Dhaka, Saturday, February 15, 1992

Developing Hygienic Habits

Sanitation, admittedly, is a much neglected issue in this part of the world. But the issue is closely related to health, hygiene and even environment. That relation was particularly focused at a conference on "Social Mobilisation for Sanitation" by the speakers on Tuesday. No doubt, the concerned people recognise the gravity of the problem and still keep their activities limited to holding seminars and symposiums — mostly.

·Then something is surely amiss. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was however quick to pinpoint that missing link. That it is the people's involvement that account for the success of the national record on sanitation is more than sure. But the intriguing question is - how to involve the people in the movement for sanitation? Cold figures, although hardly represent the true picture. are at least enough here to focus on the low level of the people's awareness about sanitation. If 1000 children die of diarrhoea and other diseases every day and 90 per cent of the people are deprived of basic sanitation facilities, it becomes obvious that not poverty alone is the villain but our proverbial callousness is, to a great extent, responsible for the dismal situation.

Economic health surely has its reflection on the sanitation situation of a society. It is also a habit that can go a long way in improving the national sanitation record. Even some of the developing countries like Singapore have a unique way of teaching their students sanitation and environmental lessons. In fact, the lessons should begin at home. And who does not know that habits - good or bad - die hard? The merits of developing, at an early age, a conscious effort at keeping the surrounding clean cannot be measured in terms of money. We should start training our students on sanitation and thus the mobilisation of public opinion in favour of environment-friendly programmes can be easier. Sadly, though, the school curriculum in the country has not much to boast on sanitation also.

The theme, when extended, presents a paradoxical picture in that the posh areas of the city have stinking garbage piles side by side the beautifully manicured flower lawns of the most modern residential houses. The malice therefore is more mental than anything else. So, it is no longer a question of the PM indulging in rhetorics but of a concerted effort on the part of the people, the sanitation department and the non-government organisations working in the area at making the movement a success.

True, the government and some NGOs in particular have taken pains to improve sanitation facilities through distribution of hygienic latrines and tubewells. Credit surely goes to all of them for doing the good job but at the same time it must be noted that the programmes are being carried on in isolation. Those programmes alone, without having taken care of a few other perennial problems, cannot fully ensure a safe environment, but they are sure to substantially improve the condition. And that is no mean achievement provided that everything goes on smoothly. In this respect, the NGO Bureau's role cannot be overemphasised. It can and should effectively coordinate and integrate the sanitation programmes of the government and the NGOs. Only then the overlapping of programmes and the failure to reach the facilities at all to some places can be avoided. The perspective of sanitation of the country should be taken as a whole.

Heroin Deaths in Pabna

Whatever might Dr Goebbles had said as an eternally derided aphorism, the incredible continues to be incredible even if you keep on repeating it. There have been comments galore on drug addiction in the national press. And the seriousness of the problem has rather been lightened by sponsored processions in Dhaka decrying addiction and by newspapers publishing photographs of those apologies of a parade divorced all the way from the reality of the thing. We too, in good faith, have commented on the spread of the real danger, thinking that this would help induce the authorities to act and the readers to resolve to resist. And then comes news from Pabna, which is a far-cry from being something as urbanised and cosmopolitan as to be infected with the poisons of modern western vices, that 40 persons have died there of drug addiction in the last one year. Moreover 30,000 families have been claimed to have been affected by the affliction the same year in the same The Daily Star, February 13. story.

This is, as we said, incredible. And Pabna being what it is the incredibility of the bad tidings do not diminish.

There are at least two lessons to learn from the Pabna disaster. One, if the situation in Pabna is that bad, there cannot be any point in Bangladesh — be it Thakurgaon or Jhikorgachha or whatever - which hasn't been infected by the problem. There is a corollary to this lesson: there may indeed be scores and scores of places where the problem would be worse - far worse.

Lesson number two: as it is in the Pabna report in The Daily Star, heroin addiction has become a very much Bengali vice bred as a necessary offshoot neither of affluence nor of the breaking down of the moral fabric of the society in the Western pattern — but of the very real and painful fact of abject poverty. Our forebears, specially the old ones among them, in order to fight off pain caused by hopeless maladies such as cancer, used to partake of opium in controlled doses. Our compatriots of the present generation are taking to heroin addiction to assuage the sufferings generated by poverty. This country-wide spread of addiction has got nothing to do with the addiction indulged in by a handful of wayward children of the opulent families of the metropolis, the latter being the butt of all of government's attention, if there is any.

We demand of the government an urgent lowdown on the national situation vis-a-vis heroin addiction. And with that, what they propose to do to contain and curtail that.

