi Saifuddin Ahmed also spoke, among others.

Dr Shahriar Hossain said, "Hundreds of people are killed annually by their work particularly in ship-breaking, tanneries, chemical industries and agro-farming are in the top death ranks."

According to the presentation, around 20 thousand tannery workers are at high health risk. Almost each and every worker are exposed by toxic chemicals in their work station and in every year on average three to five hundred workers lost their job due to serious illness.

Speakers at the seminars stressed the importance of proper co-operation between health, labour and environment ministries to overcome the problem.

Read More

India's coal inferno

India's planned power expansion depends overwhelmingly on coal, with over a hundred huge new generation units planned by 2030. Sarah Stirk reports on the nightmare the dash for coal is bringing to once peaceful rural communities.

The smell, a mix of human and animal excrement, combined with acrid industrial pollution makes the air gritty, stinging eyes and making breathing a struggle.

Champa's eyes are surrounded by dark circles and her face is thin and drawn. It began with a fever, pain in her limbs, and she was then diagnosed with tuberculosis.

"I was diagnosed with TB two years ago now. I have been on medication but I am not getting any better. I have difficulty breathing and even talking is hard. It has been like this for five or six years - ever since the plant started, our problems have started too."

Champa is not alone. She is one of millions of people in India whose health and lives are being blighted by the country's surge in coal-based power generation.

170 gigawatts of new coal generation planned by 2022

India ranks third in the world in the production of carbon dioxide and is burning more coal than ever before, with 66% of power generated by coal-fired thermal power plants.

Future plans are for massive expansion, with India's 12th five-year plan ending 2017 adding 76GW of
coal-fired power capacity. The 13th five-year plan, ending in 2022, aims to add another 93GW. Read More

**Chinese Workers at IBM Factory on Strike amid Company Sale**

HONG KONG — More than 1,000 workers have gone on strike this week at an IBM factory in southeastern China in the latest sign of labor activism as companies’ acute shortage of blue-collar workers makes employees increasingly willing to take to the streets.

IBM is selling Lenovo its x86 computer server business, which includes the factory in the southeastern city of Shenzhen, where the strike is unfolding. Lenovo agreed in January to pay $2.3 billion for the business in a transaction that is still subject to regulatory approval.

A video posted on Chinese social media shows hundreds of workers in blue factory smocks standing on Tuesday in front of an IBM building in Shenzhen, a sprawling electronics industry hub adjacent to Hong Kong with more than 10 million permanent residents and migrant workers. “Workers are not a commodity,” read one homemade banner; another said, “Give us back our respect.”

IBM said in a news release that it hoped workers for the wholly owned subsidiary being sold, International Systems Technology Company in Shenzhen, would be willing to continue working for Lenovo but that it would offer them compensation if they did not accept the new employer.

By KEITH BRADSHER: read More

**Another film to document ill Samsung factory workers**

A documentary complement to ‘Another Family’ is being funded largely through citizen donations.

A citizen fund-raising campaign is under way to support the theatrical release of “The Empire of Shame,” a documentary on occupational diseases among Samsung Electronics semiconductor plant workers by director Hong Li-gyeong.

The move comes amid a wave of support for director Kim Tae-youn’s “Another Family,” which is based on the story of one worker’s struggle with leukemia and eventual death.

The distributor, CinemaDAL, started the campaign to support the film’s release on Jan. 29 by setting the goal of raising 30 million won (US$28,200) through the social funding site Tumblbug. As of Feb. 17, it reported raising almost 18 million won (US$17,500) from 554 donors.

“It looks like people are taking more notice of ‘Empire of Shame’ as ‘Another Family’ gets more and more attention,” said Oh Bo-ra, head of planning for CinemaDAL. “The fundraising effort has been moving very quickly.”

“Empire” is set to premiere on Mar. 6, the seventh anniversary of the death of Hwang Yu-mi, a 23-year-old who had been diagnosed with leukemia while working at a Samsung Semiconductors plant in Suwon. Talks with theaters are under way for a release on 20 screens - an average number for documentaries in South Korea.

By Kim Hyo-sil: Read More

**Urgent need to recycle rare metals**

Rare earth metals are important components in green energy products such as wind turbines and eco-cars. But the scarcity of these metals is worrying the EU.

The demand for metals such as neodymium (Nd) and dysprosium (Dy) is increasing much faster than production. These metals are used in technologies such as the generators that store power in wind turbines, and the electric motors that propel electric and hybrid cars. But they are also used in everyday products like computers and mobile phones.

Rare earth metals do occur in Earth’s crust, but not in sufficiently high concentrations. This is why only one country -- China -- has so far been supplying the entire world with these elements. However, in recent years, China has begun to restrict its export of these materials.

Forecasts show that as early as next year, these metals will be hard to come by.

**Clean material**

This explains why the recycling of rare earth metals from scrap is fast becoming an important research topic. Seven major European research institutes (Fraunhofer, CEA, TNO, VTT, SINTEF, Tecnalia and SP) have joined forces to invest in a joint programme (Value from Waste) aimed at tackling this important issue.
"The aim is to extract valuable materials from the waste streams. The challenges lie in the fact that the material must be sufficiently clean in order to be recycled, and we have to be sure that it is not contaminated by other harmful materials," explains Odd Løvhaugen of SINTEF ICT. Read More

Workers at Samsung supplier in China win pay increase after strike

A strike by more than a thousand workers at Samsung supplier, Shanmukang Technology in Dongguan, ended over the weekend when the Korean-owned company agreed to increase overtime rates for weekdays and weekends and double the employees’ monthly subsidy. The basic monthly salary however remained the same.

The strike broke out on 27 March when the company, which manufactures and assembles mobile phone cases for Samsung, announced that it would deduct additional social insurance contributions from the workers’ already low basic salary of 1,380 yuan per month. See photo below.

The production line workers, who have to assemble phone cases once every four seconds for more than ten hours each shift, took the lead and went on strike Thursday evening. They were later joined by workers from other departments, including finance, human resources, procurement, and administration, according to one worker’s personal website.

“This is the third strike that I have experienced at this company,” said the worker Tong Er. After this latest strike, management agreed to raise the overtime rate on weekdays from 11.59 yuan to 15.98 yuan per hour, up 38 percent, and increase the rate on weekends from 15.98 yuan to 19.98 yuan per hour, up 25 percent. Read More

Tributes

Deaths due to Silicosis in Khambhat, Gujarat

Thakorbhai Fatehsingh Rathod on 30-03-14

Jivan Kalidas Baraiya on 24-03-14. Jivan is survived by his wife Laliben and 4 children

Nannusha Diwan aged 33 died on 5-1-14

Rukhiben Parmar, 65 (3-01-14)

Chirag Soni, 32(?) (17-01/14)
Chimna Ram Meghwal, sandstone worker in Jodhpur, Rajasthan died due to Silicosis on January 6, 2014.

Mr Choi Hyong-Sik, co-chair of BANKO and leader of Mesothelioma victims group in Korea died on 3 March losing his fight to Mesothelioma victim. He was a suspected environmental victim and the first beneficiary of Korean Asbestos Victims Relief Act for those not covered by workers compensation insurance in 2009.

Read the tribute on IBAS website

Regional News

Hill of death

During a film shoot at the beautiful Roro hill in Jharkhand’s Chaibasa district, the villain takes out his gun to kill a young man. The moment he shoots, onlooker Rango Deogam bursts into laughter and yells at the camera crew, “You are shooting a death scene on the hill of death.”

The shoot is stopped because of his outrageous act and Deogam is escorted out when he starts coughing blood.

The 65-year-old resident of the Roro village then clears his throat and says, “That’s death.” Deogam is not the only one in the Roro village who is coughing blood. An estimated 200 people in the 14 villages near the Roro hill are dying slowly from a lung disease called abestosis because of an abandoned cryotile asbestos mine in the area.

