

Toxic poultry feed

A pressing public health concern

POULTRY feed is being produced through using tannery wastes without necessary treatment and sterilisation. The news has further lengthened the long list of public health hazards.

Experts have pointed out that poultry feed produced from tannery wastes without sterilisation is harmful both to the poultry birds and consumers of eggs and chicken. So the magnitude of the health hazard can easily be gauged.

The problem stems primarily from the fact that poultry feed producers are not always using the scientific methods and not going by the health and hygiene standards. Poultry is a fast growing sector which contributes significantly to the economy. However, the latest finding shows that things are not being handled the way they ought to be in this area.

The number of consumers of eggs and chicken is big and there will be an adverse impact on public health if toxic or contaminated substances are allowed to pass on to the consumers through poultry feed.

What is, however, most surprising is that the government department and ministry concerned have said that they are unaware of any such production of poultry feed. That only goes to show that there is no monitoring on poultry feed production.

Now that the government agencies have come to know that poultry feed is being produced by some people in violation of health standards, they must act swiftly to stop such production. Without question, public health and the interests of the poultry industry should be uppermost in the minds of the decision-makers.

The finding should also help them realise that better monitoring is needed for a sector like poultry which supplies protein to numerous people. Corrupt practices and the tendency to make extra profit at the cost of public health have to be curbed. It must also be ensured that the poultry feed producers, and all others working in this sector, become sensitised about the health hazards and do not violate the rules.

Admission season peaking

School crisis hits sore-point

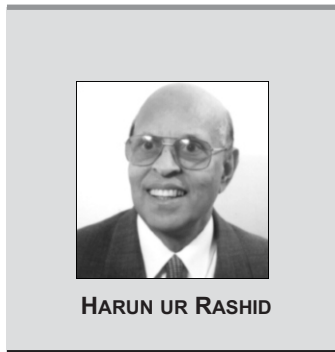
IT is called problem of admission, but we call it crisis of schools. Why we call it so, would be clear from a simple statistical analysis. There are 322 secondary-level schools in Dhaka city. Of them 24 are government run. Only 15-16 schools are sought after by parents for getting their wards admitted into. The break-up is even more tell-tale; three to four government schools and 10-12 private sector ones are facing the brunt of admission rush.

An overwhelming number of schools 300 plus are left in the lurch as very few admission seekers are collecting application forms from them. Even some of the reputed schools of yesteryears like Pogose High School and Nawabpur Government High School are being side-tracked. The parental preference is also visibly shifting towards private schools, the number of favourite government-run schools remaining static: Government Laboratory School, Dhanmondi Government Boys' School and Motijheel Government Girls' High School. Although the admission tests for government schools are being conducted centrally, the parental choice is concentrated on those just three schools. Private schools are being increasingly chosen for good management practices, quality of teaching and class room tests that make the students comprehend the concepts better.

Now, the rush for admission to few schools spawns donation culture, commercial coaching and influence peddling which in turn make the system opaque and discriminatory.

In a broader context, it amounts to waste of school space in a country which can ill-afford idle schools, given the none-too-happy literacy status of the country. The issue basically is lack of uniformity in the quality and standard of schools. The dire need is to upgrade the large number of schools that have gone comatose over the years. Management is the core concern there.

Seismic shift in Gaddafi's policy



ON 19th December, both the US President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that Libya's strongman Colonel Mu'ammarr Gaddafi had agreed to destroy the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) including the Scud missiles. Western powers have hailed Col. Gaddafi's decision as "huge statesmanship and courage".

It has been revealed that Libya has: Tonnes of mustard gas and other chemical weapons materials; Bombs made to carry mustard gas; Facilities that could manufacture germ weapons; Scud missiles; A more advanced nuclear programme than previously known (much advanced than that of Iranian programme).

The agreement came after nine long months of secret negotiation by the US and British officials in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks (France and

Germany remained in the dark and they are not happy about it). Tripoli acted swiftly to prove its commitment by meeting UN nuclear arms inspectors on 20th December. Libya also agreed to take steps to go through a verifiable process to destroy the chemical and biological weapons and on 23rd December four British officials are reported to have met three Libyans in London to put into writing Tripoli's

enumerated below:

First, Libya has been under crippling sanctions from the US. Its petrol industry has worn out and needs new equipment. It is the US companies that could do it. Libya agreed to destroy the WMD in return of lifting US sanctions on Libya so that US companies can return to strike commercial deals with it.