Right-wing Presidential Contender Can't be Ignored

S the presidential elec-A tion campaign gets underway, lead-ing politicians and foreign policy specialists in the United States are actively debating what role Washington should play in the post-Cold War world.

Many visions are being put forth, but one in particular stands out for its clarity, and the vivid rhetoric used to describe it.

"Put America First," declares Republican presidential contender Patrick Buchanan. and let the rest of the world fend for itself.

Such isolationist sentiment is considered anathema within the US political establishment Buchanan is not given much chance of surviving as a challenger to George Bush after the initial round of Republican presidential primaries in late February.

Nevertheless, it is becoming clear that Buchanan's message has considerable grass-

roots appeal. Public opinion polls show many voters agree with his basie programme: focus attention and resources on problems at home, withdraw from foreign entanglements, and forcefully assert US interests in trade negotiations, even at the risk of retaliation from Japan and the European Community.

While Buchanan's ideas are regularly denounced as being far outside the political mainstream, they actually fall within a long-standing US tradition of right-wing populism.

The ideology of this 53year-old newspaper columnist and television commentator bears many similarities to the xenophobia of the 19th Century nativist movements, which opposed Irish, Italian and eastern European immigration to the US.

Buchanan's foreign policy views are likewise rooted in the "America First" crusade of the Thirties, when people like famed aviator Charles Lindbergh urged that the US not become involved in the fight against Nazism.

Indeed, Buchanan notes in his 1988 autobiography. Right from the Beginning, that his father's sympathics "had been with the isolationists, with Charles Lindbergh and the

Kevin J. Kelley writes from Washington

Patrick Buchanan, vying to replace United States President George Bush as representative of the Republican Party, has been called a racist and anti-Semite for his far-right views. But his popular appeal means he cannot be dismissed lightly. A surprisingly large number of people may vote for him in protest over Bush's economic policies.

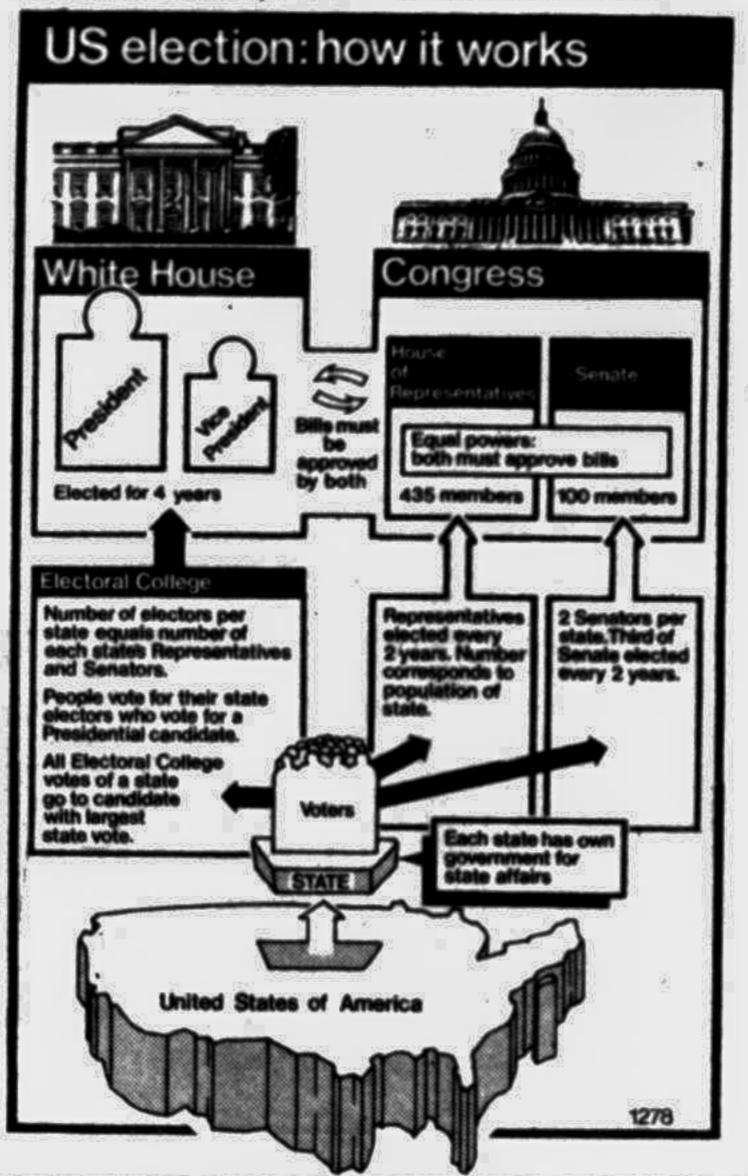
America First Committee." Other household heroes included Spanish dictator Francisco Franco and the fiercely anti-communist US

senator Joseph McCarthy.

