

Editorial**Adultery: How Safe is Our Milk and Water?****Mohsin Masud Jan**

Editor

Pure milk is rapidly becoming a rare commodity, and has become virtually impossible to procure, even though more and more companies have started selling the product. A Supreme Court bench, headed by Justice Saqib Nisar, has noted that a large number of milk brands are adulterated with chemicals, urea or cane juice – intended to thicken the liquid or improve its flavor. The bench, hearing a petition placed before it by Barrister Zafarullah, was told this was also true of boxed juices, sold everywhere in the country. The result is that consumers are simply not getting what they are paying for, with children, the main consumers of milk, being the main affectees. In the past, the issue of adulterated loose milk has been placed before courts. The denial of safe milk to children was noted by the court to be a major issue, with a commission set up to examine it. The Punjab Food Authority, which has been active in the past two years in tackling unhygienic food preparation, is to play a part in the inquiry.

A study conducted by the Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR), noted that many brands of commercial water as well as other items were contaminated. This issue has come up time and again at various forums. Inquiries have been in the past as well, all to no avail. Perhaps we need to take things further. It is no secret that many food items we buy are contaminated while laws to ensure companies follow codes and declare accurately the ingredients in their products are both inadequate and poorly enforced. In the case of items such as milk and bottled water, this affects millions on a daily basis. Certainly, urgent measures are required to control standards and prevent further damage to the health of people, who really have no control over what food products they consume. We have failed to put these in place in the past. This time, with the issue coming up again before the superior judiciary, we need to devise a set of solid measures and take steps to insure they can be implemented

consistently and over a long-term basis in order to protect people across the country. We await a strategy to resolve the problem and place checks in place on the food that is aggressively marketed and sold to us by businesses, big and small.

Milk and water, are two basic necessities of life, water for all human beings and milk is the base sustenance for children of all size and ages. And these two base commodities are widely being adulterated in Pakistan, which causes at the very least, nutritional deficiencies in children, if they do not end up causing more damage. Some contaminants found in milk, such as sugar cane juice, are added to increase the flavor of the product, and such products do not produce any adverse effects on the body whatsoever. But some of the adulterants such as detergents added into milk, normally give way to toxic and potentially harmful substances when ingested by humans.

Water, which forms 70% of the normal human body, a basic necessity also contains contaminants found to be harmful to health. Majority of the places supplying drinking water in Pakistan, do not do a satisfactory job, and that leaves a huge majority of our population without access to safe potable water. More often than not, the mere bacterial content found in our drinking water supply would make our stomachs turn. Initiatives taken by the government have been far and few, and those too mostly have been inadequately run and managed.

Even though these issues are being addressed by the Supreme Court itself, we here need to have strict enforcement of any such laws and regulations, as needed to ensure that our population gets the best form of safe and drinkable milk and water. And the powers that be need to devise plans that will ensure the compliance of all companies selling and marketing these goods, not only in the short term but also in the long run as well.