Second, Libya's leader has realised that his zeal to transform

Third, the stubbornness and defiance of Saddam Hussein did not in the long run pay. The world scenario has changed with the September 11 attacks. It has given rise to unilateralism of the mighty powerful US. Although Saddam's capture does not justify the original reason for invasion of Iraq, it is a deep humiliation for Saddam Hussein to be in the custody of the US..

Fourth, the concept of pan-

Arabia. At one stage he threatened to withdraw his country from the Arab League.

Fifth, his failure to spread pan-Arabism has led him to advocate pan-Africanism from mid 90s.. He wanted to integrate all 51 African countries into a powerful force like the European Union. He was instrumental in changing the name of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to African Unity (AU) in 2002. His dream of African unity

the idea of building a political and economic force from the Third World to counter the influence of the Western powers. He saw that during the three decades his dream was not fulfilled. He has realised that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the equation of global power has dramatically changed. The US has become the lone superpower and this eminent position of the US does not seem to disappear within his life-time. He is now in his 60s and has finally adopted a policy of pragmatism in a unipolar world. By agreeing to eliminate WMD, Gaddafi, once one of the region's most fervent anti-Western powerful leaders, seems to distance himself from the ideologies he had earlier pursued.

The Libyan leader hopes that the deal will eventually lift US sanctions and lead to resumption of diplomatic relations with the US, cut off since 1981. Col. Gaddafi's first name is 'Mu'ammarr' that in Arabic means 'long-lived'. He has survived as a leader since 1969 and is likely to continue to do so, especially after the stunning deal with the US and Britain. This brings to mind what Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) once said: " Survival is a thing not beyond the bounds of possibility."

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

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Many argue that this course could have been easily adopted with the Saddam Hussein regime and the chaotic conditions in the post-war Iraq would not have arisen. The stance of France and Germany about resolving political disputes through negotiation or soft power has been found to be valid. Furthermore fighting terrorism with war is like fighting the fire with petrol. War is fuel for terrorism, not a deterrent..

The weapons deal with Libya was hailed as a triumph of diplomacy. The question is why did Gaddafi agree to it? Some of the possible reasons are

Libya's society through his "Green Book" philosophy has ended in failure. The philosophy was based on Islam, Arabism and socialism. Libya has not been getting richer but poorer because of sanctions. Libya's main income is oil and unless it is modernised, there is no hope getting its national wealth increased. Libya remained isolated since 1993 until this year because of its involvement. It was 1988 bombing of a Pan Am jetliner over Lockerbie in Scotland. Gaddafi wanted to join the mainstream of world community for national interests and the only way to quicken it is to agree to destroy the WMD.

Arabism advocated by Gaddafi for a new world order turned out to be illusory. He proposed several abortive declarations of union with Arab countries: Egypt and Syria (1969), Egypt (1972), Tunisia (1974), Syria (1980), Chad (1981) and Morocco (1984). Relations with these states have been strained on occasions, with Libya being accused of destabilising other governments. It was involved in a lengthy and unnecessary war with Chad until 1987. He was deeply frustrated with policies of many Arab States toward the Western powers and often Libya with its headline clashed with pro-US Saudi

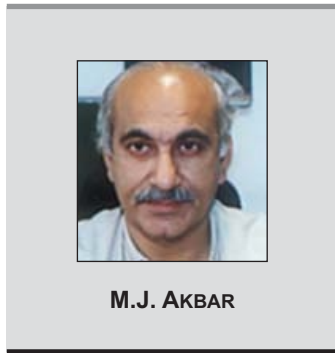
has also ended in failure.

Sixth, the Libyan deal follows the earlier Iranian decision to submit to rigorous UN inspection of its nuclear enrichment programme so as not to use nuclear plants to produce nuclear weapons. Iranian decision was also the result of diplomatic negotiations by three big European powers--Britain , France and Germany. Libya considers that these two events will put immense pressure on Israel to destroy WMD by the Western powers including the US.

