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PRESS RELEASE

Hundreds of people took oath in an awareness session in Khulna to prevent lead pollution

“Together, we can solve lead pollution” with this slogan hundreds of community people, government and NGO officials, police, religious leaders, and media reporters took an oath at a community event. The 'Community and Stakeholder Engagement' event was held on 5 April, jointly organized by the international NGO, Pure Earth, and the Environmental Science discipline of Khulna University. It was held at Mohammadnagar, situated in Jalma Union, Batiaghata Upazila of Khulna District. This awareness session was organized with the support of the Department of Environment, Khulna, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), and Jalma Union Parishad.

Bangladesh is the 4th most lead-impacted country in the world; of an estimated 36 million Bangladeshi children, approximately 60% have concentrations of lead in their blood that the World Health Organization recognizes as causing brain damage and IQ loss. In 2019, lead exposure resulted in more than 38,000 deaths (3.6% of all deaths) in Bangladesh. Illegally used lead-acid battery (ULAB) recycling factories are one of the major sources of lead pollution.

Pure Earth's Toxic Site Identification Program (TSIP) has identified 300+ toxic sites, World Bank estimates 1100+ ULAB toxic sites in Bangladesh. One such lead-contaminated site has been identified in Khulna's Mohammadnagar area where there used to be an open-air, unsafe, illegal lead-acid battery dismantling factory. Pure Earth and Khulna University have collaborated to start a clean-up program in April 2023 in that lead-contaminated area to reduce exposure. This intervention is a part of the Protecting Every Child's Potential (PECP) project. The community event aimed to raise awareness about lead pollution and inform the community and local administration about the upcoming lead clean-up activities and seek support and collaboration from them during the intervention.

Supporting the project's intervention, the special guest of the event, **Md Iqbal Hossain, Director, Department of Environment, Khulna** said, *“Bangladesh ranks fourth in the world in terms of lead pollution. This is very dangerous for us. We have dismantled many unsafe lead battery factories through mobile courts. The Department of Environment will provide full support to Pure Earth's lead remediation project in Khulna.”*

The special guest of the program, **Dr. Md. Monzurul Murshid, Director, Khulna District Health Office, Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS)** said, *“There are many sources of lead pollution. The damage that lead pollution causes is irreversible. Prevention is the only way for that.”*

Dr. Mahfuzar Rahman, Country Director of Pure Earth said, *“We want to see Khulna as a healthy city, so it is important to make it lead-free. We want no one to be left behind, not even a child with lead in their blood.”*

Professor Dr. Md. Atiqul Islam, Environmental Science discipline, Khulna University said, *“Lead is a heavy metal, so if it is not cleaned, it remains in the environment forever. Therefore,*

Pure Earth and Khulna University have jointly taken an initiative to clean up the lead pollution spread from the lead battery-breaking factory in Mohammadnagar, Khulna. We don't want to see our future generations crippled by lead."

In the closing speech, the **chair of the program, Dr. Abdullah Harun Chowdhury, Professor and Head of Discipline, Department of Environmental Science, Khulna University** said, *"There is no alternative to raise awareness to prevent lead pollution. We should be aware of ourselves and make others aware. It is very important to make Bangladesh free of lead as it is very harmful to children and pregnant women."*

The event was highly interactive with the proactive participation of the community people and youth groups through question-and-answer rounds, also it was informative for the audience as they get to see a video documentary on the impact and solutions to lead pollution, and also received lead pollution-related leaflet and dangler as a take home. The one and half hour event concluded with taking an oath to unite to prevent lead pollution, and a photo session with a placard that reads "Together, we can solve lead pollution".

Other special guests of the event were Sujat Ahmed, Civil Surgeon, Khulna, Md. Anamul Haque, Officer In-charge, Labanchora Thana, local religious leader Mawlana Nazmul Hasan, Baitul Miraz Jame Masjid, and many more.

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