“The exact number of the victims can only be known after an extensive medical camp is held in the affected villages,” says Punit Minz, convener of Bindrai Institute for Research Study and Action (BIRSA), a non-profit that has been working in the area for the past decade to educate the residents about the problems with asbestos.

Guidelines flouted

The cryotile asbestos mine—which was owned by Birla’s Hyderabad Asbestos Cement Products Limited (HAPCL)—was operational for 20 years between 1963 and 1983 at Roro hill. It was abruptly closed after the mine ran into huge losses. HAPCL has since then changed its name thrice and is now called HIL and is owned by C K Birla. The company website says it provides green solutions.

The company, which employed over 1,500 workers at the site, chose not to inform the workers about the health hazards because of exposure to asbestos. If the company would have sensitised the people, it could have saved the workers who are suffering from asbestosis, which is curable if diagnosed early. Asbestos is a chronic disease that affects the functioning of lungs. Advanced asbestosis leads to heart or respiratory failure.

The development of asbestosis is slow and the disease becomes critical about 15 years after the first exposure to asbestos. Also, excessive exposure can result in death within 10 years. Read More

Articles on Asbestos Issue on IBAS website

Awards to Schmidheiny and Candidacy of Paolo Boffetta attacked by Victims’ Groups by Laurie Kazan-Allen

We are now just 20 days into the New Year and the deluge of asbestos news which was observed throughout 2013 shows no sign of abating. European and Latin American asbestos victims’ groups, which have consistently called for industry and government personnel to be prosecuted for asbestos crimes, have in 2014 ratcheted up efforts to prevent those linked to this deadly industry or perceived to have supported it, from enjoying prestigious awards or high-level positions.

An Italian asbestos victims’ group from Casale Monferrato – AFeVA – has obtained legal representation in the United States in its bid to have Stephan Schmidheiny stripped of an honorary doctorate awarded by Yale University in 1996. AFeVA argues that Schmidheiney’s 2012 criminal conviction by an Italian court should debar him from this honor.1 Although the Ivy League college has not yet rescinded this award, the Yalegate scandal is far from over.2 In a letter he sent to Yale on January 14, 2014 AFeVA’s U.S. lawyer Christopher Meisenkothen asked whether Yale had, in deciding to bestow the doctorate on...
Schmidheiny, considered the deadly impact his commercial activities had had on workers, family members and residents in Casale Monferrato.

Read More

The Curse of Asbestos - by Eliane Brum

Victims launch an international offensive to revoke the titles and awards of billionaire Stephan Schmidheiny, former owner of the Swiss Eternit Group. In Brazil, they are focusing on the Order of the Southern Cross, granted to him by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

If it is up to asbestos victims, 2014 may be the worst year in the life of Swiss billionaire Stephan Schmidheiny. They are getting ready to open another front in the struggle to ban the carcinogenic fiber. This time, they are looking at something perhaps more valuable than the actual fortune of the businessman whose family founded the Swiss Eternit Group. Throughout the 20th century, the industrial group planted factories around the world and through them sowed fatal diseases such as asbestosis (known as “stone lung”) and Mesothelioma (the so-called “asbestos cancer”). Now, the target of patients and their families is the intangible property to which the Swiss [tycoon] devoted much money, battalions of marketers and his greatest efforts: his biography.

In Brazil, lawyers of the Brazilian Association of People Exposed to Asbestos (ABREA) plan to revoke the prestigious Order of the Southern Cross, granted to the Swiss billionaire by then President Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1996. The offensive is part of an international strategy of asbestos victims, led by Italian representatives. Since last year, the Italian organization AFEVA (Association of Relatives and Victims of Asbestos) has been pressuring Yale University, in the United States, to revoke the honorary doctorate of humane letters also granted to Schmidheiny in 1996. In Venezuela and Costa Rica, similar initiatives are being organized to pressure institutions that have granted him awards. The goal is to revoke one by one the titles and awards cited by the billionaire in his official biography. For each honor there is a group of victims organizing to press for its annulment. “We are not interested in destroying a human being, but in the search for the truth. And the truth is that there is no honor in the conduct of Mr. Schmidheiny,” wrote Bruno Pesce, coordinator of the AFEVA to the Yale University administration.

First Asbestos Claim Brought Against the Dutch State - by Bob Ruers – Member of the Dutch Senate and asbestos victims' lawyer

Klaas Jasperse, a former employee who is suffering from asbestos-related cancer (mesothelioma), has brought a claim against the Dutch State for damages.

Mr Jasperse worked in an aluminium factory in Vlissingen for more than 30 years, where he was exposed to asbestos between 1977 in 1984 on almost a daily basis. As a result, he was diagnosed with mesothelioma in 2009. His employer, the Pechiney aluminium factory, had failed to warn him against the dangers of asbestos and had not provided him with any protective equipment or clothing. Mr Jasperse brought a claim against his employer, but the company became insolvent. As a result, Mr Jasperse did not receive his wages and received state benefits instead, which were much lower than his previous income.

Supported by his lawyer, Mr Ruers, who is associated with the Dutch Committee for Asbestos Victims, Mr Jasperse brought a claim against the Dutch State in 2013. According to Mr Ruers, the Dutch State acted negligently by failing to supervise as required by law and by failing to pass legislation to protect employees in a timely fashion.

Thailand Ministry Backs Immediate Ban - by Laurie Kazan-Allen

On Wednesday, January 29, 2014, the Thai Public Health Ministry (MoPH) passed a resolution calling for the immediate prohibition on the use of chrysotile asbestos, the only form of asbestos still legal in Thailand.1 The next day (January 30), members of the Thailand Ban Asbestos Network (T-BAN) met with a ministry official to discuss developments and request documentation about the decision to outlaw asbestos use.2 Welcoming renewed government support for banning asbestos, T-BAN Coordinator Mrs. Somboon Sreekumdokke urged politicians and officials to work alongside civil society campaigners on a coordinated program to raise asbestos awareness and decontaminate the national infrastructure.

Since T-BAN was established two years ago, it has been closely monitoring the governments’ progress towards honouring a three-year-old commitment to ban asbestos.3 Unfortunately, the 2011 ban
asbestos resolution adopted by the National Health Commission set off a huge backlash from foreign as well as Thai asbestos vested interests. It has been alleged that Russian asbestos lobbyists exerted financial and political pressure on Thai civil servants and medical experts to overturn support for the ban asbestos policy. While it now appears that they have not succeeded, it is not unreasonable to believe that their efforts contributed to the three year wait for action.

An Alice-in-Wonderland scenario which unfolded during the MoPHs asbestos deliberations may very well be related to this pressure. Read More

The children who played with asbestos

Children in a County Durham village used to spend their days playing with lethal asbestos from a local factory. One, now 51, has cancer. What will happen to the rest?

It is the late 1960s and a little girl is playing hopscotch on a grid she has marked out - not with chalk, but a lump of asbestos. Forty-five years later she will be contemplating the cancerous mesothelioma in her lungs which is "growing out like a fungus". "I was doomed from then," Caroline Wilcock says. "There was nothing I could have done between then and now to make a difference. I'm pleased I didn't know it."

She was one of many children in Bowburn who, between 1967 and 1983, played with asbestos from the factory opposite her house. Its parent company, Cape Intermediate Holdings, is paying her a "substantial" out-of-court settlement, although it has denied liability for her illness. Caroline describes a white, chalky film of asbestos dust on "the grass, the flowers and the bushes". It also settled on window ledges.

The mothers were less impressed. Ann Sproat, a friend of Caroline's sister, remembers them constantly cleaning. "If cleaning wasn't done we couldn't see out the windows," she says. "It was coming down like little dust particles, like tiny little aniseed balls."

