

# Dental patients should stop seeing quacks

by Shahrier Khan

working as helpers of qualified dentists. In both cases theoretical knowledge acquired is minimum. Quacks hardly know anything about oral cancer, says Dr Mollah. Mal-treatment of patient suffering from pre-cancerous lesion leads to untreatable rapid growth of cancer. Pre-cancerous condition is however often treatable.

Bengal and Barisal in the country. Dr Ashraf, Principal of Dhaka Dental College, also reveals that 20 per cent of total cancer patients suffer from oral cancer. But with their simple dentistry tools and poor knowledge of dentistry, quacks in interviews with The Daily Star say that they do not go beyond cavity filling, scaling,

Quacks also set springs in mouth to normalize deformed teeth, treat gum diseases, use hydrogen peroxide for washing mouth. They also replace damaged teeth with false teeth made of silver, steel cap and lead.

Their nonchalant way of using lead in dentistry is very dangerous, says Dr Ashraf, lead is very poisonous and can cause slow death. Permanent placing of metal-made teeth

dentists but is not recognised by the dental college. Since the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council do not have a standard curriculum, the Government of Bangladesh recognises this organisation. Boasting dentistry skill, road side dentists on the other hand complain about mismanagement and negligence in the public service of the Dental College. They say poor people do not get attention in the Dental College where free medical service is rendered. Dental patients becoming sick and tired of hanging around for free treatment come to the road side as their last resort. Indicating to his specimen teeth box, a quack told The Daily Star, often Dental College students come to him buy some of these specimen teeth for their education purpose, and they never say you are doing it badly.

There are indeed some problems in the highest dentistry institution of Bangladesh, Dhaka Dental College, says Dr Mollah. Lack of facilities, supplies, shortage of doctors account for deteriorations of services. The Dental College principal however mentioned that the government has taken a scheme to build a very modern Dental College and hospital for the public in Mirpur besides, two colleges have already been established in Chittagong and Rajshahi, which will produce dental graduates from 1995. Other problems created by the quacks for dental patients issue from random prescriptions of antibiotics and other drugs, says Dr Mollah.

While the Dental College is yet incapable of serving cent per cent of Bangladeshi population, the Dental College principal suggests increase of awareness in the masses about dental health via mass media. He says, the practice of quack dentists should be discouraged and necessary lawful action taken against them for the greater interest of the public. Once, he adds, quack practice is stopped, the poor mass will stop seeing those quacks. They will then go to local health complex for their treatment.



he adds, if it is treated by expert dentist. Dr Mollah also revealed that the dental college is getting two to three patients everyday in average. Half of these patients come in untreatable condition. According to a study conducted by maxillofacial surgery unit of the dental college and hospital, the prevalence of oral cancer is highest in the north

false teeth setting etc. One 35-year-old quack, who has been practising dentistry for eight years say, 'I cannot go for root canal since I do not have sophisticated machinery, but I assure you, I know how to do it.'

also follows a hazardous procedure and can cause synechitis, according to Dr Mollah. Quack dentists exist from the British days, according to Dr Ashraf. The absence of qualified dentists helped the growth of quack dentists. They have also strengthened their position by forming the Dental Association of Bangladesh, which certifies them as

# Dye-Lasers for Irradiation Therapy of Skin

CLINICAL dermatological research is currently being well served by one particular type of laser, the dye-laser.

Dye-lasers are helping doctors improve their understanding of the effect of ultra violet light on skin and create fresh therapeutic principles, reports 'German Research'.

Human skin reacts to UV light by turning red (erythema) and then brown (pigmentation). This occurs not only under natural sunlight, but also in the solarium or during irradiation therapy of skin diseases.

Used for the irradiation of human skin, a dye laser's paramount property is its monochromaticity, which furnishes us with a light source of high spectral intensity. Dye-lasers also possess a second characteristic property, known to physicists as 'tunability' of the wavelengths, which enables any given wavelengths or colour to be retrieved from certain spectral regions. Even wavelengths in the ultra violet (UV) range, which lie outside the visible region of the spectrum, can be produced using a dye-laser.

