IT'S NO JOKE

BIRD flu, shmird flu; what's all the fuss about?

How many of us work closely with chickens? So close, that we are likely to be sneezed on by one of our feathered friends or something unmentionably worse?

Not a vast number of chicken fanciers or voodoo practitioners among the general population, I would hazard.

But on a serious note, do spare a thought for the country's poultry farmers who are seeing their livelihoods slip away, not just through culling but also from lack of sales.

My dear *bua* -- like thousands of others -- has got it into her head that she cannot buy chicken products any more.

It's not like I'm not forcing her to bring live ones into the house to slaughter, but I have to beg her just to get eggs from the corner shop.

I love eggs.

If I thought my cholesterol levels were getting a break from her cruel denial of my daily omelette, it might compensate a little. But no, she has suddenly taken to buying and cooking large amounts of red meat instead of chicken.

We don't eat red meat at home as a rule. But what can you do when a tasty morsel or ten are presented to you at the table without warning?

I must have a stronger word with her.

I realise the government and local authorities must act with due caution to contain the spread of a virus that could potentially be harmful to us humans.

But perhaps I could point out to my *bua* that it's a little like overkill to get so worked up about some sick chickens when there are enough threats to the people population to last a lifetime already -- or rather, to cut short our lifetimes already.



Let's count the manifold ways ...

Malnutrition for a great many people would be number one, I guess.

Thereafter, there are (join in if you know the words) dengue, malaria, cholera, typhoid, leprosy, filarial, and TB.

If I were an expert in tropical diseases I could name a couple more, I reckon.

But as a layperson, I think I can rack my brains for a few more likely sources of disease that aren't chickens.

How about rats, bats, rabid dogs, (I think we've covered the mosquito threat), open drains, rotting garbage, and street food?

Then there are the purely physical dangers, such as collapsing buildings, pollution, bus drivers on speed, truck drivers on heroin, taxi drivers that don't know their brake from their accelerator.

Not to mention the threat of earthquakes and global warming.

Oh, and how could I possibly forget the friendly reminder sent to every mobile subscriber in the country, it would appear, from the nephrology department at Birdem Hospital.

Kidney disease is "harmful" and all too common, according to the SMS I received out of the blue two days ago from the kind people at Birdem.

An innocent public health message, an attempt to drum up business, or uncalled for scare mongering?

You decide.

But don't forget to line up and have your kidneys tested, just in case.

Speaking of scare and mongering, I wonder if I can ever again get my *bua* to cook up my favourite dish of chicken livers.

I really miss them.

Bandicoot