

Bottled water business flourishes as demand soars

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Good health is identified as a vital component of a good quality of life, and access to good health is recognized as a basic human need and a fundamental human right. A healthy population is more productive and efficient component of the society. Pakistan is among several eastern countries that have problems providing a reliable supply of safe drinking water. The problem becomes even more pronounced when you enter a large city like Karachi.

Heavy industrialization and dense living conditions causes increased levels of contamination in existing water supplies. Inadequate water supplies and poor sanitation standards are the main causes of fatal water borne disease in Pakistan. The water business is one of the most lucrative and profitable enterprises worldwide due to the fact that every human being on earth must have safe pure water on a daily basis to stay alive.

During the past thirty years, use of bottled water is increasingly moved up the world over, as it has become a global phenomenon. Bottled water sector, despite its excessively high price compared to tap water, is measured as one of the powerful sectors of all the food and beverage trade as its consumption increases by an average of 12% every year.

Pakistan has witnessed a mushroom growth in the bottled water industry over the past few years. The poor quality of

tap water is considered to be the main driver of demand for bottled water by people who can afford to buy it.

With rapid urbanization, increasing population and growing awareness of consumers, the demand for clean drinking water has ballooned over the past few years in Karachi and other major cities. Consumers are increasingly counting on private suppliers of filtered bottled water as government water boards fail to cope with burgeoning needs of the people.

According to the World Health Organization, Pakistan has 80th place among 122 countries in drinking water quality. Gradually, the threat of diseases from contaminated tap water and benefits of clean drinking water, along with better disposable income of consumers, are turning them towards a healthy lifestyle. This, of course, has sparked growth of the bottled water market in the country.

Per capita bottled water consumption is estimated at five liters but it is growing due to rising awareness. Pakistan's consumption is higher than that in Bangladesh where per capita consumption stands at three liters whereas in India it is estimated at 11 liters.

Apart from three international brands Aquafina (PepsiCo), Kinley (Coca-Cola) and Nestlé Pure Life (Nestlé), over 130 local brands are registered in Pakistan. According to Pakistan Standards &

Quality Control Authority (PSQCA,) 69% of water samples have been found to be contaminated in 24 cities, providing room for small filtered water plants to bridge the demand-supply gap.

These small plants can be set up with an investment of just Rs500,000, which produces a hefty return in the range of 60% to 100% a big incentive for entrepreneurs with little resources. PSQCA has designed a policy aimed at restricting the sale of substandard water. Under the policy, all purification plants need to get a no-objection certificate from PSQCA before running their operations.

Recently a research carried out by Pakistan Council for Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) stated eight brands of bottled water unsafe for human consumption, reported a local media house. The PCRWR results are publicised after quarterly reviewing the quality of bottled/mineral water brands.

According to the quarterly report from January to March, 2018 110 samples of mineral/bottled water brands were collected from various cities which included; Islamabad, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, Bahawalpur, Tandojam, Quetta and Karachi.

The results were further compared with the permissible limits of Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) that revealed the eight brands – Edlen Premium, Aqua Fine, Pure Aqua,

Livon, Zam, Aqua Gold, Pure 18, and Aab-e-Noor –were unsafe for consumption due to chemical and microbiological contamination.

Out of those unsafe brands, Aqua Fine has high levels of arsenic with 20 parts per billion (ppb) against 10 ppb permissible under the PSQCA water quality standard.

The four brands, Zam, Aqua Gold, Pure 18 and Aab-e-Noor, were found to be unsafe due to microbiological contamination which may cause diseases like cholera, hepatitis, typhoid, etc.

Moreover, brands like Edlen Premium, Pure Aqua and Livon were found unsafe under the PSQCA water quality standard, due to the presence of higher levels of sodium ranging from 57-60 parts per million (ppm) against 50 ppm.

PCRWR stated that the poor quality of potable water had forced a large section of citizens to buy bottled water, which resulted in the mushroom growth of bottled water industry in the last few years. However, many of the mineral/bottled water companies have been found selling contaminated water.

Recently Supreme Court ordered the Chief Executive Officers of all major mineral water companies to appear before court in a case regarding the alleged exploitation of water resources in the country. The CJP observed that the com-



panies making money from water get ahead while common people get left behind, adding that steps need to be taken to improve the lives of the common man. The court subsequently ordered the CEOs of all major companies selling mineral water including Nestle, Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Gourmet to appear before the bench. According to the report, 82 such units are operating in Karachi, 16 in Sukkur, 15 in Hyderabad, 12 in Islamabad and 8 in Lahore.

There are many local bakeries operating within Pakistan but 'Gourmet' is one

of the more popular brands in Pakistan as it not only operates in many cities of the country but also operates internationally. The company provides food products, baked goods, sweets, water, fizzy drinks, catering services and much more.

Due to the unavailability of pure drinking water, a large population is left with no choice but to buy bottled water, especially during traveling.

As a consequence of this expanding market, a mushroom growth of bottled water industry in the country was witnessed during the last few years. The



PCRWR warned that many mineral/bottled water companies had been found selling contaminated water.

In order to have a check on bottled water, the government through the Ministry of Science and Technology has designated the task to the council for quarterly monitoring of bottled/mineral water brands and publicize the results.

Challenges

The bottled water market in Pakistan is witnessing annual growth rates nearing 40%. A billion people around the world lack access to safe drinking water supplies. If the trends continue, almost 3.0 billion people out of a global population of 8.18 billion could be facing water shortages by 2025. In Pakistan, only 3% of the nation's sweet water resources are used by households, for various purposes including cooking and drinking.

In Pakistan, the unchecked and more than needed population explosion has heightened the need to ensure uninterrupted access to improved drinking-water supply, especially in mega cities like Karachi and Lahore where traces of multiple deadly rudiments including the human feces are reported by laboratory reports. This shows height of criminal neglect exhibited by the civic bodies towards public right of safe drinking water. Provision of pure water to all the people by the government is not only a basic need and precondition for a healthy life but it is also a vital human right of all the

people which mustn't be ignored at any cost. Various improved water supply technologies have been developed by the modern world nations which included household connections, public stand-pipes, boreholes, protected dug-wells, protected springs and rainwater collections. The global water shortage of affordable and safe drinking water is conspicuously visible in Pakistan with an estimated 44% of the total population is without any access to safe drinking water. This paucity of clean drinking water can be more visibly seen in rural areas where up to 90% of the inhabitants may lack such access. On the other side, only 3%

of Pakistan's sweet water resources are used for household purposes and drinking. As one warning of the high-scale of the drinking problem prevalent in our society and the public ignorance of it, it is anticipated that more than 2.5 lakh infant children die of diarrheal diseases every year.

Chemical contaminants in drinking water such as arsenic, fluoride and nitrate are discovered at various locations. Arsenic contamination is found in southern Punjab and central Sindh.

On the other hand Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Saqib Nisar doubled down on the importance of constructing the Kalabagh dam deeming it a "matter of survival for Pakistan. He said that there was going to be an immense shortage of water in the days to come, adding that if a consensus was reached by the nation then Kalabagh Dam would also be constructed. The construction of dams is the only solution to the water crisis.

References

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