The children would share the pieces of asbestos they found, marking out cricket stumps and anything else their imagination conjured up.

The thought of her brother creating a zebra crossing on the main road through the village makes Caroline laugh. It is striking how much she laughs considering the grim nature of the conversation.

She jokes about trying to get on to drugs trials, about the "awful" operation to test a sample of lung and about whether "incapacitated" is the right word for what will eventually happen to her.

Laughing makes her cough. She is also often tired and short of breath. Her treatment is palliative - there is no cure for mesothelioma.

Her doctor, Jeremy Steele, says there must be a factor that makes some people susceptible, but they do not know what it is. "There's an element of luck - or bad luck - involved," he says.

Although Cape Intermediate Holdings will pay her, the company has denied it was responsible for Caroline's illness.

By Francesca Williams: BBC News: Read More

Revolutionary Toronto cancer treatment gives asbestos victims new life

Like many people who were exposed to asbestos, it took more than 20 years before former Ontario Hydro mechanic Man Hong Chan knew anything was wrong.

When he started feeling short of breath during his weekly soccer matches, Chan went to the doctor and his worst fears were confirmed: he had mesothelioma, one of the most aggressive forms of lung cancer. "It was scathing news. I was really scared," he said. "Most people don't even last two years."

But thanks to a new therapy pioneered by a pair of Toronto doctors, 74-year-old Chan has been cancer free for more than four years.

The technique used by Dr. John Cho and Dr. Marc de Perrot at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre has doubled survival times in patients with mesothelioma, according to research they published last month. Their success has drawn attention from around the world and they say doctors at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota will soon attempt to use their method.

Cho, a radiation oncologist, and de Perrot, a thoracic surgeon, paired up to turn conventional treatment on its head, giving patients radiation before surgery instead of after it. They've dubbed
the technique SMART, for Surgery for Mesothelioma After Radiation Therapy, and Cho says three-year survival rates have more than doubled, from 32 per cent to 72 per cent.

And because the study only started five years ago, survival rates could be pushed further in the years to come.

Mesothelioma is caused when the microscopic fibres from asbestos are inhaled and act like needles, slowly working their way into the lining of the lungs over decades. What make the cancer so hard to treat, Cho says, is that some of those fibres and affected cells would escape during surgery and the cancer would spread anew.

By: Marco Chown Oved | Read More

Asbestos fibre imports – coming legally to Europe soon?

The manufacture, marketing and use of asbestos have been banned in Europe since the end of 2004*. But EU law allowed one exception for imported diaphragms incorporating chrysotile asbestos fibres for existing electrolysis cells. This highly specific let-out was included so that a German chlorine production plant and a Swedish hydrogen production plant could continue operating “until they reach the end of their service life, or until suitable asbestos-free substitutes become available, whichever is the sooner”.

Ten years on, under pressure from the multinational Dow Chemicals, the European Commission and the body in charge of REACH implementation, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), are thinking of extending the let-out up to 2025 or after. Furthermore, documents available on the ECHA website indicate that this derogation introduced in Annex XVII of REACH would be extended to allow not only diaphragms containing asbestos fibres, but also the asbestos fibres needed to maintain them to be imported into Europe. If these proposals go through, tonnes of asbestos could be legally imported into Europe each year.

Asbestos victim support groups are taking action. In a recent letter to the European Commission, they protest that ECHA’s proposed changes to the existing derogation are flatly at odds with the EU’s demands for a worldwide ban on asbestos. They also argue that, in pure law, it flies in the face of European Court of Justice rulings that the derogations laid down in REACH’s Annex XVII should be interpreted very narrowly. They also point out that asbestos-free electrolysis methods of chlorine manufacture are available now, so there is no good reason for extending this production method.

Both the Commission and ECHA are defending their decision by claiming that the risks to workers in European firms are fully controlled.

ECHA is currently running a public consultation on the proposed amendments to Annex XVII of REACH. All interested parties are invited to submit their comments preferably before 29 May 2014 and no later than 19 September 2014. Read More

Insurers urged to fund research into asbestos cancer

Lung experts say the insurance industry should fund research into the deadly asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma.

Writing for the BBC News website, Dr John Moore-Gillon of the British Lung Foundation says this would aid research - and cut future insurance payouts.

Symptoms of mesothelioma take decades to develop after exposure to asbestos fibres, but it can then kill quickly.

An insurance industry spokesman said discussions were set to take place shortly with the BLF on the issue.

Payouts

Mesothelioma is most prevalent among those who worked in industries with heavy exposure to asbestos up to the 1980s, including construction, shipbuilding, engineering and power generation.

About 2,000 people are diagnosed each year, and the numbers are set to increase over the next 30 years, with an estimated death toll of between 56,000 and 63,000, according to the Department for Work and Pensions.

The Mesothelioma Bill, passed by parliament last month, will enable many thousands of people with mesothelioma, or their families, to apply for payouts from a £380m pot funded by the insurance industry over the next decade. Read More

Asbestos report highlights danger to women - 20/03/2014

Women are likely to form a significant proportion of the ‘third-wave’ of people with asbestos-related
diseases, according to the findings of a new research report 'The Asbestos Narratives', released today (Thursday, March 20).

Conducted by Southern Cross University, the report investigated the social and psychological impacts of asbestos disease. It also led to the development of an interactive online community, aimed at helping reduce the impacts for the sufferers, their families and carers.

The project has been funded by Comcare through the Wave 2 of the Asbestos Innovation Fund. The researchers also worked closely with Slater & Gordon's Asbestos Practice, the Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australian (ADFA) and the vTeam (managed private social networks).

Associate Professor Rick van der Zwan, director of the University’s Regional Initiative for Social Innovation and Research (RISIR) and project leader, said more than 60 men and women shared their experiences of living with an asbestos-related diagnosis during the research.

“We found through this project that there are several distinct, but related communities each facing multiple challenges,” Professor van der Zwan said.

“Women are likely to form a significant proportion of the emerging third wave of exposure to asbestos and may suffer considerable hardship as a result.”

Professor van der Zwan said approximately 3500 people died in Australia from asbestos-related disease each year. An estimated 40,000 people will eventually die.

“The medical effects of this disease are well researched, but little has been known about the social, psychological and economic implications for those diagnosed, their carers and their families,” he said.

“Exposure to asbestos can result in a range of debilitating diseases, all of which can leave people physically and socially isolated.”

Calls for more asbestos awareness after fears of a 'third wave' of diseases

A Broken Hill contractor is urging renovators to be aware of asbestos in their homes, after concerns a spike in diseases caused by the material is on the horizon.

Southern Cross University's released a report warning of a new "third-wave" of people suffering asbestos-related illnesses.

The Asbestos Diseases Foundation says the number of people being diagnosed with the illnesses is rising, and regional areas are at significant risk.

Building contractor Chris Hicks says there's a lack of awareness about how prevalent the material is in homes.

He says he expects an influx of more call-outs to have it removed with the rise of do-it-yourself projects.

"I do talk to a lot of people and find that they really don't know what asbestos is," he said. Read More

Killer dust

A long vertical pipe sits against white-painted brickwork in the corner of a cramped storeroom. Two men wearing orange boiler suits and gloves crouch at its base. One uses a scraper to remove lumps of what looks like wet papier-mâché from the outside of the pipe, into a red bag held by the other.

Both men are breathing through facemasks, their air sucked from outside the isolation unit: a short, makeshift corridor constructed from black plastic panels and transparent polythene sheeting. An extractor fan hums relentlessly.

It might look like a scene from a horror movie in which scientists fight to contain a virus, but the truth is more banal – though no less deadly. The two men are removing asbestos insulation from a heating pipe in a west London hospital.

