

Poultry turning dangerously toxic

Time to act decisively

THIS is the height of nightmare for policymakers, health practitioners and consumers. An entire subsector specialising in turning tannery waste into fake, but cheap alternative to regular poultry feed enters the supply chain. Only now are we beginning to fathom the dire effects of inordinately high levels of mercury turning up in chickens and eggs, two of the basic staples in our diet. The fact is that authorities have their hands full with formalin, carbide and other industrial-grade chemicals being used in abundance by suppliers in an effort to preserve foodstuffs. And although the government has recently enacted a food safety law, its implementation remains to be seen.

While all this is going on, consumers are left largely to their own devices to find “safe” food for themselves and their families. Going by a detailed study made public by Dhaka University’s chemical department on June 28, we are appalled to learn that “the excess amount of chromium can be transported from poultry feed to the human body through the chicken leading to carcinogenic effects on human beings like cancer, ulcer, liver cirrhosis and kidney damages, etc.”

Little wonder, that the formal poultry feed sector is up in arms demanding immediate government intervention to stamp out the illicit business specialising in the manufacture of fake feed that is affecting not only chicken, but egg production in the country. It is high time authorities take decisive steps to bring this criminal syndicate to book in the interests of protecting public health and the poultry industry at large.

Supreme Court's welcome ruling

Follow up on it urgently

MONDAY'S Supreme Court (SC) ruling that upheld its 2010 verdict affirming a High Court order on the government to demarcate the areas of four rivers surrounding Dhaka and remove all structures therein excluding the government-built ones is welcome. With this landmark SC verdict, the government has now been freed of all legal barriers to removing privately constructed jetties and other structures from the rivers Sitalakhya, Balu, Turag and Buriganga.

It is worthwhile to note that the media and the civil society have been engaged in a long-drawn crusade against the various vested quarters’ attempt to encroach on lands deep within the shorelines of these rivers and build illegal structures there. But these powerful quarters went ahead with their evil designs, despite the public uproar. Even worse, by challenging in court the public interest litigations seeking redress against such destructive activities, those quarters have already caused inordinate delays in the government’s effort to free up these rivers and thereby restore the delicate river ecosystem that cradles this historic city and its population.

Hopefully, the government would now go all out to make up for the lost time, demarcate the rivers and evict all illegal possessions falling within their boundaries determined by the administration. At the same time, to save these dying rivers, it will also need to take measures with due immediacy to dredge them and remove silts that have been choking

The politics of iftar

ABDUL MATIN

RAMADAN is a holy month during which Muslims all over the world fast, pray and refrain from all evil deeds, thoughts and words, and seek *rahmat* (mercy), *maghfirat* (forgiveness) and *nijat* (refuge from the fire of hell). It is also a tradition among Muslims to offer iftar, the first meal after fasting, to people who fast. Our Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “If a person gives *iftar* to a fasting person in this month, his sins will be forgiven. And he will be given as many rewards as has that fasting person.” He also explained: “The rewards will be given even to a person who gives a date as the *iftar* or who provides water to break the fast or who offers a little milk.”

Unfortunately, the concept of offering *iftar* to fasting persons is being misused by several sections of the people. Instead of offering *iftar* to those who cannot afford a decent meal a day or are travelling, or praying in mosques, they are holding lavish *iftar* parties in posh hotels and convention halls for political purposes. All major political parties are holding *iftar* parties for the leaders of other political parties, diplomats and journalists. Interestingly, the political motives of the parties become clear when the leaders of the opponent parties refrain from attending each others’ *iftar* parties even though they are invited cordially. Ultimately, each *iftar* party turns into a get-together of the like minded parties where political speeches are made and programmes are announced instead of religious discussions being held.

