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### **The blame games**

LAHORE: The federal government is blamed for instable rupee, power and gas crisis, and high petroleum rates and rightly so, but provincial governments are spared for having abdicated their responsibility of regulating prices and unadulterated supplies.

All the provincial governments in their first two years in power have failed to check the malpractices of decanting of LPG cylinders in public places, adulteration of food and encroachments. Besides, the resolution of minor issues like sale of spurious foods, use of non-food colours, and open manholes continues unabated.

Resolving these issues does not need any additional funds or resources. All that is required is to activate the district administrations that are responsible for regulating these affairs.

All the ingredients on the imported items are clearly mentioned on the packing. Then expiry date is mentioned even on imported toilet soaps. All types of toothpastes have an expiry date. The manufacturing and expiry date is mentioned on each edible packed item.

This includes jams, marmalade, prickles, sauces, drinks, juices, custard, jelly, chocolate, wheat flour and its preparations, edible oil, butter, biscuits, rice, sweets, potato chips and even frozen meat or any item that is consumed by a human being or even pets.

However, in case of domestically processed products, this practice is mostly ignored. Medicines are the only exception where ingredients and expiry date is mentioned.

Moreover, there is no surety of the purity of products that consumers buy and consume. Manufacturers may use cheap filler that is easily disguised in the spice to increase the volume and sold thereby cutting the cost of pure spice, and thereby increasing the ultimate profit margin.

Some of the common adulterated foods are milk and milk products, flour, edible oils, cereals, condiments (whole and ground), pulses, coffee, tea, confectionary, baking powder, non-alcoholic beverages, vinegar, besan and curry powder.

Alum and chalk are sometimes added to bread to whiten it, while for stale flour, ammonium carbonate is added to disguise its sour taste. Mashed potatoes, sawdust and plaster of Paris are also used to increase the weight of bread.

Coal-tar colours are employed a great deal, pickles and canned vegetables are sometimes coloured green with copper salts; butter is made more yellow by anatta; turmeric is used in mustard and some cereal preparations.

In confectionery, dangerous colours, such as chrome yellow, Prussian blue, copper and arsenic compounds are employed. Yellow and orange-coloured sweets are to be suspected. Artificial flavouring compounds are employed in the concoction of fruit syrups, especially those used for soda water. These adulterants are known to the regulators, but adulterators are seldom apprehended for obvious reasons. Consumers also suspect adulteration on items they buy, be it fruit, powdered chilli or carbonated beverages.

Affluent ones try to shield themselves from spurious adulterated ingredients by buying from large reputable stores. But you never know as the incentive for profit is higher for larger stores. Ordinary consumers mainly get adulterated products.

The quality and purity of the edible items is crucial for the general health of consumers. A number of them get ill after consuming edible items that have expired. This is great injustice to those that pay the rate for a healthy consumable product but are cheated by the manufacturers who might have sold them expired items.

This unethical practice has been effectively checked in most of the emerging economies. Manufacturers in these economies dispose of those items that are nearing their expiry date at half or even lower rates. We do not see this practice in Pakistan, because they do not have to mention the cut-off date for use of edible products.

In the recent instance we have seen that the Punjab government is making all out efforts (at least it makes public think so) to control the rates of wheat flour by supplying wheat to the flour mills at very low rates. Still, the consumers complain that the flour they buy at controlled rate is of inferior quality and good quality is available at much higher rates. Definitely the inferior quality wheat flour is adulterated.

The state has not been able to apprehend any miller because the entire system is corrupt. The previous government at least managed to keep a check on quality of edibles though it could not control adulteration. This time the provincial governments have failed to check the quality and prices of consumable items, including edibles.