Ordinarily there would be bright yellow tape with the words "WARNING asbestos" on it, the site supervisor tells me. But this is an especially sensitive job. The neighbouring ward’s beds are filled by patients with acute respiratory conditions, and the hospital’s management decided that advertising the true nature of the work might cause alarm. Read More

Gauteng to be rid of all asbestos roofing

Gauteng will pay for poor people to replace their asbestos roofing in a programme aimed at eliminating the health hazards caused by the material.

The project is expected to cost the provincial government millions.
Malibongwe Kanjana, chief of operations in the Gauteng human settlements department, said yesterday that asbestos roofs were a health hazard.

"The asbestos in many houses is old. Some of the asbestos roofs are broken and research shows that this causes respiratory problems," he said.

Kanjana said the department would focus solely on helping poor communities and households in the lower-income bracket. People who have been given title deeds to their houses will also be eligible.

Municipalities are trying to establish the number of houses with asbestos roofs in their jurisdiction.

"We will lobby other people who can help us in a private-public partnership to assist those not belonging to the lower-income groups."

"But we are committed to eradicating asbestos in the entire province," Kanjana said.

Penwell Dlamini: Read More

**Prevention of asbestos-related diseases discussed**

The Health Environment Management Agency (HEMA), under the Ministry of Health, held a conference in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to discuss the prevention of asbestos-related diseases on February 25 in Hanoi.

Asbestos is one of the elements in the inorganic toxic dust workers are exposed to in the manufacturing process, according to the WHO and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

It causes respiratory problems, silicosis disease, pleural thickening and cancer.

WHO policy has encouraged countries to gradually eliminate asbestos and use substitutes. As a result, over 40 countries worldwide have put asbestos on the list of banned substances for use or trade, such as Japan, Sweden and Finland. Read More

**Residents warned vs. exposure to asbestos**

Manila, Philippines – Quezon City residents have been warned anew on the dangers posed by over exposure to asbestos-tainted construction materials prominently used for housing projects in the ’50s and ’60s.

First District Councillor Victor Ferrer Jr. issued the warning after a World Health Organization report revealed that asbestos-tainted materials can cause lung cancer, mesothelomia, cancer of the larynx and ovary and asbestosis (fibrosis of the lungs).

In the rounds he made in the city’s 142 barangays, Ferrer expressed alarm after he personally discovered that some old houses still have roofs made from asbestos.

“Certain improvements were made in the residences but some of the owners have failed to remove the asbestos roofs and change them to a safer roofing material,” Ferrer said.

Ferrer also supported the bid of toxic watchdog EcoWaste Coalition and the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines in calling for the concerned agencies to take drastic actions to eliminate asbestos in consumer products in the local market.

In a joint statement, the EcoWaste Coalition and the TUCP called on the authorities to expand the prohibition on the manufacture, importation, distribution and sale of consumer products that can expose consumers and workers to asbestos, a group of cancer-causing fibrous materials.

Read More

**Silicosis: The curse of Lesotho's miners**

When Lebina Liphapang last went down the world’s deepest gold mine, he was already feeling sick. He had worked underground in South Africa for 29 years, far away from his wife and children back home in Lesotho. He was a general labourer, a winch driver, then a stoker.

It was harsh, he says, working underground. The darkness, the heat. "In the early days, we didn't have mouth or nose protection. It was hardly bearable," he said.

He wanted to continue working, despite the conditions. But one day in 2003 he asked for his retirement package. "I thought: 'If I continue to work here I am going to die.' As much as it is necessary to go to South Africa and work and provide a living for my family, this work was completely hazardous to me."

He is one of tens of thousands of gold miners - many of them migrant workers like himself - who have registered for what is thought to be South Africa's largest class action lawsuit in history. Three law firms - Richard Spoor Attorneys, Abrahams Kiewitz Attorneys and the Legal Resources Center - have filed affidavits against 31 mining companies
accusing them of damaging their clients’ health by exposing them to elevated levels of dust underground.

The suit charges the companies with 12 specific forms of neglect and endangerment, and is awaiting certification in the South Gauteng High Court in Johannesburg

Author Victoria Schneider: Read More

Fourth victim of deadly silicosis in 2014 fails to wake up Gujarat officialdom to pay up compensation

Poonabhai Ramabhai Parmar, 59, has become the fourth victim of the deadly silicosis disease -- which is rampant in and around Khambhat town of Central Gujarat -- this year. Parmar breathed his last on February 25 night. Large number of locals joined his funeral on February 26 morning. Informing about his death, Jagdish Patel, senior social activist of the state-based NGO People’s Training and Research Centre (PTRC), Vadodara, said, “Parmar worked in a textile mill in Khambhat till 1994, and when mill was closed he turned to agate polishing. He was diagnosed of silicosis at Sri Krishna Hospital, Karamsad, in December 2012. He was bedridden for the few months.”

Patel, who is one of India’s topmost campaigners against the occupational disease, said, “This is the fourth death in 2014 following the death of Rukhiben Jethabhai, Isub Ibrahim and Nannusha Diwan. In 2013, as many as 14 male and 2 female workers died of silicosis.” He regretted, “In 2012 Government of Gujarat declared a welfare scheme for the workers dying of silicosis according to which Rs 1 was to be paid to the dependents. For technical reasons the scheme could not take off.”

Pointing out that recently the Government of Gujarat declared revised scheme, Patel said, “Accordingly, now the amount of Rs 1 lakh is to be given by the board for unorganized sector workers and not any insurance company. The scheme is to be implemented by the Rural Labour Commissioner (RLC). A resolution passed on January 4, 2013 reads that the rules should be drafted jointly by the director, Industrial Safety and Health (DISH) and the RLC to implement the government’s revised scheme.”

Chip Profits Help Soften Other Losses at Samsung

In the marketplace, Samsung Electronics and Apple battle for customers. In the courts, they fight over patents. Yet every time Apple sells an iPhone, Samsung quietly cheers, too.

In addition to being one of Apple’s main competitors, Samsung is one of its top suppliers. Samsung provides the application processor in the iPhone 5S — the brains of Apple’s flagship handset, and one of its most expensive components.

Because Samsung is not only the biggest maker of smartphones, but also a leading provider of parts to Apple and other gadget makers, company executives say they are confident that the electronics giant can work its way through a difficult period. On Friday, Samsung confirmed that sales growth and earnings had slowed sharply in the fourth quarter of 2013 and warned that business conditions would remain challenging in the first half of this year. Apple’s sales have risen, and those gains have shored up Samsung by lifting the performance of its chip-making business.

Samsung said that one-time factors were largely responsible for the fourth-quarter weakness. These included a special bonus totaling 800 billion won, or $740 million, that Samsung paid out to employees on the 20th anniversary of a management initiative to improve quality, as well as the effects of a surge in the strength of the South Korean currency, which Samsung pegged at 700 billion won.

By Eric Pfanner: Read More

Samsung completes strongest year yet, but future may not be as bright

SEOUL, South Korea -- For Samsung Electronics and its 270,000 employees across the globe, 2013 was the best year.

One in every three smartphones sold carried the Samsung brand, with the company shipping more than 300 million of the devices. South Korea’s best known company on the world stage rounded off the year with record annual revenue and profit. Employees celebrated bonuses totaling more than $740 million.

Already selling more smartphones than any other company, Samsung is set to ship even more this year. Its smartphone sales will jump over 20
percent to nearly 400 million units, according to Counterpoint Technology Market Research.

But that probably won't translate into another year of record earnings, a scenario anticipated by investors with Samsung's share price down 17 percent since the start of 2013.

