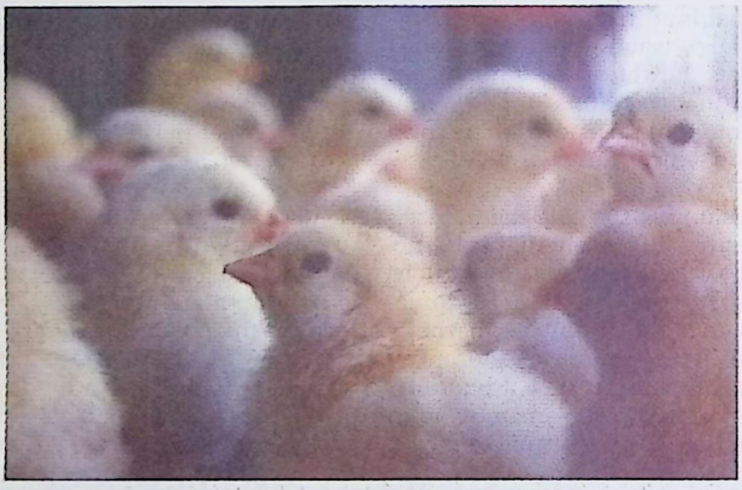
Back with the Flu

The Bird flu virus is back! Travelling through space and time, this virus spreads through affected fowls, eggs, faeces, egg crates and even vehicles, used to carry poultry products to markets. As investigators strive to solve this age-old mystery of this rapidly spreading disease, they have discovered that a great deal of the fault lies mainly with the government.





Firstly, the government's monitoring mechanism is not as strong as it claims it to be. In spite of providing the public with constant assurances of having everything under control, the real picture seems to be very different. There is a lack of bio security measures on the farms, not to mention precautionary steps taken for the sake of the workers. Many poultry farm owners are unaware of the precautions and the measures taken to protect themselves and their workers, since the authorities do not take the pains to inform them or create any kind of awareness. According to poultry farm owners, facemasks and gloves are not provided as per the, international policy, inside poultry farms. Many farms do not have the required footbath at the entry and exit points either. One such owner claimed that he was not aware of the fact that disinfectants are supposed to be sprayed at least twice a day. He would spray them every other week! He also says that even though his farm is registered with the government, government livestock officials have never paid the mandatory inspections to improve the bio security system. The officials appear once in a while, when the owners repeatedly inform them of sickness of the chickens.

Secondly, the Avian influenza (AI) is most likely to spread amongst the birds this year, since temperature as low as below 20 degrees is a favourable breeding environment for the H5N1 virus. The virus is also likely to spread during slaughtering, plucking, processing and preparation of the poultry for cooking. According to experts, in the case of human infection, it is quite difficult to differentiate the Avian flu from regular seasonal flu. But there is a 90 percent chance of full recovery if antiviral is applied within 48 hours of being infected with the A H5N1 virus. To prevent the Avian influenza, World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that meat be cooked thoroughly so all parts of the meat reach an internal temperature of 70 degrees Celsius -- the temperature that destroys the Avian influenza virus.

To battle this disease, at least 10,000 sets of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) have been donated by the United States to Bangladesh as combat gear. Each set consists of coveralls, shoe covers, a respirator, goggles, an apron, and inner and outer gloves. This, according to many, might be a way to strengthen avian influenza prevention and control. However, the government must take steps to arrange research programmes to fight the rapid spread of this disease and also organise workshops for poultry farm owners to create awareness regarding improving the bio security system on the farm.