In addition to an uncompromising brand of conservatism. Buchanan inherited from his father a devotion to Jesuit style Roman Catholism and a pugnacious disposition.

During his student days at Washington's Georgetown University, the young Buchanan was arrested for assault in two police officers who had stopped him for a traffic violation.

This characteristic combativeness was channelled into verbal form during Buchanan's tenure as a speechwriter for President Richard Nixon



He later served as commu nications director in the Reagan White House, where he was credited with fashioning that administration's confrontational rhetoric, aimed both at liberals at home and at radical nationalists in the Third World

Over several years. Buchanan has emerged as one of the country's best-known political pundits. His colourfully-expressed opinions were carried in more than 400 newspapers, and he often appeared on nationwide TV talk shows.

Buchanan has acquired celebrity status - and made himself a millionaire - mainly by convincing audiences that he takes his ideas very seriously. Having come close to running for president in 1988, Buchanan decided this time to take leave from writing and dedicate himself totally to reasserting the Reaganite

As Buchanan secs it, Bush has strayed from the one trué conservative path. The President, never fully trusted by right-wing ideologues, offended many by abandoning his 'No New Taxes' pledge last year as part of a deal with Democrats in Congress. Buchanan contends that marked a betrayal of fundamental Reaganite principles.

He finds much less support on the right for his criticisms of Bush's global outlook. In fact, some of Buchanan's former colleagues in the media maintain that it is he - not Bush - who has repudiated Reagan's foreign policy of intervention on behalf of US economic and strategic objec-

A significant number of conservatives refuse to support Buchanan, in particular because of his opposition to the 1 S led military campaign against frag

With communism defeated, Buchanan reasons, the US no

longer has any reason to send truops to Third World hotspots. That position is considered dangerously short-sighted by many Republicans, some of whom became even more chagrined at Buchanan because of his argument against Bush's decision to go to war in the

The country was being drawn into unnecessary conflict. Buchanan said early in 1991, mainly at the instigation of Israel and its "amen corner" in the US.

That comment, which clearly referred to Jewish-American lobbyists, re-ignited controversy over Buchanan's alleged anti-semitism.

During his career as a columnist. Buchanan came to the defence of an accused Nazi war criminal, insisting that the US resident had been set up by the Soviet intelligence agency. He also questioned whether the generally accepted history of the Holocaust is correct in certain key respects.

African-Americans and ho mosexuals have also been the targets of remarks by Buchanan that many consider insensitive, at best. Charges that he is a racist have been given new credence as a result of some of Buchanan's recent utterances.

Soon after he announced his candidacy for president in mtd-December. Buchanan responded to an interviewer's question about immigration policies by declaring: "I think God made all people good, but if we had to take in a million immigrants — say. Zulus — nest year, or Englishmen, and put them in Virginia, what group would be easier to assimilate and would cause less problems for the people of Virginia?"

ironically, the governor of that southern state is an African-Amrican And in an interview in

January with Britain's Sunday Telegraph newspaper, Buchanan asserted: "The US should stand up for values, shared

Why are we more shocked when a dozen people are killed in (the Lithuanian capital) Vilnius than a massaere in Burundi? Because they are white people. That's who we are. That's where America comes from."

Buchanan's nationalist advocacy does extend somewhat beyond white people in the United States. He favours creation of a Palestinian state, for example, and has also suggested in his column that Quebec be allowed to secode from Canada. The angiophone provinces of Canada could then be merged with the US to create a North American super-nation.

At the same time, however, Buchanan is not eager to see the US conclude a free trade agreement with Mexico a country much poorer - and less easy to assimilate - than

English speaking Canada. Because of views like these. Buchanan is generally thought to pose little threat to Bush's renomination as the Republican Party's standard bearer.

But Buchanan is managing nevertheless, to position himself as the only viable insurgent to the right of Bush.

His competitor for that role - former Klu Klux Klan leader David Duke - will probably be unable to overcome a reputation as an extremist, especially stnce Buchanan takes many of the same positions, and puts them in more respectable packaging.

The key test of Buchanan's appeal will come soon. Unless he wins more than one-lifth of the Republican vote in the nation's first primary election, on February 18 in New Hampshire, the Buchanan challenge will almost certainly come to an early end.

The deep recession in that New England state has angered many voters, however, and a surprisingly large number may decide to protest over Bush's economic policies by casting a ballot for Patrick Buchanan - GEMINI NEWS

KEVIN J. KELLEY is an American freelance journalist, and editor of the Toward Freedom journal.