Conclusion

The Libyan leader has toyed with

The motto of SAARC



HOW close is policy to a heartbeat? To paraphrase a well-known adage: policy is a dish best eaten cold. A policy decision is an exercise in collective will, a marriage of two circles: one of the government and the other of the bureaucracy. All governments are temporary, or should be; institutions are permanent. Institutions are required to be heartless, so there is no heartbeat factor operating there. They also prefer to be conservative and even negative, on the valid assumption that all change involves risk. Their job is to protect the nation, rather than merely the government, from such risk.

The heartbeat does make a difference at the political level. Take a recent example. Paul Martin has replaced Jean Chretien as Prime Minister of Canada. Both belong to the same party, the Liberals, and are committed to the same policies. But if Martin had been in charge nine months, it is highly possible that Canadian troops would have been alongside American ones in Iraq. Alternatively, if Gordon Brown had been Prime Minister of Britain instead of Tony Blair, Britain might have been America's guard-dog rather than the poodle. The inclinations of men do make a difference, even when they sit on the same platform. But once taken, a policy decision is meant to be sacrosanct. In the case of foreign policy, a successor government is required to honour a national commitment, although of

course there can be no guarantees.

Is the latest attempt to bring normalcy between India and Pakistan vulnerable to President Pervez Musharraf's heartbeat? It may not be very polite to address such a question, but it has assumed a very real dimension after the last two assassination attempts. As is known, such attempts have been made before, but never on this scale, with such

that the transfer of the last Chief of General Staff, Lt.-Gen. Shahid Aziz Siddiqui to Lahore as corps commander is evidence of such isolation. It predicts that the next casualty will be Lt.-Gen. Ali Mohammad Jan Orakzai, corps commander in Peshawar and therefore on the frontlines of the US war against Taliban and Al Qaeda, because of the latter's outspoken hostility towards the United States, "because he had

elements of the Army involved then power is much better reason than ideology. It means that for a sufficient number of generals, President Musharraf has become vulnerable. I am not a great believer in conspiracy theories: they are difficult to initiate and almost impossible to fulfil. But the very nature of a dictatorial system created through a coup lends itself to such suspicions. However, within ten days two

BYLINE

There is much at stake in the coming SAARC Summit. A long season of discontent seems to be giving way to reasons: 'seems' is as positive as we can rationally get in Indo-Pak relations. Good sense prevails upon South Asia when good sense guides India and Pakistan; they are the engines of the region. The nations of SAARC can decide whether it is in their shared interest to play dangerous games with one another, or work together to challenge common enemies.

determination, and so close to home. Once may be a matter of chance; twice may be a coincidence; but the third time, as Ian Fleming wrote, is definitely enemy action. So who is the enemy, and what is he doing in Islamabad-Rawalpindi? Theories have rolled out as quickly as the airwaves can absorb them. One side of the Rawalpindi bridge where the bomb attack took place was manned by the army and the other by the police -- so which side was vulnerable?

The usual suspects are all on parade: disgruntled generals, as ever, are high on the list, and Al Qaeda is now alleged to be responsible for all that goes wrong. One irreverent website that is called South Asia Tribune but concentrates chiefly on Pakistan, reported after the 14 December attack that a "major reshuffle in the top Pakistan Army ranks, almost within hours after the 3rd (or the 8th) assassination attempt on General Pervez Musharraf, has brought the existing divisions with the Army to the forefront with Musharraf now becoming even more isolated at the top". It claims

been insulted and mishandled by the immigration staff at New York's JFK airport". I know the feeling as do innumerable others, but I doubt that a mature man in a powerful position takes a view of vital importance because an immigration officer pinched his ego. There has to be a better reason. Journalists are accused of jumping to conclusions: actually, conclusions jump to journalists under deadline pressure.

So is there a better reason? Have significant numbers of the Pakistan establishment, whether in the Army or the police services, become converts to Al Qaeda? It may be reasonable to suggest that the ferment against George Bush's America that is so evident among Muslims extends to the hearts of those who might not express it because they have a job to protect. But that is not the same thing as becoming an activist who would instigate an assassination attempt against Pervez Musharraf because Osama bin Laden believes that he is one of the "Munafiqun", or hypocrites who accept the faith publicly but secretly work to destroy Islam. If there are

attempts were made on President Musharraf's life, and only Providence has kept him alive. Did the bridge-saboteurs of 14 December enter from the civilian side, past the police patrol? (One is using the police-military checkpoints as a metaphor of course.)

