

# A factory recycles cloth into paper

By Moutussi Acharyya

AN INDIAN entrepreneur who is also a keen environmentalist has started producing paper from waste cloth at his factory in Dubai.

"We are the first and only ones in the Gulf to recycle textile factory waste and discarded cotton cloth to produce paper known as handmade or recycled paper," says Rajan Ahluwalia, of Oasis Paper Industry, in Al Quoz.

The product is hundred per cent eco-friendly, produced entirely from dumped material and is further recyclable. There is a huge demand in the Gulf for this product. Unlike some recycled products which look shabby, our product looks elegant and is used for many purposes: from invitation and greeting cards to writing paper, envelopes, writing pads, file covers, brochures, gift wrappers, bottle holders, sweet boxes, decorative paper, etc."

Mr Ahluwalia, who has been in the environment field and waste management business in India for the last 10 years, was collecting garbage and disposing it of in an environmentally friendly way in Chandigarh. He also employed 80 rag pickers and their wives to make handmade paper.

When Mr Ahluwalia came to the UAE, he saw a lot of waste produced here and wanted to do something.

"I saw there were a lot of garment factories here which were just dumping their waste in the landfills. In fact, we had to buy the waste in India but here it is free as it is just thrown away. I saw there was not a single factory recycling the textile waste in the whole of the Gulf and I decided I could not



Waste cloth being recycled into paper at the Al Quoz factory.

let this opportunity go. Also, the conditions were very favourable as people here are environment conscious and the demand here for recycled products is great. People get quite excited when I tell them about my idea."

Mr Ahluwalia says people can contribute in the future by donating their old cotton clothes, as well as jute bags bought from the supermarket in which onions, rice, etc. are packed. "But since my production capacity is small, I cannot accept them right now as they could not be utilised. In future, when we start producing at full capacity, we will have to work out a network of collection points by approaching the Emirates Environment Group and similar organisations. At the moment I

have so much raw material I can utilise only a fraction of that so people who want to donate their old clothes will have to wait for a while."

But even now he feels he is making a difference by helping the Dubai government reduce its landfill problem by collecting all the waste of garment factories.

"And we are also contributing our bit to the world's environment by not cutting down trees to produce more paper. Do you know one tonne of mill paper produced costs the earth 270 eucalyptus trees or 460 bamboo plants? Also, we don't use chlorine or any chemicals whatsoever and it is produced in the most eco-friendly way."

Explaining the recycling

process, he said, the cotton waste is first brought to the factory and thrashed for five to six hours till it turns fluffy. It is then put in an agitator and brought to a particular consistency. To create different designs, flowers, grass, wollen bits are added to the pulp and then moulded into sheets which are dried out in the sun. They are then pressed in a calendar machine to give a glazing effect. The company has tied up with a number of people to supply everything from recycled shopping bags, cards, envelopes, to table mats and lamp shades and venetian blinds made of this paper.

Mr Ahluwalia says though the paper is mainly sold in bulk to stationeries and card manufacturers etc., the company is

prepared to meet specific demands of clients. But the minimum order should be at least for 150kg, which is the quantity produced at one time by the machine. At the moment, the company is recycling 1.5 tonnes of waste per day but its goal is 12 tonnes.

Oasis Paper has already found many clients, including individuals, who want to use the recycled stationery. Dubai Municipality has promised to meet all its paper needs with the company's material. Dubai, Eppo, DHL and Emarat want to have their letterheads on recycled paper.

Mr Ahluwalia also has plans to recycle wood and get involved in wood mulching as it can produce beautiful furniture.