Family Planning Needs More Practical Approach

the application method, by keeping the population

the videos and slide shows. by Kazi M Sakhawatullah Can SMC say how many of these are married couples in-If the Government sincerely wishes to contain terested in planned parentpopulation boom, it may like to consider changes in

new landmark is said to have been reached in the country's family planning drive through sales of one billion condoms and 43 million pills. On the basis of these figures of distributed contraceptives it is claimed that the country's rate of birth has come down from 3.4% in 1975 to under 2.2% in 1991. It is also claimed on behalf of the Social Marketing Company (SMC) that in 1975 only 7% of married couples practiced family planning but today 40% do the same. The moot question remains to be answered as to how much of this enormous quantities has gone to the use of married couples and how much gone into possession of unmarried youths and teenagers, and how much is wasted as toy balloons sold to rural children? According to SMC chairman. they have "no access to people's bedrooms" or any other means to know the actual acceptability and use by those for whom contraceptives are meant. Is not then the conclusion hypothetical and the satisfaction deceptive and selfcontradictory? (The Daily Star 25-1-92).

It is also claimed that when mobile promotional teams go to villages large number of people including women come out to hear them and watch

hood and how many are unmarried youths, teenagers and children interested in the video entertainment? SMC chairman also admitted that there are complaints from educated people about ruination of nation's youths as well as widespread misuse. It is fact that contraceptives are freely available at stationery and grocery shops and there is no restriction on sales to any class of buyers or users. I have seen innocent and ignorant elders to buy condoms and distribute to children as toy balloon gifts. For lack of knowledge they don't know that these are useful items for them. Does the concerned authorities know or can deny this? Are not the quantities gone into the possession of unmarried persons and the quantities sold as toy gifts misused and wasted? Have such figures been excluded from the figures counted for the achievements? Is keeping open the facility for free access to contraceptives by those for whom these are not meant not an open door policy to their moral degradation? SMC chairman also admitted the resistance to contraception. He deserves thanks for admitting facts. There is

programme in place. more than that. In fact there is widespread objection to the family planning programme itself from sections of both edu-cated and uneducated sensible rural people, inclu ding Ulemas, only because of unbridled propaganda and unrestricted distribution of contraceptives. A video cassette containing forceful speech and strong condemnation of the method is very popular in the rural areas. Fertile married couples only are supposed to be the programme's target and activities thereof should have been kept limited to this section of the population. Instead. the entire society, irrespective of its married or unmarried sections, has become the target of this injudicious

There are three partners in the Family Planning Project: the Government, the donor and the SMC, the latter being the real beneficiary. As marketing agency of the manufacturers of contraceptives SMC's primary and

foremost interest is unrestricted distribution, more sale and increased importation for commercial gain, reduced birth rate may be of secondary interest. But those concerned with the population problem may wish to go deep into the issue. Assumed achievement calculated on the basis of arithmetic figures may impress the layman. Sincere, serious and sensible social thinkers may be wiser to have close scanning look into the scenario. I believe the donors also are not quite convinced about the effectiveness of the existing method. Five years back in 1987, in course of a study discussion with the USAID Population & Health Unit Chief Ms. Sheron Epstein

learned that they were thinking of change in the contraceptive distribution system - only through the Family Planning and Health workers direct to the interested married couple, which implied their realisation of the folly in the unrestricted distribution. What happened to the idea

To me that would be right method. If the Government sincerely wishes to contain population

later I have no means to know.

boom, it may like to consider changes in the application method, by keeping the population programme in place, on the following suggested lines: (1) Discontinue unre-

stricted distribution and sales of contraceptives and propa ganda thereof. Married Health & Family Planning field work ers only will distribute contraceptives direct to the fertile interested married couples.

(2) Importation, storage supply and distribution of all types of contraceptives be placed at the disposal and con trol of a centralized designated authority. All other avenues be closed.

(3) Availability will be restricted to the union family planning clinics and health centres under the custody. responsibility and control of the Officer-in-Charge of the respective centres. Family Planning & Health workers will draw from there the required quantity for distribution personally to the married couples, as suggested at (1).

(4) Above steps will reduce the importable quantity to the bare requirement for the married couples only who will be

ting some medical facilities

listed and registered with by the Family Planning field workers.

Misuse and wastage will thus be stopped and the savings in the donated fund accrued by reduced importation may be utilised in more aggressive educative programmes.

(5) Priority be given to educate and motivate married couples. Each union or more than one unions may form a unit for the purpose and married couples only be employed for the purpose. Additional fund required for increased educative activities may be available from the savings indi cated at (4). Donor's willing consent will be required. which can be expected provided we are convinced and can convince them.