For the first time in more than two years, Samsung's quarterly net profit declined from the previous quarter, its latest result showed Friday. The maker of Galaxy smartphones said its net profit for the October-December period fell 11 percent from the third quarter to 7.3 trillion won ($6.8 billion). Read More

**Foxconn eyes factories in US, Indonesia as China's lustre fades**

TAIPEI, Jan 27 (Reuters) - Taiwan's Foxconn Technology Group, the major supplier of Apple Inc's iPhones and iPads, may build high-tech factories in the United States and low-cost plants in Indonesia as the appeal of 'made in China' fades into a burden.

Beset by rising costs and labour unrest in China, Chairman Terry Gou told employees on Sunday that Foxconn is considering diversifying away from its manufacturing heartland. The world's largest contract maker of electronic goods has little choice if it's to protect margins and stay ahead of peers who have adapted the Foxconn playbook into their own success stories.

"The U.S. is a must-go market," said Gou, speaking at the group's annual party on Sunday to mark the end of the Chinese year. Many customers and partners have asked Foxconn to open shop in the U.S., Gou said, with an eye on advanced manufacturing much closer to their home base.

At the same time, Indonesia will be a top priority this year as a potential production base with attractive costs and skills. That would tie in with Foxconn's deal to design and market phones in the country with BlackBerry Ltd as the Canadian company seeks to reverse its decline in the smartphone business. Read More

**Endicott IBM health study limited but telling**

ENDICOTT — The data are in, but the controversy continues.

The latest chapter of the story of how chemicals used by IBM Corp. affected residents and workers in Endicott unfolded Thursday night with a presentation of a federal study of cancer rates among former employees. Scientists from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health presented their findings to an audience eager for answers.

More than 75 people, including residents, former employees, and state and local elected officials packed the basement of the First United Methodist Church to hear a team of four NIOSH scientists make the presentation. Among the findings: Deaths from certain cancers tended to be higher for workers with greater exposure to hazardous chemicals, such as trichloroethylene, once used at the circuit board assembly plant that employed more than 10,000 people at its peak in the mid 1980s. Read More

**Workers' health: Gujarat high court notice to 11 power units**

AHMEDABAD: The Gujarat high court has issued notices to 11 thermal and lignite-based power stations in the state seeking to know what measures had been taken by the units for the health of their employees.

The high court issued the notices after the Supreme Court last month transferred to the concerned high courts a petition seeking healthcare for workers of power stations.

The Gujarat high court also issued notices to the chief secretary, Gujarat and other concerned departments of the state government.

Earlier, acting on the petition of an NGO, the Occupational Health and Safety Association, the Supreme Court had directed the concerned high courts to find out whether there was adequate and effective healthcare system in place at the power stations and whether there was any evaluation of occupational health status of the workers. The apex court had also directed the high court to find out whether or not effective medical treatment was available for workers of the power units.

Transferring the matter to the high courts, the Supreme Court bench of Justice K S Radhakrishnan and Justice A K Sikri had said that 130 coal-fired thermal power plants (CFTPPs) are spread across the country. Hence, it would not be practical for the court to examine whether each of them was
adhering to safety standards and rules for its workers, the SC had stated. Read More

Playing With Toys and Saving Lives

That video clip of hacking is widely known, but you may not have seen the one just above. It starts with Yamilet Mendoz Martínez, a nurse shopping in a toy store in Jinotepe, Nicaragua. She needs to make an IV alarm — something that makes noise when a bag of IV fluid is ready to be changed. Having an alarm means the nurse doesn’t have to keep popping in to check every few minutes — an impossibility for severely overworked nurses. The solution? A toy AK-47 — one that buzzes when fired.

Back at the Hospital Escuela Regional Santiago Jinotepe-Jinotepe-Carazo, Mendoza Martínez and her colleagues hooked up the gun to an IV pole. As the IV bag empties, a rubber band attached to it compresses, opening one side of a clothespin. That closes the other side, putting the clothespin wire in contact with the electrical contact in the gun trigger. Bag empty = gun buzz.

How do hospitals like this one normally get medical equipment? For the most part, they don’t — some public hospitals can’t even afford IV tubing or gloves. Often, they get donations from rich-country hospitals, which give away last year’s technology. But these machines tend not to last long. They might need parts that are only available a continent away, or no one knows how to repair them. Sometimes it’s just that the electricity has gone out — or there was no electricity to begin with. By Tina Rosenberg: read More

Movie Criticizing Samsung Sparks Controversy

A movie about factory workers who contracted diseases such as leukaemia while working for a Samsung-like company was the second-highest-grossing film debut in South Korea last week. But despite the low-budget feature’s early commercial success, its crew and supporters aren’t popping champagne bottles.

“Another Family,” directed by Korean director Kim Tae-yun, was the country’s fifth-highest-grossing film overall last week, generating 1.28 billion won ($1.19 million) in the four days ending Sunday on fewer than 200 screens, according to Korean Film Council. Compare that to last week’s top-grossing movie debut, Australian director Stuart Beattie’s action fantasy “I, Frankenstein,” which pulled in 1.69 billion won on more than 350 screens. (South Korea’s No. 1 film remains Disney animation “Frozen” for the third weekend running, adding 4 billion won to make a total of 62.3 billion won so far.) By Jeyup S. Kwaak: Read More

Apple Contractor Foxconn Seeks Wider Reach after China Flaps

TAIPEI — Foxconn is known as the company that assembles iPads and iPhones for the world with inexpensive labor in China. Now, the giant contractor is trying to diversify clientele, geography and means of production to grow its business as workplace issues haunt it in China. Foxconn’s latest ambition calls for investing $1 billion in the capital of smartphone-savvy Indonesia.

Giant Taiwanese contract electronics maker Foxconn normally uses factories in mainland China to make products for the world’s top electronics brands, such as Apple and Sony. But since 2010, the company has been stung there by worker suicides and labor protests. This month, Foxconn signed a deal to invest $1 billion in high-tech research and development in Indonesia.

Jamie Wang, a principal research analyst with the market research firm Gartner in Taipei, said Indonesia gives Foxconn a welcome alternative to China.

Wang said Foxconn needs a new production site and that Indonesia offers not only an end-market business opportunity but that, in terms of the production costs, Indonesia offers good value. Another key is whether the local government and its infrastructure give Foxconn attractive incentives or support. As she understands, Jakarta offered Foxconn a substantial support package.

Ralph Jennings: Read More

E-waste: An Emerging Health Risk

As the global waste stream created by discarded electronic equipment grows—an estimated 40 million tons of electronic waste (e-waste) are produced each year—it is becoming increasingly important to understand how exposure to e-waste affects human health. E-waste is hazardous because the components used to make devices such as laptops, cell phones, and televisions,
contain metals and chemicals known to harm human health. Children, who are especially vulnerable to the effects of e-waste, often work, live, and play in or near e-waste recycling centers.

E-waste presents a unique exposure scenario because people are exposed to a complex mixture of chemicals from multiple sources and through multiple exposure routes. “We know the toxicities and health implications of the individual components that make up e-waste, but we need to understand how these components potentially interact to affect human health,” said William A. Suk, Ph.D., Branch Chief of the NIEHS Hazardous Substances Research Branch. Suk served as a session co-chair at the June 2013 e-waste and children’s health working group meeting in Geneva, which was organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) and co-sponsored by the NIEHS.

E-waste is often exported to developing countries where workers use primitive recycling techniques, such as acid leaching and cable burning, to recover gold, silver, copper, and other valuable metals. Workers in so-called informal recycling centers are directly exposed to contaminants as they dismantle the discarded devices. Furthermore, primitive recycling practices release polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, dioxins, and other hazardous byproducts into the environment. This environmental contamination exposes neighboring communities to the pollutants.

By: Megan Avakia: Read More

ASE accused of not dealing with waste

Fifty environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from 18 countries have signed a joint statement reprimanding the world’s top chip packager for failing to deal properly with charges of illegally discharging toxic wastewater into a river in Greater Kaohsiung last year, Citizens of the Earth, Taiwan (CET) said yesterday.

