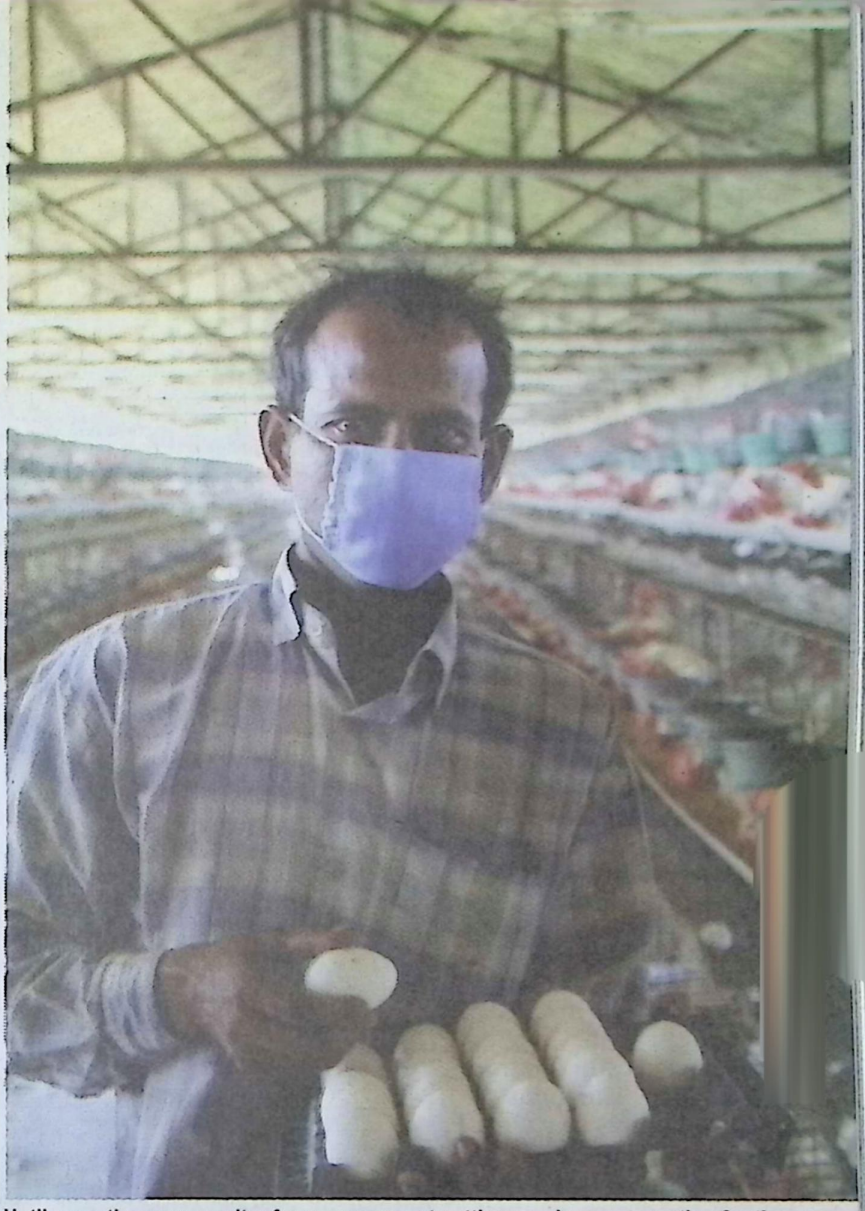
In the context of the dangerously increasing number of avian influenza (more commonly known as bird flu) cases all over Bangladesh, the most threatening piece of information is the possibility of the virus mutating so that it can be transferred from human to human. Bird flu has been a recurring threat in Bangladesh and its neighbouring nations. The problem, however, is that a wave of the disease suddenly hits the nation and then, just as suddenly it goes away, resulting in everyone believing that the problem has either been solved, or has gone away.

Unfortunately for us, the bird flu crisis did not disappear. Like most other types of influenza, bird flu is more common during the winter, when there is less sunlight. According to Zeeshan Hasan, Director of Kazi Farms, "The basic thing is that the disease is naturally destroyed by sunlight. It disappears even if you do nothing as long as it gets warmer. We only see evidence of the outbreaks when it gets cold, but that doesn't mean that the disease is not there when it is warm."

Hasan, like many more of his counterparts in the poultry industry, does not believe that proper precautions are being taken to prevent outbreaks of bird flu. The government, in order to prevent further outbreaks, is using the culling method, in which they kill the affected birds and destroy the farm in question. According to Dr. Muhammad Salehuddin Khan, Director of Animal Health Administration, "Any poultry farm within a 10 kilometre radius of the affected farm. It is important for everyone, especially all the farmers, to cooperate and comply with the prevention strategy that the government has come up with."



Until recently, many poultry farmers were not getting ample compensation for the destruction of their farms. Bird flu has caused more than just panic among the people, but has also destroyed the livelihood of thousands of people.

Unfortunately most farmers will not cooperate with the government until they are given compensation for their losses. After all, if a farmer's entire livelihood is based on the farm, far be it for them to readily cooperate with the process of destroying it. Until recently, the rule was that any farm with 5000 or less chickens would receive compensation, while the bigger farms would not. However, last week, the government announced that it would provide compensation to all the farmers, regardless of how big or small their farms are.

Even with compensation for their destroyed farms, however, people in the poultry industry does not necessarily agree that culling chickens is the best way to tackle the spreading of the disease.

"First of all, the government is culling chickens based on the assumption that this disease is foreign and that the cases of bird flu are isolated incidents, which have to be contained within the affected areas," says Hasan. "They are assuming that it is not a domestic disease. The strategy of culling failed in Thailand and Malaysia and it is no longer possible to eliminate this disease."

Similarly Dr. Rafiqul Haque, Poultry Consultant and Proprietor of the Poultry Consultant and Development Services believes that this "stamping out system is almost nearly impossible to maintain, especially because the plan takes about two to three days to put into action and by that time, the disease has already spread elsewhere."

Haque goes on to say that the bird flu crisis has become a serious problem for the poultry industry, striking a huge blow which may not be retractable. "About 50