

ROUNDTABLE ON HAZARDS OF FOOD CONTAMINATION IN NATIONAL LIFE

RDRS Bangladesh and The Daily Star organized a roundtable on 'Hazards of Food Contamination in National Life: Way Forward', on 10 August 2011. We publish a summary of the discussions.
-- Editor

Dr. Selima Rahman, Executive Director, Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), Bangladesh

Health is our fundamental right. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 health is recognized as one of the fundamental rights. Our constitution ensures development of its citizen's nutrition level and health. Food adulteration is seriously undermining our health security as well as our existence. The worst affected by adulteration are women and children. Food adulteration is like slow poisoning. It can cause carcinogenic effects and severe health damages. So we should come together and work sincerely to get rid of this grave threat.

Mahfuz Anam, Editor and Publisher, The Daily Star

Food is our basic right directly related to our existence. Are we working the whole day for buying adulterated food for our family, to feed our children? Food adulteration is just like slow poisoning. As a citizen of an independent country why we have to suffer such food adulteration? We want to get rid of this great danger.

Motivation is very important. We have to make people understand to raise their voice against food adulteration. Another important matter is enactment of law. But that is not enough. We have to ensure effective application of the laws and regulations. We have to remind that violation of law is more severe than its absence.

I want to draw the attention of our honorable parliamentarians that you are our lawmakers, our leaders. We want suggestion from you how we can proceed. You would get all of the media with your good cause.

Dr. S.K Roy, Senior Scientist, ICDDR, B

We have recently conducted the first national survey in Bangladesh on food security. The result shows that

brown rice which contains vitamin. The media should avoid these advertisements. They should maintain regulations that they would not advertise any product which is not certified by BSTI or other testing authority.

Sanitary inspector under Health Ministry should be increased in number and trained.

Khalil Ahmed, Magistrate, Dhaka City Corporation

We do not have enough magistrates to cover all the 10 zones of Dhaka. Manpower shortage seriously impedes our efforts. We suffer inadequate kits to examine various types of adulteration.

As food products are transported from remote areas so businessmen have to use preservatives which cause serious hazards to our health. So, we need complementary chemicals which are not harmful for our health and at the same time effectively preserve food items.

A.H.M Anwar Pasha, Executive Magistrate, RAB Headquarter, Uttara, Dhaka

We have to create demand in the market for natural food. For example, we ask for white puffed rice but that is processed by a chemical which is very harmful for our health. But we can get natural but less lucrative reddish puffed rice. We succeed to discourage use of food color especially in the sweets through creating awareness against food color. We should keep on that good practice.

We have to discourage reuse of old containers. We can make a hole in fixed place of the container which can warn of its previous use. The last thing -- the poor, uneducated labours should be given proper education and awareness on food safety.

Dr. Syed Humayun Kabir, Director- Standard, BSTI

There are two types of adulteration. One is gross and



promote bio-fertilizers. China is a good example in this case. They make it possible to avoid pesticides and fertilizers. Another serious concern is water. We badly need fresh water for our agriculture. We have to devise convenient transport system so that we can transport food products from remote villages at an easy and quick pace. It will help traders to avoid mixing chemicals for long-time preserving of foods.

Md. Mokbul Hossain MP, Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Fisheries and Livestock

The most important thing, people should participate in the movement against food adulteration and cooperate with the law. We have to create awareness through massive media campaign. Most of the corruption happens in the intermediary stages. We should prevent them by ensuring tough action against any kind of adulteration activities.

Mosammat Farida Akhter Hira, MP

First we need awareness. I remember the effectiveness

Rebecca Momin, MP, Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and Children Affairs

First we need an active media who would not only censure adulterated foods but also inform people about the alternatives. The law should be tough against the adulterators. Food adulteration issues should be included in the school syllabus.

There should be some mechanism to inform the authorities who can take immediate action when any one faces some sort of adulteration case.

Meher Afroze Chumki, MP, Chair, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and Children Affairs

First of all, we have to activate national food safety advisory council. It should be a high powered committee. Again, media campaign is necessary. We have to reward the honest food producers who do not resort to adulteration. Expiry date should be labeled on every product.

Training of the food producers is very important. They should be informed about the ill consequences of food adulteration.

Mahfuz Anam

If we look into the matter that the preservative chemicals are imported and have limited usage. So we should strengthen our legal framework so that those who imports such chemicals could be made responsible to the law and the government and where and to whom they are selling.

I want to emphasize on the supply side rather than putting all the burdens on the consumer. We can impose high tax on these chemicals. So we need the policy and the parliamentarians can bring relief to our food hazards formulating such policies

Dr. Captain (Retd) Mujibur Rahman Fakir, MP, Honorable State Minister for Health and Family Welfare

When we work sincerely we achieve success. We have accomplishment in containing AIDS and achieving success in EPI and breast feeding programme. We should form a permanent parliamentary body on food adulteration as soon as possible. This is not a matter of a ministry rather all the concerned ministries should join hands.

The inspection teams should be strengthened with more manpower. Public Inspection officers are already appointed down to hana level. We would try to extend it up to the lowest administrative unit. Food safety department should be strengthened.

We have to put more emphasis on media and education to make the people aware and get rid of the menace.

Dr. Selima Rahman

RDRS has been working for the poor people since 1972. The RDRS programme operates through four main interventions- (i) Active Citizens, Civil Society & Justice, (ii) Quality of life (health, education), (iii) Food, Environment and Disaster Resilience and (iv) Economic Empowerment. We uphold public causes to establish their rights. Therefore, we are concerned about hazards of food contamination and its effect to social life. It is such an important issue which directly affects our existence. So it needs wide campaign. The Media can best serve the cause. Government and NGO should come together to fight food adulteration.