Advanced Semiconductor Engineering (ASE) was found to have discharged industrial wastewater containing high levels of nickel and other toxic substances into the Houjin River (後勁溪) several times. It was fined NT$600,000 by the city’s Environmental Protection Bureau and its K7 plant was ordered to partially stop operations in December. ASE has still not done anything to help Houjin River’s recovery nor compensated farmers and fishermen living nearby, the CET said.

Instead, the company filed an administrative appeal against the plant’s shutdown, the group said.

The joint statement also condemned ASE for “green-washing” by placing a statement on the Asian Wall Street Journal on Dec. 16 in which it denied charges that it had deliberately discharged toxic wastewater and illegally installed underground piping within its facilities.

CET’s energy and sustainable industry department director Joan Tsai (蔡卉荀) said that for a company that earns billions of dollars a year, it has not been sincere in dealing with the problem, but only spends money on gaining environmental certifications or publishing media statements to create an image of being a responsible firm.

“It has been found to have illegally discharged wastewater so many times, how can it claim to have solved the problem only three days after it was ordered to shut down and apply to resume operations?” she asked.

Tsai added that although the city government is still reviewing its petition, the company may be allowed to resume full operation as early as next month.

By Lee I-chia: Read More

Voice of the silenced

The task for film director Kim Tae-yun was straightforward: to portray the death of a woman, whose family believes she contracted leukemia from working in a semiconductor factory.

But the factory was operated by Samsung Electronics, part of the country’s most powerful conglomerate — a fact that might give other filmmakers pause.

“Another Promise,” set for release in early February, is the latest film to hold the powers that be accountable for past misdoing. Kim says that such filmmaking requires courage.

“I was told by many acquaintances not to turn my back against the top conglomerate,” he said in interview in Hongdae, western Seoul. “But we moved forward without fear.”

The film depicts the hardships of parents whose daughter, Hwang Yu-mi, was diagnosed with leukemia two years after she started working at Samsung’s semiconductor production. She died four years after starting the job.
After her death, Samsung suggested a one-billion-won settlement, but her father, Hwang Sang-ki, filed a lawsuit against the Korea Workers’ Compensation and Welfare Service (KCOMWEL) instead. By Baek Byung-yeul: Read More

How Crowd workers became the Ghosts in the Digital Machine

Since 2005, Amazon has helped create one of the most exploited workforces no one has ever seen.

In 2007, Stephanie Costello had a boring office job with a lot of downtime that she spent online. She recalls the day she read one of those articles on MSN.com that have become a staple of the Internet: how to make extra money online. These types of articles often appear in the soft-news sections of MSN, Yahoo and other sites, usually with the message that there is money being left on the table. Costello was intrigued at the prospect of cutting through the boredom of her day with the opportunity to pick up a little extra cash. She went to the website, Mechanical Turk, where companies can post tiny tasks and workers can find and perform them online. It was free to register—no call for an “investment” up front, which indicated that it was not on its face a scam. And she began making money immediately. Very small amounts of money.

Costello is a trailblazer of sorts. She was one of the early workers to join Mechanical Turk, the first online, crowd-based, micro-labor platform. In her telling, she sounds like an alcoholic describing her first drink. It was fun at first—and when it became less than fun, it was still useful, if only to get through the week. But six years later, it has become a serious problem, and not just for Costello.

Mechanical Turk is the innovation behind “crowdworking,” the low-wage virtual labor phenomenon that has reinvented piecework for the digital age. Created by Amazon in 2005, it remains one of the central platforms—markets, really—where crowd-based labor is bought and sold. As many as 500,000 “crowdworkers” power the Mechanical Turk machine, while millions more (no one knows how many exactly) fuel competitor sites like CrowdFlower, Clickworker, CloudCrowd and dozens of smaller ones. On any given day, at any given minute, these workers perform millions of tiny tasks for companies both vast (think Twitter) and humble. Though few of these people have any sense of their finished work product, what they’re doing is helping to power the parts of the Internet that most of us take for granted.

Moshe Z. Marvit: Read More

How Nonprofits Use Social Media to Connect Communities

“What’s unique about Kiva is that personal connection you make when you decide to lend. We do this by sharing stories from two perspectives—how our borrowers’ lives have been affected by these loans and how our lenders’ lives have changed after empowering someone to improve their life” – Aurora Lee, Kiva Content Coordinator.

Nonprofit organization Kiva’s mission is to connect people worldwide through lending money to alleviate poverty. They envision a world where people are empowered to create opportunities for themselves and for those less fortunate. Working with microfinance institutions across five continents, Kiva provides affordable access to capital through loans from as little as $25.

Since its inception in 2005, Kiva has enabled over one million people to become Kiva lenders, generating over $521 million in over 73 countries. One of Kiva’s top priorities is to cultivate communities between borrowers and lenders. They do this by sharing great content and stories of how loans have changed lives, created opportunities and spurred lasting relationships. Tapping into the connectivity power of social media, Kiva relies heavily on social and their volunteers in the field to achieve their bottom line goals.

By Sam Milbrath: Read More

Top lessons from 50 years of fighting the tobacco industry

This month’s 50th anniversary of the First Surgeon General’s Report on Smoking and Health provides a bittersweet reminder of the promise and the limitations of public health activism to curb corporate promotion of behaviors and lifestyles associated with premature death and preventable illness and injury. In the half century since the report was released, the proportion of Americans who smoke has been cut in half. A new report in the Journal of the American Medical Association estimates that tobacco control efforts in the United States have prevented 8 million premature deaths and extended the average lifespan by on average
almost 20 years of life for the people who did not take up smoking because of prevention campaigns, higher tobacco taxes or smoking bans. Overall, the success in reducing tobacco use has added 2.3 years to the life of the average American man and 1.6 years to the average American woman.

But this progress could have been achieved in far less time had not every preventive policy been opposed by the tobacco industry and had politicians beholden to the tobacco lobby severed these ties more quickly. These delays doomed many more to tobacco-related illnesses. And despite the progress in this country, the estimated toll from tobacco in this century is 1 billion premature deaths, more than 10 times the toll for the 20th century. The main reason so many more people will fall ill and die painful, early tobacco-related deaths is that the tobacco industry has adapted the lessons on marketing and undermining regulation that it learned in the United States to emerging markets in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Sadly, the tobacco industry is not alone in contributing to America’s poor health standing among developed nations. In 2010, guns took the lives of 31,076 Americans in homicides, suicides and unintentional shootings, the equivalent of more than 85 deaths each day. Another 73,505 Americans were treated in hospital emergency departments for non-fatal gunshot wounds. While the scientific knowledge and technology to significantly reduce this toll are available, like the tobacco industry, the gun industry and its allies in the National Rifle Association have steadfastly blocked any progress to make guns less accessible or safer. Read More

World Bank Agrees to Investigate Labor Conditions at Indian Tea Company

The World Bank has agreed to investigate Amalgamated Plantations Private Limited (APPL) in India for abusive working conditions on tea plantations in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam, following a formal complaint by workers. A Columbia Law School team has confirmed the workers allegations.

In 2009, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), an arm of the World Bank, invested $6.7 million into the newly created APPL to take over 25 plantations from the Tata Group, a major Indian multinational. In return, the IFC got a 19.9 percent in the new entity while Tata kept 41 percent ownership. The 31,000 workers on the plantations were allowed to buy shares in the new company at Rs 10 ($0.20) per share.

Tea workers gather to speak to researchers. Photo: Columbia Law School.

The APPL holdings number among the roughly 1,000 Assamese tea plantations that were established on tribal lands during the days of the British empire and now supply one sixth of the world’s tea supply. To this day the workers on many tea estates are the direct descendants of the families whose land were taken to create them in the first place and who live in a relationship of total dependence on the plantation with little intervention by the state.

