



CHEMICAL CONTAMINATION IN AHMEDABAD

NHRC seeks action taken report from municipal body chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

AHMEDABAD, NOVEMBER 12

ACTING ON a complaint that chemicals were being drained in Narol lake in the city, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Tuesday sought a report from the municipal commissioner within four weeks on action taken in this regard.

A resident of Narolgam, Gauriben Bhil, had filed a complaint in October, stating that “chemical industries, (Ahmedabad) Municipal Corporation (AMC) and other individuals are releasing chemical water and drainage water into the lake of Narol at night. The life of the residents staying near the lake of Narol is in danger.”

Advocate Pratik Rupala, who had filed the complaint on Bhil’s behalf, said, “We filed the complaint after field visits and survey. There is widespread contamination of all sources of water, including drinking water. We found that

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PRATIK RUPALA

ADVOCATE

the chemical contamination has led to reduced life expectancy of the 400-500 families living there. We had already filed a complaint with AMC and GPCB (Gujarat Pollution Control Board), following which a small measure was taken to the effect where the drainage water was stopped to flow (sic) in the lake. During September and October, AMC took the initiative and cleaned the lake but this is not enough.”

The complainant sought the NHRC’s directions to the authorities to organise medical camps twice a month, to cover the lake with a fence and to take punitive action against the chemical industries responsible for the contamination of the lake.



NHRC directs Gujarat to extend relief to kin of silicosis victims

GOPAL KATESHIYA

RAJKOT, NOVEMBER 12

THE NATIONAL Human Rights Commission has directed the Gujarat Chief Secretary and Rajkot district magistrate to medically examine two patients suffering from silicosis in Rajkot and extend monetary relief to them as well as to the kin of three other patients who died of the disease. The watchdog was responding to a complaint filed by labour rights advocate Jagdish Patel.

Patel, who is the director of People's Training and Research Centre (PTRC), a Vadodra-based institute working on occupational health and safety, filed the complaint on September 20. He stated that two persons had died of silicosis in recent years, while three more were battling the disease in Rajkot district. They were in extreme poverty and did not have money for treatment, Patel said, seeking monetary relief and rehabilitation of the victims and kin.

Taking cognisance of the complaint, NHRC served the notices on October 25, asking the Chief Secretary and district magistrate to verify the three deaths and the condition of the two other workers, and respond within eight weeks. Silicosis afflicts workers of ceramic and glass factories as it is caused by exposure to silica dust.

"Chief Secretary be asked to look into the issue and direct the officials concerned to verify and get medically examined these workers and also take necessary steps to extend monetary relief and rehabilitative steps to the next of kin as well as workers suffering from silicosis. District Magistrate, Rajkot be also directed to submit his report. It is pertinent to mention here that these people have allegedly died



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of silicosis and/or are suffering from it. Hence, the state government has to keep this in mind while enquiring into the matter," the NHRC direction read.

Patel informed the commission that Ashok Chikhaliya (35), Raju Parihar (20) and Mansukh Vaghela (48) died of silicosis, while Jayanti Rukadiya (36) and Mahesh Sahu (40) have been diagnosed with the lung diseases.

A PTRC survey had recently found that 12 workers of ceramic factories in Surendranagar and Morbi districts have died in recent years after contracting silicosis, while 28 others are battling with the respiratory disease.

Patel had also helped silicosis victims of Godhra fight a legal battle and win compensation from the state government.

Chikhaliya, who died in November, 2017, used to work in a glass factory in Rajkot. Vaghela who died in August this year was working in a ceramic factory in Surendranagar.

Parihar, a native of Nepal who worked in a marble factory in Jaipur, later shifted to his relative's place in Rajkot and died

in the city. Similarly, Rukadiya was working in Samrat Glasswork when he developed respiratory complications and was eventually diagnosed with silicosis. Sahu was working in a casting unit in Shapar-Veraval, an industrial cluster on the outskirts of Rajkot city.

"We used to use sand-blasting technique for doing etching and glass painting. Doctors told me that I developed silicosis due to silica dust generated during the sand blasting accumulating in my lungs," Rukadiya said.

Rukadiya was the sole bread winner of his family when he fell ill. "After my health failed, I worked with a clinical lab and was doing the work of collecting blood samples. But that did not last as my health worsened gradually," said Rukadiya. Jagdish Maradiya, owner of Samrat Glasswork, helped him financially.

Eventually, Rukadiya's wife Chetna, who holds a post-graduate degree in arts, took up the job of a teacher to support the family.

She has had to a break from work after giving birth to their

second son three months ago.

Maradiya claimed he was not aware of the adverse health effect of sand blasting. "I myself used to work with Rukadiya and also developed silicosis. Since then, we stopped doing glass etching and painting and switched to digital painting technique which neither involves sand-blasting nor sulphuric acid," said the owner.

Sanjay Chikhaliya, younger brother of Ashok Chikhaliya, said his brother worked with a glass factory barely for five-six years before he developed silicosis. He died two years after his diagnosis.

Both Rukadiya and Sanjay said they had not received any direct government assistance so far.

"Gujarat government does not have any silicosis policy.... To protect human rights of such workers, government should frame a silicosis policy," said Patel.

Rajasthan recently announced a silicosis policy which provides for monetary relief and free medical treatment for victims, he added.