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## Asbestos report: a few plain facts

Your story The Return of Asbestos (Tehelka, February 5, 2005) hasn't investigated how the myth of 'controlled use' of asbestos through environmental norms has been debunked world over. The story reads like a paid advertisement disguised as a feature on the white asbestos cement industry. While we hold Tehelka in high esteem, it is painful to note that The People's Paper is carrying an anti-people story. According to the International Labour Organisation, 1,00,000 deaths are happening annually due to asbestos. Asbestos is now banned in the European Union member countries. The World Trade Organisation and World Health Organisation have termed white asbestos as cancer-causing. In India, grant of fresh mining leases and renewal of existing leases for asbestos are banned. Blue and brown asbestos and asbestos waste are also illegal; only the import of white asbestos remains to be banned.



Given the fact that the ministries of commerce and industry are supporting asbestos-exporting countries like Canada and Russia to the detriment of its own people, we feel citizens must boycott all asbestos products as has been the case in the US. If asbestos kills Europeans, Australians, Japanese, Canadians and others how can it be safe for Indians? In such a situation one wonders how and why your paper announced the return of asbestos in India? Why does the story



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not have a byline?

**Gopal Krishna**  
*BANI-Toxics Link, New Delhi*

Dear Mr Gopal,

The asbestos projects story is based on facts as disclosed by the ministry of environment and forests (moef) on its website over the last three years. Before dealing with the allegations against Tehelka and its editorial staff, let me at the outset defend and respect your right to give an activist's side of the story. But I remind you to stick to the facts of the story — the government's decisions on projects for manufacture of white asbestos cement products. The story was mere reporting of the facts as they exist today. I expect you to submit at the earliest a written story backed with documentary proof against the contents of the story. Please bear in mind that the story was about the environmental approvals given by the moef after consulting reputed organisations and experts in the field of pollution control and occupational hazards. Your comments about asbestos mining are not relevant to my story, as it does not contain a word about mining.

This is not to undermine the importance of the news value of your claim (made during our phone conversation) that the moef didn't consult the ministry of mining before granting environmental approvals for production of white asbestos products. Please give documentary proof to back your claim along with other relevant information about the expiry of mining leases.

I wish you had checked with any of our correspondents about our story before making baseless allegations against Tehelka. We are just a telephone call away. I find your allegations amusing because I have not met a single representative of the asbestos industry in 25 years of my journalistic career. Even the one paragraph attributed to industry sources has been picked from published industry literature.

In any case, industrialists are as much part of the society as ngos. Do you expect a business journalist to black out facts to earn a 'character certificate' from an ngo like yours? Or, is there any rule that requires a journalist to always precede any story with allegations from ngos? I hope I am able to convince you that journalism is about reporting facts. You are always welcome to bring damaging facts about any industry to Tehelka. We would not let you down.

The story appeared under the generic byline Tehelka Bureau is purely an operational one. The editorial management and myself do not want to create an impression that business pages are dominated by my contributions. In any case, whether a story appears under a personal byline or under generic byline, it has the Tehelka stamp. Tehelka as a name enjoys far more credibility than a correspondent.

**Naresh Minocha**  
*Associate Editor-Business, Tehelka*