Even though a temporary but uneasy lull is prevailing in the political arena in Bangladesh, nobody knows when violence may flare up again. Any violence will be suicidal for the country as it is likely to destroy whatever we regained in the economic and social sectors during the last several months. The country could benefit immensely if the two major political alliances took advantage of the holy month of Ramadan and held *iftar* parties in order to come to an understanding among themselves to strengthen democracy, hold participatory general elections, eradicate rampant corruption, restore human rights and shun all kinds of violence. The people of Bangladesh will wholeheartedly welcome such an understanding. Sooner it comes, better it is for the country.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Settled maritime boundaries and gas exploration

BADRUL IMAM

BANGLADESH had disputed maritime boundaries with Myanmar in the east and India in the west ever since its independence. Two landmark verdicts given by two international courts have put an end to these long-drawn disputes between the three neighbouring nations. On March 14, 2012, the Germany-based International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) settled the dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar by refixing the maritime boundary between these two nations. On July 7, 2014, another international court, the Netherland-based Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) settled the dispute between India and Bangladesh by refixing the maritime boundary between the two countries. The verdicts are binding on the nations and there is no scope of appeal. Thus, the settlements are permanent, and have been unconditionally accepted by the three nations.

For the questions, who are the winners and who the losers, the answers are less well defined. The fact is that there are wins and losses for all the three parties. In Bangladesh, the celebration over the “maritime victory” is more of political propaganda rather than reality. Nonetheless, the conclusions of the two verdicts have clearly marked an end to the conflicts, a long felt requirement for political, economic and military health of these nations. It was more so for Bangladesh than its neighbours because Bangladesh faced active opposition in both of its boundary areas whenever activities like gas exploration, fishing, etc. were undertaken.

The Bay of Bengal has been the prime exploration area for oil and gas for all the three countries for many years. In the not so distance past, there had been incident of military showdown when Myanmar was seen actively engaged in gas exploration in the water claimed by Bangladesh. India, at another point in time, compelled an international oil company to withdraw exploration programme from Bangladesh because the water in question was disputed. These are a few examples of how the three nations play out with each other in dealing with their disputed sea boundaries.

As far as petroleum resources are concerned, the settlement of the maritime boundary could not have come at a better time. The demand for gas in all the three nations has outpaced their respective supplies. With the increase in prospects of oil and gas reserves in the Bay of Bengal over the last five years, this area had been even more vulnerable to conflict as more and more exploration programmes were taken up by one and disputed by the other. That the solution has finally come has been a relief to all the three nations in question. While Myanmar and India both have already taken up extensive exploration programmes in their respective areas, Bangladesh is yet to launch a comparable drive.

In 2008, Bangladesh declared an offshore block map showing 10 shallow-water blocks and 20 deep-water blocks, and put these up for international bidding from international oil companies (IOC). The initial response from the IOCs was unexpectedly low, therefore a second bidding was announced with new dates for bid submis-

sion. When this also failed to draw a reasonable response from the IOCs, Bangladesh softened a number of production sharing contract (PSC) terms in favour of the foreign companies. Even that did not bring a reasonable response from IOCs. Only a handful of companies showed interest and even fewer actually entered into negotiation. A follow up of the events pointedly showed that one of main reasons for the low IOC turn up in block bidding was the maritime boundary dispute between Bangladesh and its neighbours. The IOCs were reportedly warned by the neighbours of negative consequence of engaging in exploration in a disputed sea area.

In the meantime, in March 2012, ITLOS announced its verdict on the maritime boundary dispute between Myanmar and Bangladesh. According to the verdict, Bangladesh lost to Myanmar almost all the offshore blocks adjacent to the Myanmar boundary. Those included blocks 13, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27 and 28, covering an area of about 21,300 sq.km. Curiously enough, this aspect was held back from public eye by the much hyped media coverage of the government sponsored “ocean victory” celebration across the country. Yet there were many who pointedly asked, how could Bangladesh lose so many offshore blocks to Myanmar? A government representative was clear while answering the above question. According to him, Bangladesh did not seek any legal or technical advice from any quarter while drawing the deep sea blocks along

Myanmar sea boundary in the wake of offshore block bidding in 2008. Rather, the blocks were drawn arbitrarily, ignoring international rules. This was in a sense a violation of international norms. So, the question is, how could Bangladesh be so outrageously ignorant of international rules while projecting itself in the international community?

