Baljit Chadha : Exporting death to India

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It is ironical but true that people like Baljit Chadha want to earn a quick buck at the cost of dying workers in poor countries like India and China. It is high time anti-asbestos groups come together and stall his efforts to export death to poor countries

According to a ***World Health Organization report, as many as*** 125 million people are exposed to asbestos at work and at least 90,000 die each year from asbestos-related diseases world wide. Asbestos has been a controversialmaterial and is known to not only cause lung cancer but also Mesothelioma, Pleural Plaque and other related diseases causing death.

Yet, asbestos is Canada's gold and it has been exporting its "gold" to poor countries like India and China where it is mostly used in cheap roofs. With India's booming economy, the India asbestos market has grown by 30 per cent as demand has grown in the rural sector as it serves the poor, according to Asbestos Cement Products Manufacturers' Association (ACPMA), a New Delhi based industry organisation. Despite being banned in 52 countries, its consumption by Indians and export by Canadians has continued due to apathy of both governments.

About 55,000 workers work every day on the ships carrying asbestos not aware of the health risks and without proper safety gear in the western state of Gujarat. Unlike in Canada where at least safety gear is provided to the workers who work in such dangerous situations, in India, no such safety measures are taken. Day in and day out, these workers are exposed to the deadly fibres and government of India despite being aware of the health risks to these poor workers, has decided to look the other way.

The uproar against Asbestos is not limited to only India. In fact, time and again Canadians have highlighted the harmful affects of asbestos on these poor workers in India and China. Asbestos was first mined in Quebec in the 1870s. According to CBC news, during the mineral's heyday, Canada boasted the world's biggest open pit mine, the Jeffrey Mine located in the province's Eastern Townships. The industry thrived and a town was even named after it, Asbestos, Que., which used to wear the moniker with pride. "These enormous asbestos deposits in the province of Quebec are immensely valuable to Canada in war and peace, and they form a very important part of our great heritage of mineral wealth," said CBC Radio's Lorne Greene in 1942, on-site at the Jeffrey Mine in Asbestos, Que. But by the late 1960s, the bloom was starting to fade. More and more miners had shortness of breath, extreme fatigue and were coughing up blood. Studies linking asbestos to voracious diseases such as lung cancer, scarred lungs (asbestosis), and mesothelioma (cancer of the stomach and chest, which is only caused by exposure to asbestos) began to rack up.

The asbestos debate is once again alive as the well known Montreal Indo Canadian businessman Baljit Chadha tries to act as a saviour to Quebec's faltering asbestos industry and earn a quick buck. As the deadline for private funding for the Mine Jeffrey in Asbestos, Que came to a close,

Chadha claimed that he had “letters of intent” from “unnamed” investors in three different countries. He says, these are enough to breathe new life into an export trade critic’s call exporting death.

Chadha, who came to Canada in 1973 from India to study science and business today sells more than $100-million worth of Canadian goods to India annually – including between $5-million and $15-million in asbestos products. According to Globe and Mail, for more than a decade, he has accompanied prime ministers and premiers on every major trade mission to India, which last year accounted for more than half of Canada’s 135,000 tonnes of asbestos sales.

It is here that he faces his strongest opposition. “When most of the world, including Canada, has either banned or restricted the use of asbestos domestically due to health reasons, it’s hypocrisy bordering on racism to expose people from poorer countries to harm knowingly,” said Madhumita Dutta of the Occupational and Environmental Network of India, one of the groups that organized noisy protests when Mr. Chadha accompanied Mr. Charest on a 2010 trip to the subcontinent to promote the province’s exports.

Some historians have suggested the harmful effects of asbestos exposure have been recorded since the first century. Even so, the use of asbestos expanded through the Industrial Revolution and beyond. Officially, the first case of diseases linked to asbestos, asbestosis, was diagnosed in 1924 in the United Kingdom. Throughout the 30s and 40s, the use of asbestos continued to expand, particularly in industrial settings. The effects of asbestos exposure also became more apparent. It wasn’t until the 1970s when asbestos products were officially regulated in the United States by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

The biggest challenge in diagnosing asbestos-related illnesses is their long “latency” period. This means that the illnesses may not show up for a long time after asbestos exposure-sometimes as long as 10 to 40 years.

Ironically, Chadha has no qualms in sending the hazardous material to his land of birth and his own brethren. The poor in India are already the underprivileged with no health benefits of any sort, Chadha’s attempt to export the deadly material will push them towards an early death leaving behind starving families with children to fend for themselves. With employment hard to find, the poor will continue to work wherever they find work with safety on the backburner. It is high time that anti-asbestos groups in India and Canada unite to ensure no more poor people die while the Chadhas count their dollars.

Diseases Linked to Asbestos Exposure

The most common types of asbestos-related disease are asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

Pleural Plaque

One of the effects of asbestos exposure is the formation of pleural plaques. Pleural plaques are bilateral areas of fibrosis present on the inner surface of the ribcage and the diaphragm that are often partly calcified. Pleural plaques, by themselves, are benign and cannot change into cancer.

About one-third to half of those exposed to asbestos will likely develop calcified pleural plaques, though not all asbestos-exposed workers develop pleural plaques.

Asbestosis

Another of the effects of asbestos exposure is asbestosis. Asbestosis is a serious, chronic, non-cancerous respiratory disease. Asbestosis starts when inhaled asbestos fibers become lodged in the lungs. Once these fibers settle in the lungs, they begin to aggravate lung tissues, causing them to scar. This scarring over time diminishes the lung's capacity for oxygen.

Symptoms of asbestosis may include shortness of breath, fatigue, chest pain and a dry crackling sound in the lungs while inhaling. The disease may eventually cause cardiac failure in its advanced stages. Those suffering from asbestos-caused cancers may also have asbestosis; however, asbestosis does not develop into any form of cancer.

Lung Cancer

Lung cancer causes the largest number of asbestos-related deaths. The incidence of lung cancer in people who are or were directly involved in the mining, milling, manufacturing and use of asbestos and related products is much higher than in the general population. The most common symptoms of lung cancer are coughing and a change in breathing. Other symptoms include shortness of breath, persistent chest pains, hoarseness, and anemia.

People who have been exposed to asbestos and are also exposed to other carcinogens, such as those in cigarette smoke, have a significantly greater risk of developing lung cancer than people

who have only been exposed to asbestos. One study indicates that asbestos workers who smoke are about 90 times more likely to develop lung cancer than people who neither smoke nor have been exposed to asbestos.

Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer that most often occurs in the thin membrane lining of the lungs, chest, and abdomen. Each year, approximately 3,000 people in the United States are diagnosed with mesothelioma. Virtually all cases of mesothelioma are linked to the effects of asbestos exposure.