

ANTIBIOTICS OFF THE MENU – THEME OF THE WORLD CONSUMER DAY 15/3/2016

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World population heading for a disaster

World population is heading for a disaster due to excessive use of antibiotics. Unless preventive measures – though difficult – steps are taken immediately to contain the worldwide man made epidemic world is facing the danger of reaching a post antibiotic era soon. 50% of the antibiotics manufactured globally is mainly used in agriculture, and human food chain entering the human body in some way via food giants in the food chain threatening to develop resistance for antibiotics even for a minor ailment as in the case of HIV. There is a possibility this proportion is likely to reach 75% in the year 2050. Antibiotics are substances used to kill microorganisms or to stop them from growing most which are necessary for the natural growth of agriculture products. Death attributed to antibiotic resistance by 2050 is shown by researchers are alarmingly high as follows. (Asia 4,730,000, Europe, 390,000 North America, 317,000 Latin America, 392,000 Africa 4,150,000 and Oceanic 220,000.) World Consumer Federation has chosen this topic as the theme of the year 2016, considering the impending danger of the process to avoid a post antibiotic era for the modern world. Due to the greed and the selfishness of the human being, the situation appears to be worsening with no signs of checks and balances. Destruction of the environment, preparation of adulterated food, manufacture of drugs of inferior quality, sheer disregard of the side effects of inferior drugs in the world -especially in the developing world market, spread of drug menace worldwide, use of poisonous fertilizer and contamination of water sale of junk food in large scale are some of the main factors catalyzing the destruction process of the human race. Sri Lanka is an easy prey for the rough wave of the menace reaching us at a terrific speed. Drug is a mafia which is considered the most lucrative business in the globe. It is difficult to seek justice from a mafia until and unless the states and organizations work together against these powerful groups. It is time for a UN convention on this arena.

Food Giants

Will the food giants cooperate with a programme to prevent disaster is a moot issue – very likely they will not- unless pressurized by groups and governments with international organizations. Main food giants such as Mc Donald's, KFC, Subway, have over 100, 000 restaurants worldwide ever growing with a systemic scientific production of food chains with antibiotics as an ingredient to catalyse and improve the quality and quantity of the end products in the food chain. These are only major players among many small food chains, food outlets, markets, and food outlets in abundance worldwide. They have been accused of providing unhygienic Junk Food by Governments and Health sectors private and public. Will they voluntarily reduce or control the antibiotic intake, or what measures are to be taken by governments of campaigners are matters to be discussed. Enormity of the production and the great demand despite the dangers food giants will not take drastic steps to contain the situation over expected losses in income. Culprits are many in additions to the main food giants in the process of the slow death of the human race due to greed of some human beings. Unfortunately, Sri Lankans have become a prisoner of fast food giant's modern economic trends depending on hand to mouth borrowed economy based on credit cards. Beckley's Chairman do not possess a credit card knowing well the adverse effects. They target children as easy prey to attract junk food and drinks with 8 spoons of sugar and cola in drinks which are grossly unhealthy. Diabetes and obesity is common in children in Sri Lanka and of course in the west too. West

live on mortgages, borrowed money credit cards and junk food and a good social security models! Food giants are a main and unregulated eating outlets and a threat to the health of the world population. In Sri Lanka food outlets are unregulated though CAA I bound to pave the way for the citizen items which are not hazardous to the life of consumer (7a) of the Act. We are heading to be a sick nation with 10% population affected by CKD and 100,000 kidney related patients added another 5000 yearly requiring more 1000 dialysis centers and spread of cancer if the agriculture mafia continues. Ajino Moto earns 12 billion dollars annually and the richest multinational companies in Sri Lanka and worldwide are drug and agricultural dealers which shows the enormity of the issue and the strength of the world players using us as pawns.