On July 7, 2014, the Netherland-based international court announced its verdict on the maritime boundary dispute case between India and Bangladesh, and it was published the next day. Contrary to what many in Bangladesh anticipated, the verdict overwhelmingly went in favour of Bangladesh. All the offshore blocks along the maritime boundary with India remain in Bangladesh, except for a very minor area of a few blocks along the western edge. The Indian claim of a 162 degree line for the maritime boundary was not accepted by the court. Rather, the court finalised a 177.5 degree line for the boundary, which deviated only by 2.5 degree from what Bangladesh claimed. The court did not accept India’s proposal for adopting equidistance principle for working out the boundary. Instead, the court agreed to use principle of equity as the working method, as Bangladesh had proposed. Bangladesh certainly gained more in boundary delimitation case with India as compared with Myanmar.

With the settlement of maritime boundaries between the three neighbouring nations by international court, they can only look forward. With major gas discovery in the India and Myanmar side of the Bay of Bengal over the last several years, Bangladesh can now seriously venture to explore all its offshore blocks.

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In the eye of a storm

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

THINGS could not have gone better for the government, probably it could not have even visualised these euphoric moments only six or seven months earlier. With an opposition in total disarray, and international criticism of the elections totally muted, there is genuine reason why the party in power should feel confident and look toward an unchallenged five year term or even more. There are more reasons to celebrate. The economy that faltered in the last six months of previous year has bounced back, businesses are picking up the lost time, and the country has announced its boldest budget ever of humongous development expenditure and vaulting income.

In a normal country with a stable government and reasonably stable economy nothing could be better than what Bangladesh is experiencing now, at least on the surface. Unfortunately, we are not a normal country.

Politically, we claim ourselves to be a democratic country. In practice, we just do the opposite. In true democracies people rule; in our democracy the leaders rule. In true democracy people choose their representatives; but in our democracy leaders choose our representatives. That is why

The abnormal normality of our politics today emanates from two factors; absence of statesmanship in our political parties, and people's abhorrence for negative and destructive politics that featured in the pre-election period last year.

Our economy has grown impressively in the last two decades and probably has potential to grow further. But despite this growth we are still a low income country surviving on the fringe. Our stability is buttressed by three elements; agriculture, apparel exports and wages of migrant workers, all controlled by external factors. A year of drought or flood can ruin or severely impact our agro-based income, and so can also a fall in demand for apparels or for migrant workers impact adversely our foreign income. Our economy has not diversified, nor has our industry matured to manufacture more durable goods or electronic products that have a more enduring effect to stabilise the economy.

And yet we celebrate. We celebrate our short-term political gains with a myopic view of the future, not realising that gaining two-thirds majority of the parliament does not augur well either for the country or for democracy. Sadly, this perverse sense of victory has emboldened the rank and file of the party to exercise their strength to stifle anything and everything that comes their way to achieve their objectives. Hence, the growth of complete lawlessness surrounding the local elections where voters would

be prevented from casting their votes by hired goons. Hence, the series of killings, abduction, and robbery by criminals under the patronage of their political overlords.

The abnormal normality of our politics today emanates from two factors; absence of statesmanship in our political parties, and people’s abhorrence for negative and destructive politics that featured in the pre-election period last year. In the so-called struggle for democracy what the political parties of our country have shown from time to time is nothing but a squabble for power. The party in power would never like to relinquish, the party out of power would like to snatch it. Common people became collaterals in this power struggle. Now they have become apathetic to the political struggle once they realised this.

This apathy does not portend well for the future of the country and our democracy, if we were to have one that is. Lack of any visible protests in the street against government or its policies does not necessarily mean that God’s in His Heaven and All’s Right with the World. A made to order parliament with a perfectly loyal opposition is not everybody’s idea of a democracy. Neither is capture of polling booths to install party loyalists in public offices or for that matter shielding the loyalists from criminal prosecution.

The eye of the storm is the quietest. It is also said that the last to know of an impending disaster is the first in hierarchy. The storm may not be brewing yet, but it has all the preconditions that cannot be ignored. First is the smugness or self-contentment of containing all opposition and sense of political invincibility that surrounds our leadership.

Second is the rampant corruption and utter absence of rule of law that prevail in the country. Third is the growth of mafia politics fed by the politicians’ greed for money and local power. Fourth is the ever expanding band of unemployed youth, some with education and others none. Of all the factors, the last is the most insidious as it has greatest potential of bringing about the storm.

