

## **Bangladesh jails three over drug scam that killed hundreds of children (Update)**

July 22 2014, by Shafiqul Alam

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A court on Tuesday sentenced three Bangladeshis to jail for making and selling a toxic paracetamol syrup that doctors say killed hundreds of children in the 1990s, a prosecutor said.

Judge Abdur Rashid sentenced them to the maximum penalty of 10 years' jail after the first verdicts into the tragedy that saw children suffer deadly kidney failure after taking the syrup.

"They deserve the highest punishment under the country's drug law as it was a heinous crime against humanity," the judge was quoted as saying by prosecutor Shaheen Ahmed Khan.

The three were employees of a local drug company accused of replacing one of the syrup's ingredients with a cheaper alternative normally used in the leather dyeing industry.

Helena Pasha, the owner of drug maker Adflame Pharmaceutical Limited, and Mizanur Rahman, the manager, were found guilty of drug adulteration.

They were taken into custody after the verdicts.

The court in Dhaka that handles drug-related crimes also convicted in absentia Nigendra Nath Bala, an employee in charge of production, who has been on the run since the trial began.

## Accused 'deserve death'

"Finally we see some justice. But I would have been happier had they sentenced them to death," said Nurjahan Begaum, whose son, aged two and a half, died within days of taking the adulterated syrup for a fever.

"They deserve death. They killed so many children that there was not enough room in the cemetery for burial," she told AFP.

The tragedy was first exposed in the 1990s when doctors said hundreds of children died, forcing the government to crack down on the local drugs industry. But dozens more children died in 2009 when the toxic chemical was again discovered in paracetamol syrup.

Prosecutors filed cases against five companies blamed for the tragedies which one top paediatrician said dated back to the 1980s and could have killed as many as 2,000 infants.

The trial of the three finally restarted in 2009 after it was halted in 1994 following court-ordered delays. A series of appeals and other delays have stalled the trials of others charged over the scandal.

"We hope we can now resume the cases against the other companies which were involved in the making of adulterated paracetamol," Khan told AFP. Two people were acquitted on Tuesday.

Khandaker Bashir Ahmed, a defence lawyer, said the three would appeal against the verdict which he called "faulty".

The court was told that Adflame added diethylene glycol, a highly toxic organic solvent used mainly in the leather industry, into its syrup which was marketed in leading hospitals.

Mohammed Hanif, a top paediatric nephrologist, told AFP that Bangladeshi hospitals first started seeing children with kidney failure in late 1982.

But he said it took another ten years to establish that their deaths were due to diethylene glycol.

"By then several thousand children had died by consuming diethylene glycol-laced paracetamol syrup," said Hanif, whose research paper on the tragedy was published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1995.

Hanif said 339 children died from renal failure in the 35 months alone that he worked at the Dhaka Shihsu Hospital from 1990.

Although he welcomed Tuesday's verdicts, he said more people should be brought to justice over the tragedy, one of the worst in Bangladesh's history.

"I'll be more happy when all the firms have been brought to justice and are made to pay compensation to the parents of these hapless children," Hanif said.

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