To uncover the effect, look for the cause. The mobile-bombers of Christmas Day were on a suicide mission, which makes it even more unlikely that the military was involved. This was an act of terrorism by people who believe that Musharraf is an enemy on a much larger battlefield. Pakistan has made regular use of shadow armies irrespective of who has been in power. General Zia ul Haq became the darling of the western world when he took on the Soviets through insurgents who were given a secure base, arms and funds through the border towns across Afghanistan. The Taliban was sponsored not by table-thumping political mullah or general, but by Benazir Bhutto. Here was a classic case of cross-border intervention: the funds, weapons, strategies and intelligence came from the masters in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and

President Musharraf gave to the *Toronto Globe* and *Star* during his visit to Canada. When asked the inevitable question about Osama, the President was reported as having remarked that Osama could be anywhere, even perhaps in Rawalpindi. This must have been said facetiously, or in a half-bitter jest. And yet there may be a serious truth there. The power of Osama bin Laden is either overestimated or underestimated, depending on how you view it. He is definitely not the chief executive of some multinational organisation that produces and exports terror. He cannot be, for the simple reason that he cannot even make a telephone call without risking discovery. He must be in deep isolation with only a few people through whom he can communicate. But he has real power to spread violence, because of his ability to capture the mind and passion of a suicide-missionary. This is what keeps him alive in a hundred cities across the world, Rawalpindi included.

Islamabad has been ambivalent towards Frankenstein: both Kabul

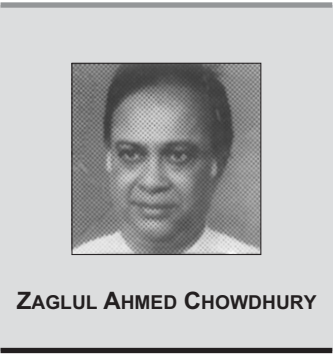
and Delhi are convinced that Pakistan calibrates its support for militants who can keep both neighbours on edge. The blur is deliberate, but maybe the time has arrived to find out who is getting lost in this blur. One fact may throw some light: there have been more assassination attempts on Pervez Musharraf than Hamid Karzai. The idea is not to score points but to find a solution. It is obvious that enough terrorist groups nurtured in Pakistan are now convinced that they must destabilise the government (still to take final shape) in Islamabad in order to strengthen themselves, and that there is no simpler way to do this than to assassinate the President. Is President Musharraf now convinced that all terrorist organisations have now placed him on the enemy list, or merely Al Qaeda? If he believes that there is still room for compartmentalisation, then he is fooling himself. If the Americans are looking for Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, then Jaish and Lashkar are looking for Musharraf.

There is much at stake in the coming SAARC Summit. A long season of discontent seems to be giving way to reasons: 'seems' is as positive as we can rationally get in Indo-Pak relations. Good sense prevails upon South Asia when good sense guides India and Pakistan; they are the engines of the region. It is obvious that we live in troubled times, with some of the trouble created by President Musharraf's chief benefactor, President George Bush. The nations of SAARC can decide whether it is in their shared interest to play dangerous games with one another, or work together to challenge common enemies.

The motto of this SAARC Summit seems obvious to me: If we don't hang together, we will hang separately.

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Cheers for South Asian cooperation



FINALLY, the 12th summit of the seven south Asian countries is set to take place in Islamabad from January 4.Barring unforeseen development of serious proportion, the south Asian association for regional cooperation (SAARC) will have its much-awaited summit in Pakistan's capital overcoming obstacles that have unfortunately delayed the event. Undoubtedly, some degree of uncertainty did exist surrounding the summit even at the last stage of preparation as host Pakistan was convulsed by a second attempt on the life of president Pervez Musharraf at the heart of the capital raising security concerns for the attending leaders. But

the Pakistani president himself sought to allay such fears by saying that it is he who is the target of certain forces and not the SAARC summit or any leader and as such that the event must be held on the schedule. The confusion was further set at rest by Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who has decided to travel to Islamabad for the event as the hosts have assured full proof security.

