

Time for a statutory warning?



Bottled danger still on

NAIMUL HAQ

A set of dishonest traders in Old Dhaka continues to fill used plastic water bottles with tap water and fastens fake security seals to them for sale.

Thousands of such bottles labelled 'drinking water' are sold in retail shops and supplied at family functions, get-togethers and public meetings.

The Daily Star published a story headlined "Bottled danger" highlighting the problem on October 1 last year.

Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI) decided to raid the illegal businesses and seize the equipment used to make fake security seals, but the BSTI inspection team never implemented the decision, allowing an uninterrupted supply of the illegal products across the country.

About two weeks before the Eid-ul-Azha, this correspondent visited Nawab Katra Road and some other places where such business goes unchecked and found the same people engaged in the back-street commercial venture.

Garbage collectors and rickshawpullers supply empty plastic bottles to such traders who recycle the bottles without using disinfecting method. According to the traders, each bottle with label intact will fetch Tk 0.20-0.30, depending on the quality of the bottle.

Some distilled water manufacturers, expressing disappointment at the issue, said the same product under a false brand costs much less than the original, forcing them to reduce production costs and arrange fixed clients for supply of their products straight from factories.

MIZANUR KHAN

Health officials and mineral water companies seem unaware of possible health risks like cancer from the reuse of throwaway plastic water bottles that a recent Australian study says contain potential carcinogenic elements.

Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines Staff that brought to light the health hazards, suggested people should not use more than once the water bottles, as they are made of polyethylene terephthalate (Pet) containing potential cancer agents.

According to the study, repeated washing and rinsing could make the plastic crack and the carcinogens can leak into drinking water.

A few companies have labels on their bottles warning people of reuse, but nowhere has it been cautioned that 'reuse may cause health hazards'.

"I heard about such a study for the first time from you. We are not sure about the authenticity of the report. If it is true, we will alert our customers," Parvez Hassan, deputy general manager of a Dhaka-based mineral water company, told Star City.

The label on the company's bottles reads "Please crush after use."

"We advertise this warning

to prevent other companies from reusing our bottles -- a business gimmick. We did not know the reuse of these bottles could lead to cancer," he said.

Authorities and quality-control departments of mineral water companies believe Pet bottles are safe, as they say there is no chemical reaction between water and polyethylene terephthalate.

"Pet bottles are used around the world and Bangladesh Standard Testing Institution approved them for use here too," said ASM Haider Ali, a bottled-water quality controller.

Some companies produce Pet bottles on their own.

"We import resin (an artificial substance similar to natural resin, used in making plastics) from Japan and Korea to produce the bottles. There is nothing wrong with it," said Hasan Imam, manager of marketing department of a popular mineral water company.

The label on his company's bottles reads: "This water is packed in Pet bottle, which is approved by USA for food packaging." But it has no caution about reuse.

"We cannot print such caution on labels, as we are not aware of further developments," he said of the findings that the bottles are safe for single-use only: if one keeps them longer, it should be no more than a week and the

bottles should be kept away from heat.

The Consumers' Association of Bangladesh (CAB) says the country has no law or policy on labels.

"The BSTI is responsible for the quality of water, not bottles or labels," said Emdad Hossain Malek, CAB programme officer.

A health ministry official said authorities took an initiative to draft a national policy on label standards. The committee led by Nurul Amin, additional secretary of the industries ministry, sat once and formed a sub-committee to review the laws and policies of neighbouring countries.

"Policies are necessary to protect our national products. The quality of labels is not up to the mark and information given is not adequate," an official working for a mineral water company said on condition of anonymity.

Most housewives store drinking water in used Pet bottles round the year, unaware of the consequences.

"We used to store water in glass bottles. We now use plastic bottles as they are cheap and available," said Samira Khatun, a Kalabagan resident.

Experts cautioned that children should be protected from the reuse of disposable plastic bottles as it could harm their health.



STAR PHOTO

Fish, soybean oil prices soar



AKM MOHSIN

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Fish prices have gone up in the city despite sufficient supply in the markets.

Meanwhile soybean oil marked another round of rise. Onion price remained static and prices of spices that soared before Eid did not come down even a week after the festival.

However, prices of farm chicken and eggs fell further while meat came down to its pre-Eid rate. Winter vegetables including potato are now available at reasonable prices. Prices of different varieties of rice are static.

In the city markets yesterday local ruhi was selling at 150-160 taka per kilogram, which was

between 100-120 taka just before Eid. Imported varieties which were Tk 80-100 a kilogram are now being sold at Tk 100-120. Prawn sells at Tk 200-220 a kilogram which was Tk 180-200 and cat fish at Tk 300-350 which was Tk 250-300 before Eid. Pabda has become dearer by at least Tk 150 and now sells at Tk 550-600 per kilogram. Other varieties of fish also marked a similar rise.

Fish traders could not give any satisfactory reason for the sudden price hike. Some blamed the hoarders at the wholesale markets while others termed it 'natural' citing that the winter is on the wane.

Soybean oil which marked a steady increase in the last few months had jumped to a record Tk 56-58 a litre just before Eid. But it has risen further and is

now being sold at Tk 58-60.

Local and Indian onions are static at Tk 22 and 20.

Market sources said prices of both soybean oil and onions are unlikely to go down before April because of 'some import factors'.

Farm chickens which fell to Tk 55 from Tk 65 before Eid because of bird flu fear have tumbled further to Tk 50 a kilogram in many city markets.

Among winter vegetables, tomato price decreased to Tk 10-12 from Tk 15-18 before Eid. Potato which was Tk 12-14 now sells at Tk 8-10 per kilogram.

Local beans now sells at Tk 10-12, carrot Tk 10-12, green tomato Tk 7-8, radish Tk 5-6, cucumber Tk 15-16, paapa Tk 5-6, brinjal Tk 12-14 and green chili at Tk 20-25.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.



"Opposition is now trying to create an issue by killing their own party workers."

-- Khaleda Zia
Prime Minister

Tells public meeting organised by BNP at Swarnpathi, Pirojpur, on February 6. Source: Prothom Alo

"Where there is a big gathering there is dust. So dust is like a component of the book fair."

-- Muhammad Nurul Huda
Member Secretary

Amar Ekushey Book Fair Organising Committee
Talking to Prothom Alo on February 6. Source: Prothom Alo

"Foreign police service may be involved to root out crimes."

-- Nurul Islam
Chittagong AL Leader

While commenting on the rising incidents of abduction, on February 5. Source: Prothom Alo

"The prime minister is now trying to shift blame on others."

-- Sheikh Hasina
AL President and Leader of the Opposition in JS

Tells Bogra Lawyers at her Dhanmondi party office while commenting on Khaleda Zia's claim on murders of AL leaders and workers on February 7. Source: Prothom Alo

"Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh and Chittagong of criminals."

-- Iqbal bin Yakub
Fatikchhari 4-party leader

Expressing disgust at frequent incidents of abduction in Chittagong, on February 4. Source: Prothom Alo

"Just wait and see. You will see a lot of things in the days ahead."

-- Obaidul Quader
Acting General Secretary, Awami League

Commenting on political developments to the newsmen on February 5. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"I will consider pros and cons if offered to join cabinet."

-- Raushan Ershad
Member, Jatiya Sangsad

Replying to Bhorer Kagoj on reports on a government move to expand cabinet on February 4. Source: Bhorer Kagoj



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



Basanta at the door

Winter is on the wane and the nature has started heralding the advent of spring. Falling leaves, blooming flowers, chirping birds and gliding butterflies are already around to welcome the loving Bangla season of romance

-- Basanta.