The Arab uprising of 2011 took years to gestate, but when it happened it spread quickly and toppled several dictatorships in less than a year. None of the leaders where this happened had anticipated this quick reversal of their placid leadership in such a short time.

We may be going through a similar period of self-contentment and relative lull in serious political challenges to the status quo. But this conceit will buckle under conditions of lawlessness, unbridled corruption, and inner fighting among mafia politicians. As contentment in the inner circle grows internecine quarrels for power in local areas will also grow, leaving a totally frustrated population clamouring for a change. This may not happen immediately, may be not in a year or two. But eventually it will come. One can only hope that this change will come from self-realisation of the leadership.

The writer is a US based political commentator and analyst.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Stop genocide in Gaza

Current atrocities on the civilians of Palestine are so inhuman. The silence of USA, the UN and the Arab leaders is most surprising. A serious protest from the Bangladeshi leaders is also expected. However, it is good to see that Russia has protested the genocide. Hope others too will wake up soon.

If we look at history we will see that once dominant and peaceful Palestine had gradually lost its lands, sovereignty and power to the barbarian Israel. Now Palestine is fighting for its survival. On the other hand, with support from some so-called world leaders, Israel is attacking with the intention of grabbing Palestine.

It is reported that more than 200 Palestinians have been killed already. They are fleeing homes; some are being picked up at gunpoint, tortured, and killed. A large number of people are getting wounded. It’s very shocking to witness the cruel death of innocent children. The UN says 17,000 people have sought refuge in its facilities as Israeli air strikes continue. Let us protest the genocide and war crimes in Palestine. Stop promoting goods that sponsors Israel. Boycotting Israeli products and companies is a peaceful means of putting international pressure on them.

Ahemed Shamim Ansary
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Jhenidah

Undying memory of Zohra Sehgal

We are deeply saddened at the demise of ever smiling multi-talented Indian actress Zohra Sehgal.

She was always full of life. She did not allow tragedies in her personal life to snatch the smile from her face. Zohra faced the world bravely with her daughter and son after the untimely death of her husband, Kameshwar Sehgal.

Zohra Sehgal acted in many movies. Many famous dance songs have been choreographed by her in the golden years of Bombay movies. She was actively associated with IPTA. She worked closely with Guru Dutt, Chetan Anand, Devanand and others in the golden years of Bollywood.

May Zohra Sehgal’s soul rest in peace. She will be fondly remembered as an elegant grand lady with old world values and charms who broke many social customs, braved many odds, kept her head high and etched a place for her in the entertainment world of India.

Dr. SN Mamoon
Dhaka

Comments on news report, “BB looks to ACC action,” published on July 14, 2014

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

After the destruction of Basic Bank, does the BB governor has the moral right to retain his post? During his tenure, we witnessed the Sonali-Hall-Mark scam. BB’s fishy role in tackling the anomalies has seriously eroded the public’s trust in the banking sector.

Deep Purple Blue

Funny laws we have. The head of a bank’s board steals money and the regulating authority -- the Bangladesh Bank -- can’t file a case or take legal action against him.

Dr. Ahsan Habib

BB and ACC, please stop all this nonsense about suing. People cannot be fooled forever. You will do nothing about rich thieves.

“US firm for revised deal” (July 12, 2014)

Shadhin071

Bangladesh should talk to China and Russia for this. I bet they will be cheaper than this and will also transfer the technology. It will help Bangladesh tremendously and Bangladesh should, without any delay, cancel this deal with ConocoPhillips and choose other suitable options.

Qamar Uddin

Considering the experience of a Chinese company’s work for the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, I think we should not take them into consideration even though they offer cheap price. Cheap price always comes with bad quality and we definitely don’t want any disaster like the one that a Canadian company was responsible for a few years back. We should award the contract to some company which has the goodwill and reputation, and can guarantee that it can do the job perfectly.

“Govt staging drama over verdict” (July 12, 2014)

Molla A. Latif

After all, the government has achieved something. What did the BNP do during its long reign? Did India get its claimed areas? Please see the Indian reaction and do not stage undesired drama for nothing.