Today, we have seen our leaders' commitment and political will. We have to strongly activate National Food Safety Advisory Council.

Another important matter, for preservation of food we have to use preservatives, but that should not be toxic. We need alternatives. Our scientists should come forward to find the solution.

The last, but most important, thing we have to raise social resistance against adulteration. We should uphold our moral values against any sort of such menace.

Our demands:

- (i) Beyond fine, we demand exemplary punishment of dishonest traders.
- (ii) Permanent drive by the government authorities against food adulterers instead of special move.
- (iii) New academic syllabus for students ensuring awareness against food adulteration.
- (iv) Campaign from government side for creating mass awareness on the effects of consuming contaminated food.



Dr. Captain (Retd.) Mujibur Rahman Fakir



Dr. Selima Rahman



Mr. S K Roy



Dr. Md. Golam Kibria Khan



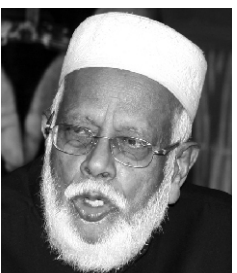
Khalil Ahmed



AHM Anwar Pasha



Dr. Syed Humayun Kabir



Prof. Dr. MA Mannan MP



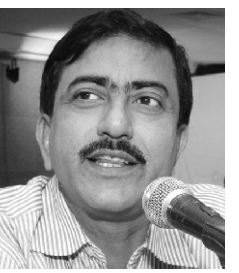
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Sultana Bulbul



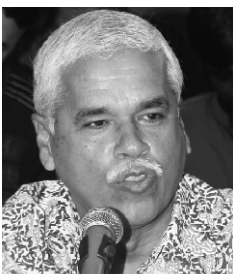
Monoranjan Shill Gopal



Narayan Chandra Chanda



Dr. Matiur Rahman MP



Prof. Md. Shah Alam



Rebecca Momin



Meher Afroze Chumki

another is microbiological. The second one occurs mainly due to unhygienic production process. Another source of adulteration is environment. For example, industrial emissary and waste chemicals enter into the food chain which can cause severe health hazards. We should strictly control use of pesticide above permitted level. The farmers should be given training on using fertilizers

and pesticides.

Codex has been formulating standard guidelines on use of fertilizers, pesticides and food additives through rigorous toxicological tests. BSTI is the contact point of Codex in Bangladesh. We are providing these guidelines to the industries but it should be further disseminated to the food producers at the root level.

Labeling is another important guideline to follow. It should be made compulsory. Licensing authorities should ensure standards of the food producers before issuing any license. The last thing, strengthening the food inspection department with trained manpower is urgently needed to ensure the above mentioned requirements.

Professor Md. Shah Alam, MP, Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education

We have to ensure the use of existing manpower effectively. Corruption is seriously damaging our good efforts. So it should be checked. Strict laws should be enacted to promulgate loopholes. The important thing is to create awareness through massive media campaign. We should put emphasis on nurturing moral values. Food adulteration issues should be included in the syllabus to educate our children.

Professor Dr. M. A Mannan, Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Planning

BSTI should reach to the grassroots level. We should

of the Mina cartoon which succeeded in promoting healthy sanitation practices among the children far in the remote areas. I think Mina is a good example how media can serve such causes in building awareness.

Sultana Bulbul, MP

We need awareness at the grassroots level. I think media can play this important role. I find some sort of consciousness has grown among the people, especially children. They are now avoiding fast food and preferring homemade cuisine.

Monoranjan Shill Gopal, MP, Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Cultural Affairs

We have to apply the existing laws strictly. Campaign against food adulteration should be broadcast through the media regularly so that people could be informed about food contamination. If we engage people then they would avoid food adulteration and prevent others from doing that.

Narayan Chandra Chanda, MP, Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Food and Disaster Management

We can form a parliamentary committee to vigilant the drive against food adulteration. Food adulteration issues should be included in the text books so that children learn and teach their family and neighbors about hazards of food adulteration.

Dr. Matiur Rahman, MP, Member, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Planning

Two things are needed do any good thing. One is political will and another is public participation. It is a matter of regret that there is still a huge gap between BSTI and us the people's representatives. BSTI should make a comprehensive list of their products and publicize it around the country so that people can learn about unadulterated food.

We need a creative BSTI who would provide us healthy alternatives to toxic preservatives.

behavior at the household level is very poor. In 2004 DCC conducted a random survey of food items. We found the adulteration rate to be almost 76.32%.

We have to know clear definition of food safety and food adulteration. According to WHO, food safety is the assurance that food will not cause harm to the consumer when it is prepared and /or eaten according to its intended use. Food adulteration is defined as "the intentional addition of non permitted foreign matter." In addition, if it bears or contains any delirious and poisonous substances which may render injury to health and if it is a raw agricultural commodity and it bears or contains a pesticide chemical which is unsafe, it is adulteration.

Calcium carbide, toxic powder, color, formalin and saccharine are some of the chemical substance used for adulteration. These chemicals cause serious hazard to health; dysfunction of the liver and kidney, growth retardation, asthma, cancer are the worst ones.

Women and children are the worst affected. In women, infertility, anemia, chronic ill health could be caused by food adulterations. In children, growth retardation, mental retardation, germ like mutation, risk of cancer (spanning generation) could occur.

Dr. Md. Golam Kibria Khan, Associate Professor, Dhaka Medical College & Hospital

I expect strong media role. They should make people aware about the adulterated food and their impacts. We usually feel attracted to the advertisements. Suppose we like white rice rather than