Consumer International

Consumer International and organizations worldwide are calling for Global commitments urging food companies for long-term and constructive steps in production of the food chain and from restaurants stop serving such food to take such food off the menu. It is doubtful whether restaurants will oblige when they already keep serving unhealthy and adulterated food with dangerous foreign bodies such and “Ajino Moto – monosodium Glutamate” freely and frequently used in Sri Lanka and worldwide. It is a weed killer in Sri Lanka and used in restaurants, hotels and evening houses as a cooking ingredient for taste. With the development of the Hi Tec, IT, and the Technology in all sectors world has become a small village where news and products pass across borders easily and quickly with a click of a button in seconds. While the entire world suffers due to excessive production of meat and related food Sri Lanka will not be in isolation due to dependency to the outside world for food. Sri Lankan food chains are less regulated and pruned to provide adulterated and unhygienic food except for few concerned restaurants and hotels. in Sri Lanka water is infested due to pollution with fertilizer which Has resulted to produce 100,000 kidney related patients growing by 5000 every year which is a disturbing scenario. Vegetables, fruits, cooked and uncooked food is adulterated and poisonous in the absence of a proper monitoring system by the CAA and the Bureau of Standards. We recognize the services rendered by the consumer international in leading the worldwide campaign for the consumer who are in need of assistance for healthy consumer items at a reasonable price.

Threat of Post Antibiotic Era

Invasion to Sri Lanka of the danger of post antibiotic era, is inevitable and what are the possible remedies available under the Sri Lankan legislature is important to consider to activate action/s in line with the theme and the programme of the Consumer International to work out an international plan of action. With the open economy and the expectations of the consumers in Sri Lanka it is difficult to expect self-regulatory procedure as precautionary measures and alternative steps for the consumers to be provided with locally processed food and imported food free from antibiotics which is a complicated and cumbersome procedure. In Sri Lanka the main regulator is the Consumer Affairs Authority (Act No 9 of 2003) which is a new model on promoting competition and regulation of trade replaced by Consumer Protecting Act (1/79, Fair trading Act (1/87) and Control of Prices act (Chapter 173) based on price control of consumer items and services in par with free economy instead of the price control based on strict price controls in a closed economy under the previous legislation. Current legislation lacks teeth, yet implementable with the help of the state and a strong consumer movement which is in a paralyzed state today even though it is the duty of the CAA to promote assist and encourage the establishment of consumer organizations (8/f) of the act) We are informed that the Authority is maintaining some files and the information is that the associations are non-existent an inactive. Nothing is heard in the media or the presence is not felt. It is time to bring about changes to the CAA act as a matter of urgency.

Consumers Act No 9 of 2003

The act deals with regulation of trade giving the Authority powers to undertake studies, issue directions to manufacturers and traders, Enter into agreements on price and maximum price of goods, punishment of offences of refusal to sell, denial of possession of consumer items, investigations, advisory references, authority to review questions relating to price of goods, publication of reports, traders to display prices, registration of traders, directions to traders to issue receipts, direction on notice boards, warranties in relation to the supply of goods, promotion of competition and consumer interest, power to issue notices to witness, lead evidence and conduct investigations are some powers vested in the CAA which is a model of Canadian and European model with Western concepts on competition and open economy. Whether the powers vested are made use of for the consumer who is actual or potential user of any goods or services made available for a consideration by any trader or manufacturer (S/75 of the Act) is a matter for the citizen who is a consumer to decide. Consumer is a king and a king maker in the other parts of the world using the organizational strength. How powerful the Sri Lankan consumer is known to the consumer not properly recognized by the state, CAA or the Media. Do people feel the presence of the CAA authority set up with many hopes to protect consumers against marketing of goods or services hazardous(7a), protect consumer against unfair trade practices(7b) to ensure consumer has adequate access and (7d) seek redress against unfair trade practices. CAA act is designed to provide for the better protection of consumers through the regulation of trade and prices of goods and services and to protest traders and manufacturers against unfair trade and restrictive trade practices. People are the best judges to adjudicate their positioning the society and it is time they start flexing muscles through consumer organizations.