(6) Employment of unmarried male and female persons as field workers be discontinued and existing incumbents be transferred to other jobs.

Modifications, in the application of population programme on the suggested lines will remove the causes of discontent, resistance, opposition towards the family planning project as a whole and as a result popular support and interest can be expected.

The writer is retired Consultant, UNCTAD, Geneva.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Requisitioning of vehicles

Sir. In the city of Dhaka as well as in the district towns and upazilas, authorities requisition vehicles that belong to private organisations and individuals. I am told that law of . the country does not permit requisitioning of vehicles by authorities unless a state of emergency is declared in the country. If that is so, most cases of requisitioning of vehicles fall in the category of flagrant violation of law. Their eyes always fall on good limousines, microbuses, pick ups and station wagons.

I remember, years back heard of a case where a brand new station wagon was requisitioned because the family of Mr. X wanted to go for a picnic ! Now that with the combined efforts of the people of Bangladesh we have broken the shackles of despotic rule. we should behave like a true

democratic nation where individual whims and wishes of a few individuals, would not

Abu M. Fatz Dhaka-1205

Quality of products

Sir. I would like to congratulate the government for taking necessary measures to control smuggling of consumer goods.

Local manufacturers should avail this opportunity by producing quality goods and marketing them at a competitive price. Otherwise, it may be difficult to change the behaviour of traders and the consumers in favour of local goods.

Government should take appropriate measures to assess the quality and price of imported and local products and constantly advice the local manufacturers to improve

their performance. The organisers of Textile Products Exhibition at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar can undertake a survey to test consumers' reactions about the quality and price of locally produced textile prod-

M. Nurul Islam Director, Institute of Appropriate Technology. BUET, Dhaka.

Strike and transports

Sir. Our aim is to establish true democracy in the country where people could live peacefully enjoying the human rights. But it would be evident that a section of people in our society wouldn't prefer to reach the expected goals, abiding by the rules of democracy. The recent transport strike has proved this fact. The transport owners definitely reserve the right to call and observe strike but they have no right to attack or damage private or government transports during the strike period. Our college buses had to cancel routine movement because some unruly persons were stated to be destroying vehicles during the transport strike. This caused a serious inconvenience to our teachers.

students and staff, particularly the examinees.

But how long this anarchism will continue? Why people destroy or damage national property during the strikes

Now that a democratic government is running the state, would the administration be methodical enough to monitor all the striking affairs through radio and TV network with a view to mobilize public opinion

and other action programmes?

on the state of affairs? I think, the government should settle genuine demands before any concerned party starts strike. On the other hand, ingenuine and illogical demands should never be metup, rather stern actions should be taken for calling strikes on ingenuine grounds.

M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor. Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka.

Hospitals and clinics

Sir, The persons who have occasions to visit our hospitals and clinics for the treatment of the sick, know it fully well what kind of service is rendered, there. However, the position was not such even 10/12 years back. Then people at least had the scope of get-

Now, far to speak of reasonable or adequate attention and nursing, for which the diseased persons are taken there. even for a glass of hot water a patient has to spare a few chips. And if fortunately one recovers from illness, at the time of discharge he is sure to face a group of people seeking tips, although some of them were never seen by the bedside of the patient. Such experiences are very common and is really a matter of concern for those who are anxious to see things improved.

In the government hospi tals, employees of lower ranks are found present on duty during first hours, but doctors are seldom found to take their seat even after one and a half hours since as if that portion of time is their unwritten compulsory leisure. In the clinics, the tendency of exacting fabulous amounts from patients on newer and novel items is a chronic episode and most common feature. People are, in fact, fed up with high sounding slogans of "health for all by 2000" which has little relevance in view of the steady deterioration of hospital

To my mind the sick people have very rightly been termed as "patient" as if they are des-

service.

tined to patiently forbear the pangs of illness till take the last breath.

Ahmed Siddique Malibagh, Dhaka

World Cup cricket on

Sir. Cricket lovers of Bangladesh are overwhelmed with joy that BTV have arranged to telecast live 23 matches of the World Cup cricket, commencing 22

February next. It is hoped that BTV would take such bold steps in future also for telecasting live, important one-day cricket tourneys i.e. Sarjah cricket, World Series Cup Cricket (Australia), Texaco Cup Cricket (England) etc. and hereby earn the gratitude and admiration of the cricket lovers of the country.

Besides, by viewing the topstars in action on the miniscreen, our cricketers would be immensely benefitted in improving their skill and style This would surely help develop the standard of ericket in Bangladesh Thanks, many thanks, BTV.

M. Nazmul Hague, Dhaka