On October 15, samples provided by the Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institute (BSTI), DU Chemistry Department handed over the reports to BSTI, although these were rejected by the popular multinational branded powder milk companies, as it differed with the test reports conducted at BSTI laboratory and a private laboratory Plasma Plus.

Later, the chemistry department disclosed their report publicly revealing melamine contamination levels as follows: Australia's Diploma - .23 mg/gm, Red Cow .30 mg/g, Denmark's Dano Full Cream Milk- .04 mg/g, China's Yashili- 1.29 mg/g, Yashili- 2.14 mg/g, Sweet Baby- 2.28mg/g, New Zealand's Nido Fortified Instant- .45 mg/g and Anlene- n.20 mg/g.

After the report of deaths of four children and 53,000 babies having suffered acute kidney failure with several fatalities after drinking melamine contaminated milk in China, BSTI collected samples of eight powdered milk products for testing at three laboratories- BSTI laboratory, Department of Chemistry laboratory and private laboratory Plasma Plus. Last month Bangladesh stopped importing powdered milk from China.

The biggest hurdle in getting to the real facts regarding such contamination is the fact that there is not enough data available about things like the long term effects of consuming these substances and how much of it can cause damage to health.

The Chemistry Department detected an 'amorphous powder' form of melamine in the milk samples of all of the eight brands, following the high quality United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) guideline of High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) method in the sophisticated GC-MS machine.

"We are confident about the results of our tests detecting melamine in the samples of powdered milk provided by BSTI," says Professor Nilufar Nahar, under whose leadership the tests were conducted at the Chemistry Department. "And in the case of the same samples and same method the result will always be the same at any laboratory of the world", she adds.

On the other hand, Plasma Plus and BSTI detected melamine only in one Chinese brand Yashili 1, though last month, Chinese authorities had alerted Bangladesh of the existence of harmful substances in the products of the two companies Sun Care and Yashili that produce Sweet Baby, Yashili 1 and Yashili 2.

Instead of giving any guidelines for the people, the welfare secretary of Ministry of commerce declared for a retesting the powdered milk products at the laboratories of Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) and Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) and in Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) laboratory.

In response to the rejection of the test reports by the Department of Chemistry by the local agents of the powder milk companies and the controversy over the results, the government formed a five-member committee with representatives from the ministries of commerce, industries and health, the BSTI and the powdered milk companies in question, to collect samples of the eight brands from the local market for retesting at the laboratories of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) and in Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) laboratory.

Another 12-member committee comprised of experts from the DU chemistry department, BAEC, BSCIR, Plasma Plus, BSTI and the health ministry will give their opinions on the basis of the tests after which the government will take the final decision in this regard.

Mysteriously, the government ignored the advice of the UN agencies FAO, WHO and Unicef of removing all melamine contaminated milk products from the shelves of markets as soon as the tests confirm the unsafe levels of contamination. UN also offered support for authentic tests of the samples sent abroad.

The government's lethargy regarding such a crisis was severely criticised by the citizens and human rights



After detecting toxic melamine in powdered milk experts are suggesting to avoid other milk products such as sweets.