

# MOSAIC

## Asia toxic dumping ground

SOUTHEAST Asian nations are fast becoming a dumping ground for toxic waste from wealthy countries, environmental group Greenpeace warned recently.

The warning came after revelations that nearly 12,000 tonnes of toxic industrial waste were exported to Malaysia illegally by a company in Taiwan, a case which Greenpeace called "the tip of the iceberg".

Huge volumes of dangerous refuse — including medical and electronic waste, old tires and used lead acid batteries — in the guise of recycling materials, are being shipped to Thailand, Cambodia and the Philippines from industrialized nations that don't want to pay to dispose of the material safely.

Greenpeace called for the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to urgently implement international laws on toxic waste to stem the tidal wave of toxic and hazardous waste that is often heaped upon countries in the region.

All ASEAN member states should ratify the Basel Ban Amendment, which needs signatures from 62 countries before it becomes part of the Basel Convention on the control of trans-border hazardous waste movement. A total of 44 have ratified it so far.

This would help to "effectively place a global prohibition on the export of hazardous wastes from member states of the European Union or the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)."

Among ASEAN members, only Malaysia and Brunei have ratified the amendment.

"It is clear that the status quo has emboldened the international waste traders to use the ASEAN countries as a dump for the industrial world's toxic waste," said Francis de la Cruz of Greenpeace.

Taiwan said it was prepared to take back the

toxic industrial waste exported to Malaysia after the environmental authorities found the import license for the shipment was fake. — *Samina Iqbal*

## Venomous precautions

INSECTS of the order hymenoptera, which includes ants, bees, hornets, wasps and yellow jackets, have a stinging apparatus at the tail end of their abdominal segment and are capable of delivering between 100ng (fire ants) and 50 microgm (bees) of venom.

This was stated in a recent issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Some of these venoms can induce toxic responses. An adult can die if he receives 1500 stings of hymenoptera venom. Most people experience redness, swelling, tenderness and pain at the site of the sting, which resolves in a few hours. Occasionally it may persist for a week.

These are not life threatening, unless they involve the airway. But they can cause tremendous morbidity as when the sting involves the foot or hand or is near the eye.

Sometimes generalized reactions can occur. These can be seen as urticaria and itching. At times there is a broader effect with nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal cramps. There can be breathing difficulties, low blood pressure and collapse.

Local reactions are treated with antihistamines and cold compresses. Topical application of antihistamine or steroidal creams can help. Generalized reactions are treated with injectable epinephrine, 0.011mg per kg body weight to a maximum of 0.3mg in children and 0.5mg in adults.

Preventive measures include avoidance of insects by people with a known sensitivity to the insect venom. Epinephrine should always be used in case of emergency and if available,

an epinephrine auto-injector must be owned by such patients. Referral to an allergist is warranted and venom immunotherapy should be administered for all venoms testing positive. — *Dr Fatema Jawad*

## Napoleon memoirs

TWO hundred years after he crowned himself emperor of France, a handwritten draft of Napoleon Bonaparte's memoirs — littered with spelling mistakes — fetched a record price at auction in Paris.

Thirteen pages in Napoleon's own hand, describing the triumphs and defeats — military and political — of the diminutive military genius at the dawn of the 19th century, went to a Swiss collector for 250,000 euros (\$336,400).

The memoirs reveal what numerous corrections and a vivacious writing style could not disguise — that the commander of Grande Armee that subdued most of continental Europe had a less than total command of the French language.

The Corsican's spelling was atrocious.

The memoirs were written in exile between 1817 and 1820 on St Helena. "The (memoirs) are extraordinary. He manages to remember what the battle sites looked like, 20 years after the event," auctioneer Eric Buffetaud said.

The document lingers over the French defeat at the siege of Genoa in 1800 and describes the attempts at a breakout by General Andre Massena, a future Marshal of France.

Based on the draft, Napoleon's memoirs were published in 1823, two years after his death. It appears, however, that the publishers took little account of Napoleon's own corrections and comments made in the margins, most of which were ignored.