

Effluent-plagued rivers expose people to health hazards

FAISALABAD: People in many parts of Punjab continue to be exposed to health hazards as the textile and other factories of Faisalabad are discharging about 290 million gallon untreated wastewater into the Ravi and Chenab daily.

The district has only a small wastewater treatment plant of 20 MGD which is unable to treat the effluent of these factories, says a document of the Water and Sanitation Agency (Wasa).

Drainage of effluent into the river is causing hazards for the dwellers residing along the areas downstream the rivers. People of dozens of villages in Mamonkanjan, Dijkot, Khurrianwala, Sattiana and Samundri are unable to consume groundwater because of untreated effluent being discharged into Maduana-Samundri drain for years.

The millers of the textile capital of the country, like many other parts of Punjab, have not focused on installation of the plants claiming that they don't afford to purchase the costly treatment plants.

Sharing his views about the issue, an industrialist said the millers had been paying for sewage and pumping the groundwater to Wasa and it was the Punjab government's responsibility to ensure installation of the plants at Paharang and Maduana drains.

Factories in Faisalabad still lack waste treatment plants

"We have been requesting the government for years to resolve the issue of effluent because of the high cost of the plants," he said. He said the charges of electricity and gas left little room for the millers to make an investment on other facilities.

The issue has been taken up from time to time. In December 2013, the Environment Protection Agency (EPA), Punjab, had issued notices to more than 200 factories of Faisalabad, most of these textile processing units, asking these to install wastewater treatment plants otherwise their units would be sealed. However, nothing has been done by the EPA to save the rivers and still untreated water is being discharged by millers.

The EPA had issued notices after a resolution was adopted by the Punjab Assembly on Dec 3 that year. The then MPA, Ahsan Riaz Fatiyana, had moved the resolution stating: "Thousands of people have died after contracting fatal diseases as at least 144 industrial units are polluting Samundri drain water in Faisalabad district. Either these units should be closed or treatment plants to treat toxic water should be installed."

Deputy Commissioner Saifullah says the government is in contact with the Danish government for having a loan of Rs15 billion for installation of a waste treatment plant. He said a delegation of the Danish government had visited his office on Tuesday last and they were briefed on the issue.

An officer of Wasa said an MoU had been signed between the governments of Pakistan and Denmark. He said the Danish government had promised the feasibility study for wastewater treatment plant after which it would commit financing the project through a concessional credit (approximately 35pc grant and 65pc loan for 10 years maturity).

He said in the phase-I, plant of 45 MGD would be constructed that would ultimately improve environment in Faisalabad.