In addition to the Act there are other institutions and bodies providing the consumer redress he is entitled to under the UN system and the Constitution. Health Ministry, Ministry of Finance, Local Authorities, Public health Inspectors, Bureau of Standards, Institutions and bodies set up under the drug ordinances, food safety and food health and many bodies and institutions set up under various ministries such as Ministry of food safety and Ministry of Cooperatives. It is doubtful whether these bodies already inactive will be in a position to resist the grave danger nearing us with leads of genetically prepared food chains with antibiotics fast reaching our dishes.

Consumer Organizations

They say the consumer is always right and a King and a King maker who is in a position to topple governments unable to look after the citizen who is a consumer or a potential consumer at some stage in the living process in the modern world. Though John f Kennedy once said that consumers are the most neglected group in the, society the organizational power of the consumer today has priced it otherwise in the west. When Cola company used water from Thames, it is the consumer movement and the press that brought them to knees through litigation. The consumerism and the consumer is powerful worldwide mostly in the west and other parts of the globe. In our country Cola and many companies still in the process of contamination of water in a large scale in Kelani River contaminating drinking water of citizens in and around Colombo, when the NGO's and social active sector has turned a blind eye due to reasons we can understand It is big Money to politicians! What is required in Sri Lanka is independent consumer movement devoid of political interferences led by a committed and knowledgeable consumer leader. It is the mandate and duty of the CAA to facilitate and encourage the movement. Unfortunately, it is concentrating on collecting funds by way of fines from the trader and manufacturer expected to be encouraged based on fair competition. Nothing is too late. It is time for the line Minister to give some life and strength to the CAA to activate a network of powerful and committed consumer organizations. We

thank IPS having organized this event as an annual event for the benefit of the consumer with great commitment and vision.

Way forward

Way forward is difficult but it has to be achieved in the interest of the future generation and the existence of the mankind. It has to be a continuous concentrated effort by the UN and International Organs/organizations, Non-government organizations, States, Consumer organizations professional bodies and social active groups worldwide. We must realize that if we do not have a proper control on resisting the food chain and if we do not succeed we should be prepared to perish and buried. World is full of poisons food fast as well as normal food dry and cooked. West has awareness programs and steps are taken in educating and organizing the world citizen. We Sri Lankans digging our own grave by destruction and destroying our environment and practicing wrong eating habits with excessive consumption of liquor as a country famous and leading for excessive consumption of alcohol. We are an Island with no physical boundaries thereby we can be safe in isolation without being infested with foreign intervention if we manage ourselves carefully maintaining our own food and agriculture system unique to ourselves we are used to for generations. We were self-sufficient historically and it is easy to regain it as has been done in paddy cultivation. It is easy to regain past glory with some efforts to avoid import of potentially poisonous food chains. We could grow our own food with carbonic fertilizer. USA is in trouble in this area. She has 2 Trillion waste to be got rid of which is continuing tied to the tigers tail with no escape. We can avoid or limit eating poisonous flesh of the animal kingdom. Though we are carnivores still we can limit eating flesh of others for our own good. CAA act should be amended and given sufficient teeth and a proper leadership is required to implement the strategy and the concepts with the social actors and the consumer organizations. Trader manufacturer and the consumer should be educated and should have a close rapport with the CAA and the State on planar action. Consumer organization should be given recognition and facilities and country wide network I to be established. It is the duty of the professionals and professional bodies to educate the citizen of the impending danger to the mankind- Sri Lankans as will soon. If proper steps are not taken Sri lank will be a country of cancer, Diabetic and Kidney diseases. We should be a party to the international consumer organizations and the activism on consumerism. Media has an important role to play in this issue by giving balanced and important news instead of giving sensational news to sell the products. It is sorry to note that media is at times irresponsible and do not consider priorities. We must keep politics apart in this most polarized society fighting with each other for petty mattes and petty differences. Young and students, professionals, NGOs, and the ordinary citizen must speak and discuss with one word in this crucial issue concerns every citizen equally. Clergy too should play a main role in directing and educating followers giving correct signals. There is no time to waste – the plan of action and the strategy should commence forthwith.