

A plant in plight

The Kasur Tannery Pollution Control Project was prepared by a team from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in April 1993 as part of an overall rehabilitation programme for Kasur i.e. the Kasur Integrated Environmental Improvement Programme. At the core of the project is a waste treatment plant though it has a number of other components as well.

In 1989 UNIDO undertook a study to ascertain the extent of pollution caused by tanneries in Kasur, and to come up with a practical rehabilitation plan. The project, if and when completed, will effect a significant environmental improvement by removing the stagnant ponds, enabling farmers to recover contaminated land and allowing future development in Kasur. But the way things are, it may never materialise.

The project components proposed by the UNIDO consultants include a chrome recovery pilot plant, drainage of the stagnant ponds of tannery effluent, in-house effluent treatment arrangements in tanneries, an analytical laboratory, construction of a tannery effluent drainage and collection system within the tannery clusters, construction of a tannery effluent treatment system including

a common primary treatment plant designed to take an eventual flow of 13,000 cubic metres per day, and the establishment of a solid waste disposal system.

The project plan has been

would support similar projects in other parts of the country. For the Kasur project, the donors demanded an unequivocal commitment from the Government of Punjab to make available adequate Operation

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completed up to the level of tender documents and is envisaged to cost about US\$ 9 million, excluding land costs. The three donors — United Nations Development Programme, the Netherlands Government and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation — have promised their full support.

The donors also indicated to the government early last year that if the Kasur project was satisfactorily completed, they

and Maintenance (O&M) funds and a foolproof administrative arrangement for the project. This was, in fact, a prerequisite to the release of funds.

The O&M costs were estimated at Rs. 21.23 million inclusive of a Rs. 7.25 million per annum allowance for depreciation. The Government of Punjab discussed this matter in detail with the various departments, government agencies and organizations involved.

The general consensus was that the 'polluters should pay'. But the tanners refused. They even used their political clout with the Nawaz Sharif government to divide the financial burden amongst all concerned.

In the end the tanners got away with paying only 50% of the O&M charges while the Kasur Development and Metropolitan Corporations — both beneficiaries from the pollution through levy of taxes — were made to pay 15% each towards O&M. The Finance Department of the Government of Punjab agreed to pay the depreciation.

The deliberations in these meetings also resulted in consensus to establish the Kasur Tanneries Waste Management Board. This was agreed upon by all concerned for early 1993 but the project has still not materialised. The failure is phenomenal but in no way unique; it simply illustrates the criminal lack of political will to improve the country's environment.

Though the preliminaries have all been completed, the project has not received any attention because of the successive political upheavals in Islamabad. It is still lying with the Housing, Physical and Environmental Planning Department in the shape of a finalised PC-1. All it needs is an approval from the Chief Minister of Punjab and the provincial legislature to put it into first gear. But there is scant hope as the new masters of Punjab are too busy with their power games to spare time for the plight of Kasur.

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over. The administration still refuses to act against the tanners who have been given a virtual 'license to kill' through poison-

and fast. Judging by past experience, they are waiting in vain for assistance that may never come.

Muhammad Sharif, the unofficially acknowledged spokesman of Bangla, "We have decided to tell the polluters that

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