All told, tea estates in India employ some one million permanent workers and another two million temporary workers, making the industry probably the largest private sector employer in the country. For Tata, a company that has managed tea estates since India’s independence from Britain, however, the major profits lay in marketing tea, rather than growing it.

by Pratap Chatterjee: Read More

Searching for the Union: The workers’ movement in China 2011-13

China’s workers have emerged over the last few years as a strong, unified and increasingly active collective force. Workers have time and again demonstrated the will and the ability to stand up to abusive and arrogant managements and to demand better pay and working conditions.

However, workers are still hampered by the lack of an effective trade union that can maintain solidarity, bargain directly with managements and
protect labour leaders from reprisals. As a result, workers are turning to labour rights groups that can advise and support their collective actions while, at the same time, demanding more of the official trade union and putting pressure on it to change.

In China labour Bulletin’s new research report on the workers’ movement, published today, we examine this evolving relationship between the workers, the trade union and civil society and look at how the government is struggling to respond to rapid social and economic change.

CLB recorded 1,171 strikes and worker protests from mid-2011 until the end of 2013, about 40 percent of which were in manufacturing industries particularly hard hit by the global economic downturn and the decline in China’s economic growth during this period. Factory workers staged protests when they were cheated out of their wages and overtime payments, when their bonuses and benefits were cut back and when the boss refused to pay the social insurance premiums mandated by law. Workers also went out strike to demand higher pay, equal pay for equal work, and proper employment contracts.

Palm Oil Company fined
Millions as Indonesian Court delivers historic ruling against illegal destruction of Tripa Peat Swamp Forests.

PRESS RELEASE – January 9th, 2014
[Banda Aceh / Indonesia] Setting a landmark new precedent, Indonesian courts yesterday found palm oil company PT Kallista Alam guilty of illegally burning forests within the Tripa Peat Swamps, part of the protected Leuser Ecosystem, resulting in a fine of 114 billion Rupiah, approximately 9 million US dollars.

“This is a clear message to companies working in Aceh who think they can destroy protected forests and get away with it” said Muhammad Nur, Chairman of WALHI Aceh (Friends of the Earth Indonesia).

According to Senior Judge, Rahmawati SH, PT Kallista Alam was found in breach of National Law No 32/2009 on Environmental Protection and Management, for illegal use of fire to clear forests, and ordered to pay Rupiah 114.3 billion (approx. USD 9.5 million) as compensation and Rupiah 251.7 billion (almost 21 USD million) for restoration of the affected forests.

Kamaruddin, a lawyer working with communities in the Tripa region reiterated, “This decision should serve as a wake up call to any company thinking of investing within the Leuser Ecosystem, a National Strategic Area, that they could suffer the same fate as PT Kallista Alam. It should also be a reminder to others who deliberately burn forests or allow forest burning within their concessions, regardless of whether or not they are working inside the Ecosystem’s boundaries, that they could also be prosecuted. The Judge’s decision in this case clearly illustrates a move towards improved law enforcement against environmental offenders in the region.” He added.

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Government cuts in vital health and safety ‘red tape’ threaten lives at work

The TUC is warning today (Monday) on Workers’ Memorial Day that the government’s persistent ideological attacks on key health and safety legislation threaten even more accidents, injuries and deaths at work.

In a new report published today Toxic, Corrosive and Hazardous: The government’s record on health and safety, the TUC reveals that in the last four years the government has drastically cut Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspections, cut funding to the HSE by 40 per cent, blocked new regulations and removed vital existing protections, prevented improved European regulation on health and safety, cut support for employers and health and safety reps, seen local authorities reduce their workplace inspections by 93 per cent, and made it much harder for workers to claim compensation if they are injured or made ill at work following employer negligence.
The government is now trying to change the law to exempt large numbers of self-employed workers from health and safety protection. This is a huge concern as self-employed people are more than twice as likely to be killed at work than other workers. Read More

Challenging impunity: holding industry and government leaders criminally accountable for putting industry profits ahead of human life

Protection of the health of children and respect of scientific evidence are surely two key characteristics of a decent society.

In a recently published, landmark book, Professor Philippe Grandjean documents how both are linked and how both are being betrayed, with enormous harm being visited on children as a consequence. Grandjean exposes how a combination of academic naiveté, negligence by regulatory authorities, and irresponsible interference by vested interests has created this public health crisis.

In his book – Only One Chance. How Environmental Pollution Impairs Brain Development and How to Protect the Brains of the Next Generation (Oxford University Press, 2013) – Grandjean examines the ways in which industrial chemicals are causing a silent pandemic of brain damage, a situation he describes as a “chemical brain drain”.

Grandjean is Professor and Chair of Environmental Medicine at the University of Southern Denmark and Adjunct Professor of Environmental Health in the Department of Environmental Health at Harvard School of Public Health. He puts forward the staggering statistic that developmental delay or neurological disease are thought to occur in about one of six children in the United States. While the cause of these disorders, ranging from mental retardation, cerebral palsy and autism to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is frequently unknown, Grandjean’s research points to environmental pollutants as likely culprits.

By Kathleen Ruff: Read More

Reforms slow in Bangladesh’s toxic tanneries

Dhaka (AFP) - Standing knee deep in toxic chemicals, Mokter Hossain loads animal hides into huge drums filled with still more dangerous liquids at a tannery in the Bangladesh capital.

Barefoot and sick with fever, Hossain stops every now and then to cough, a legacy of the job that his doctors warn could one day kill him.

"Some days I am too ill to work," said Hossain, 25, who has spent years inhaling fumes from the hexavalent chromium and other chemicals used to turn the raw hides into soft leather.

"I take medicine to control my skin diseases. If I don’t, it gets worse," Hossain adds, gesturing to his arms and legs which are covered in rashes and black spots.

Hossain’s tannery is one of 200 in Hazaribagh in Dhaka, where some 25,000 workers toil for as little as $50 a month to produce leather for shoes and other goods for stores in Europe and the United States.

Ten months ago, Western retailers were forced into action after a garment factory complex collapsed killing 1,135 people, one of a string of tragedies that have shone a global spotlight on that sector’s shocking labour and safety conditions.

But there are few signs of reform at Bangladesh’s leather industry, where conditions are equally atrocious and business is booming thanks to the West’s growing demand for cheap leather items. Read More

Poisonous Mine Shut Down in China’s Hunan Province

Asia’s largest realgar mine has been shut down, leaving behind massive arsenic contamination with ill and dying people in surrounding villages.

The 1,500 year-old mine, located in Baiyun Township, Shimen County, in China’s Hunan Province, once a source for a Chinese medicinal supplement, has gradually become a toxic wasteland during the past six decades.

Arsenic contaminated soil and water within 9 square kilometers (5.5 square miles) of the mine has poisoned more than a thousand villagers, according to a report by Legal Weekly, a mainland Chinese media.

Hu Lizhen, a local villager, said five of her 11 family members have already been diagnosed with arsenic poisoning, but not all of them have been checked yet.

Another villager said the water is not drinkable, and they have to get water from outside.
**Working For the Few - Political capture and economic inequality**

“Economic inequality is rapidly increasing in the majority of countries. The wealth of the world is divided in two: almost half going to the richest one percent; the other half to the remaining 99 percent. The World Economic Forum has identified this as a major risk to human progress. Extreme economic inequality and political capture are too often interdependent. Left unchecked, political institutions become undermined and governments overwhelmingly serve the interests of economic elites to the detriment of ordinary people. Extreme inequality is not inevitable, and it can and must be reversed quickly.”

**Give reasons for delay in relief: HRC**

INDORE: Taking an exception to the deaths from silicosis in Panna, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued a notice on Thursday to the chief secretary asking him to explain the reasons for not giving relief to the kin of the deceased on time.