As such, no uncertainty should exist for the January 4-6 conference of the leaders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. However, one should not forget that there are instances of the summit being called off at the last moment. Once it happened when Bangladesh received with shock that the event was postponed at the dying moments when the country had made all the preparatory works to host it. But it appears that any possibility of the summit not being held this time is very remote.

It is important that the SAARC summit takes place once in a calendar year as stipulated in the charter of the organisation.

The charter provides this clearly for the reason that a summit once in a year should not be difficult since members come from one region and their number is not large.

Commonwealth lead-

intentions of the SAARC. Consequently, the forum suffered in the absence of meetings of their leaders at a regular interval.

Arguably, the SAARC secretariat and other levels meetings are useful, but consultations by the

limbo since delay and uncertainty about the meeting of the heads of government had cast a dark shadow on the activities of the forum that was founded through its first summit in Dhaka in 1985.

Bangladesh has particular

MATTERS AROUND US

Smaller nations of the group have bigger stakes in the forum while effective cooperative efforts by all seven countries can bring substantial benefits to 1.4 billion people most of whom are mired in abject poverty. SAARC with its resource constraints cannot do much but the achievements cannot be mean

ers(CHOGM) meet once in two years, non-aligned and Islamic countries once in three years. All these groups have big number of members who come from different continents, whereas seven SAARC members are neighbours. Hence the decision for annual conference of the leaders is rational as this should also provide the members to have talks at highest level for overall interest of the region. Sadly, this vision did not work for the forum as annual summit remains a distant dream even though it was one of the basic

leaders are imperative for the development of the organisation, which is afflicted with manifold problems mainly stemming from political differences. After all, it is the summit that effectively helps clear the hindrances that scuttle the expected growth of the forum. The

summit failed to take place several times on the schedule and this delivered a body blow to the cooperative efforts of the member states. It is against this background that SAARC deserves cheers because it has come out of the

reason to be anxious about the SAARC as this country mooted the idea . When late president Ziaur Rahman conceived the south Asian forum, the proposal was

greeted with a large degree of skepticism in certain circles and major nations in the region even dragged their feet in endorsing the concept. But once it took off following assiduously built painstaking efforts, SAARC did not look back and the nascent forum is now eighteen years old -- albeit the slow progress.

actions(IPA) and the technical committees dealing with important areas have also performed reasonably well. But the inherent mistrust in the region and particularly between the two main players in the spectrum -- India and Pakistan -- continue to mar the expected development of the forum. The failure to stage the summits in time can be attributed mostly to the Indo-Pak rivalry. Summits were possible only after decks were cleared following improvement of New Delhi-Islamabad bilateral ties. It is no

exception this time too.

The SAARC is not mandated to touch the contentious bilateral matters and as such the relationship among the member nations considerably influence the overall ambience. The fall out of this situation is obvious in the region and SAARC is often the casualty in many ways. While removal of this unhealthy condition is a daunting task and cannot be swept under the carpet, the spirit of collective welfare should take precedence over bilateral dealings. Nonetheless, it is heartening that India has agreed to take part in the event. Pakistan's bid to hold the summit in January,2003 was frustrated by Indian prime minister's refusal to attend citing worsening bilateral ties.

Conducive ground for the summit has been created as two countries moved meaningfully in recent times to improve relations. The attempt on the life of Pakistan president Gen. Pervez Musharraf just ahead of the summit could have provided India a pretext to stay away from the event. But New Delhi's willingness to attend has come as a big relief to the well-wishers of SAARC

and also reflects its commitment to the forum. It is expected that all member states will participate in the deliberations in the same positive spirit that has been demonstrated in facilitating the staging of the long-delayed event. The summit is to deal with number of key issues that are inextricably linked with the economic well being of the people of the region.

Smaller nations of the group have bigger stakes in the forum while effective cooperative efforts by all seven countries can bring substantial benefits to 1.4 billion people most of whom are mired in abject poverty. SAARC with its resource constraints cannot do much but the achievements cannot be mean either. One wishes the Islamabad summit of the SAARC well and hopes that it will march ahead towards the avowed objectives surmounting the problems as far as possible.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.