The state government has been given eight weeks’ time to reply to the notice. The NHRC also wanted to know from the government the measures it is taking for the workers down with the disease.

The commission feels that the state has failed to protect lives of three Panna workers: Bal Krishna Durga, Ramjan Khan and Asharam Gaund.

The NHRC also said the chief secretary should ask the Panna district magistrate to get all the quarry workers examined by a team of doctors and submit a report. The team should also mention the names of the employers/firms they are working with.

The commission said the district magistrate should be asked to ensure free treatment to the rest of the workers.

The commission observed: “The administration should also find out the possibility of an alternative employment for those suffering from silicosis.”

Earlier, there were reports that only Jhabua and Alirajpur were racked with silicosis. In August, 2011, Environics Trust had held a medical camp in Panna, and out of 40 workers examined 36 were found to have been afflicted with silicosis.

In January 2012, the trust had submitted a complaint to the NHRC requesting it to direct the state government to take steps for their treatment and compensation to the family of one person out of 36 who died after the check-up.

**Dr. Ken Takahashi, “Toolkit for the Elimination of Asbestos-Related Diseases” – Global Asbestos Awareness Week 2014**

The “Toolkit for the Elimination of Asbestos-Related Diseases” was developed to serve as a concise and easy-to-use source of knowledge, technologies and information related to eliminating asbestos-related diseases (ARDs). The traditional public health approach of addressing the three levels of prevention was considered a basic means for tackling ARDs. It is a sad reality that many countries, especially rapidly developing countries, continue to use asbestos at alarming levels. The developing countries in Asia are at the forefront of this trend, so we intend for the administrators, practitioners and researchers of Asian countries to be the primary beneficiaries. However, we hope that any concerned party will benefit from this toolkit. Whoever the party, a core principle to bear in mind, while referencing this toolkit is that “the most efficient way to eliminate ARDs is to stop the use of all types of asbestos.”

A total of 190 factsheets (380 pages) are included in this toolkit, along with 200 pages of originally developed reference documents and a CD which contains all the materials. The following website provides a comparable version: [click here](#)

To view all 7 days of Global Asbestos Awareness Week (GAAW) content, please [click here](#).
Metalworkers’ alliance calls for the scrapping of Herrera Law

“Twenty-five years of disservice to workers. Twenty-five years of a law that brought about nothing but depressed wages, destruction of jobs, and stifled workers’ assertion of their rights. This is the only legacy of the Herrera Law as far as metalworkers are concerned.”

This was how the Metal Workers Alliance of the Philippines (MWAP), a national alliance of steel and metal unions and organizations, described Republic Act 7615, popularly known as Herrera Law, which marked its 25th year last Sunday.

Under the Herrera Law, contractualization was further expanded, resulting in the loss of millions of regular jobs. Today, only three out of every 10 workers are considered regulars.

This is most evident in manufacturing, particularly in the electronics and ICT, garments, and mining sectors. In the electronics sector, 80-90% of workers are contractuals and most of women workers have jobs for only three to five months. They do not get benefits accorded to regular workers and are vulnerable to lay-offs and retrenchments depending on employers’ whims.

“The swelling number of contractuals and the plummeting number of regular jobs have made it more difficult for workers to form unions and have tried to undermine unions’ bargaining strength. The substantial drop in union density decreases workers’ capacity to fight for wage increases, regular jobs and better working conditions,” said Reden Alcantara, national president of MWAP.

Another appalling feature of the Herrera Law is the unlimited power of the Labor Secretary to assume jurisdiction, dubbed as “AJ” by workers, over strikes and labor cases.

“This AJ has been overly used and abused in the last 25 years. Workers who tried to form unions especially in export processing zones and industrial enclaves, which are considered as ‘no-union, no-strike zones,’ have experienced the brutality of the AJ and other provisions of the Herrera Law,” Alcantara said.

Workers’ assertion of their rights was forcibly quelled through illegal dismissal, lay-off of striking workers, filing of criminal charges, and breaking of workers’ strikes and picketlines. This is the sad experience of workers in Sunever Lights, Nissan Motors, Toyota, Lepanto Mines, Daiho Philippines, Yokohama Tires and many other companies in the metal industry.

“We unite with the Filipino workers who are calling for the scrapping of the Herrera Law. After 25 years, our experience only points to the law’s anti-worker character. It is high time to have a law that will genuinely accord workers our basic right for living wages, regular and stable jobs, and free exercise of our right to unionize and to strike,” ends Alcantara.

Reference: Reden Alcantara, MWAP National President, 0928.2482211

Cell tower worker fatalities continue: More than a dozen deaths since 2012

In 2012, a Frontline and Pro Publica investigation of the cell (or wireless) tower industry found that between 2003 and 2010 the average fatality rate for the US tower industry was more than 10 times greater than that of the construction industry. A January 6, 2014 story by KUOW reporter John Ryan about the death in January 2013 of tower climber Mike Rongey in Mount Vernon, Washington is a reminder that the industry remains extremely dangerous. It is also a reminder that the employers of the workers killed in these incidents may only be fined minimally and that the wireless service providers generating the work are rarely – if ever – cited for these accidents. In Mike Rongey’s case, the state has levied a penalty of $450 against the company that employed him.

According to the Wireless Estimator, a website that tracks communications tower industry news, in 2013, thirteen US cell tower workers died on the job. Add to these deaths the most recent such incident reported by the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA): On November 22, 2013, a maintenance worker died in a fall from a communication tower in North Witchita, Kansas. Cell tower worker fatalities cited by the Wireless Estimator occurred all across the country, in Indiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Virginia and Washington. Most of these cases are still under federal OSHA or state investigation so full incident detail and penalty information is not yet available.

By Elizabeth Grossman: Read More
Banned across the world, asbestos continues to plague Pakistan

Seven years ago, Fareed Ahmed died of tongue cancer at the age of 55. He was working as an engineer at a building and construction factory. Doctors said his death was due to asbestos poisoning.

Asbestos, a naturally occurring mineral used extensively in construction, may cause cancer when inhaled. It has been banned in 52 countries of the world, but Pakistan remains an exception.

Since 2007 when Fareed died, his brother Haroon Ahmed has been campaigning to ban this product in Pakistan. He filed a petition in the Sindh High Court and the case now awaits a decision by the Supreme Court.

Findings by a commission, which worked under the Supreme Court directives, revealed that due to asbestos exposure workers at the factory where Fareed worked were suffering from severe lung and chest infections, according to a report published earlier in The News.

As part of an ongoing campaign to highlight the dangers of this cancerous mineral, the first event kicked off through a conference held on Saturday, where renowned doctors, educationists, politicians and lawyers of the country urged the need to legislate to ban asbestos. Read More

Use of asbestos building materials in Malaysia: legislative measures, the management, and recommendations for a ban on use

Malaysia has partially banned the use of asbestos. The prohibition of asbestos building materials in schools, clinics, and hospitals built by government started in 1999. Since 2005, prohibition has also been applied to all government buildings. However, asbestos construction materials such as roof and ceiling tiles are still sold in the market. There are no acts or regulations prohibiting the use of asbestos in private buildings in Malaysia. Asbestos was first used for industrial purposes in Malaysia in the 1960s and the first regulations related to asbestos have been around since the 1980s. Non-governmental organizations have been pushing the government to impose a total ban since the 1980s. Asbestos is still used in the manufacturing sector under the “control use” concept. The study found difficulties in established and validated medical record data on asbestos-related diseases. This paper reviews existing asbestos-related regulations and guidelines in Malaysia and discusses the urgency for a total ban in the use of asbestos in building materials in the country. In the meanwhile, stricter enforcement of occupational safety and health regulations related to the use and exposure of asbestos among workers in the manufacturing, construction, maintenance, and demolition sectors has been in place.

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