### Effect of radiation

The precise understanding of the effect of UV radiation on human skin is of vital significance for treatment using light. While phototherapy involves the use of light, photochemotherapy is a combination of light and photosensitising dyes which may be applied locally to the skin or administered orally as medicine.

Bronzing or pigmentation of the skin is usually preceded by reddening caused by some of the more energised elements of UV radiation known as UVB (wavelength approximately 280 to 320 nanometres).

The UVA component (wavelength approximately 320 to 380 nanometres), somewhat less energised radiation, can cause pigmentation of the skin without prior reddening or subsequent sunburn. This obviously beneficial effect is exploited in solarium.

The UVB component which is artificially filtered out of radiation lamps. In order to retain the same bronzing effect from UV radiation, however, the intensity of the radiation must be considerably increased (up to 1,000 times that occurring in natural, mixed UVB and UVA radiation). Moreover, UVA radiation penetrates more deeply into the skin, thus reaching layers in which cell generation takes place.

Hitherto, a normal person who has never been exposed to such intense UVA radiation under natural conditions as sunburn has always provided ample forewarning. The dangers of intensive UV radiation can be better assessed by im-

proving our knowledge of the spectral sensitivity of the skin, something which can now be very precisely determined in so-called action spectra using the dye-laser.

Of particular interest here are the precise spectra of

therapeutic and cosmetic purposes can be better matched to these conditions. These spectra enable finely differentiated investigations to be performed within the UV range.

Up to now, such spectra sources. In trials by German scientists small areas of the skin of test persons or patients of diverse skin types were irradiated at varying wavelengths and intensities. The reaction of the skin was then determined using some form of calorimetric device.

This method is also employed to determine the time factor for the development of reddening and pigmentation after irradiation. The employment of calorimetric devices has still to be perfected in certain respects. Especially, the abundance of readings obtained can only be adequately

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photo and photochemotherapy (healing spectra).

It is possible that in the future the spectral range of the radiation lamps employed for



Skin treatment with laser instruments.

have been almost exclusively determined using lamps. Hence some of the action spectra have not yet been accurately determined. The published results are also contradictory in some cases.

The so-called spectral bandwidth of these radiation systems lies between 5 and 20 nanometres, which is relatively broad, but necessary in order to produce the required intensity of radiation.

However, if the spectral section, the bandwidth of the lamp, is large, then only very approximate spectral reading can be obtained. Hence the lasers, with their spectral bandwidth of under 0.1 nanometres, are ideal light

assessed with the aid of a high-performance computer. Studies of this nature can produce further information on the molecular mechanisms which occur in the skin during interaction with light.

Thus, for example, German doctors now believe that the presence of specific intermediate stages of melanin metabolism plays a role in the pigmentation in UVA.

Melanin is the brownish pigment which forms in the deeper layers of the skin under exposure to UV radiation, and which is subsequently transported to surface of the skin.

(PTI Science Service, German Research)

# Sri Lanka Using Imaginative Campaign On AIDS

by Harold Pieris from Colombo

AIDS virus may also give a false impression that the AIDS rate is low. Government health officials fear that AIDS in Sri Lanka will reach epidemic proportions if preventive measures are not taken now

health budget barely able to cope with communicable diseases, Sri Lanka can ill afford another health burden. AIDS therapy is very expensive and unlikely to reach most AIDS

Part of the programme is to strengthen the capacity of clinics specialising on sexually-transmitted diseases, including AIDS. Para-medical health workers and others like nurses will be provided training on AIDS care.

The programme will promote the use of condoms and take the message of 'Safe Sex' to the public. Safe sex means staying with one partner if possible and using condoms in casual sex. The installation of condom vending machines will soon start.

The information campaign will include persuading high

risk groups like prostitutes and drug addicts to come up for blood testing for the AIDS virus.

Sri Lankans going abroad will be informed about the disease. One poster asks them not to take back AIDS to their partners.

AIDS patients and their families will be advised on how to cope with the disease. Health officials emphasise that AIDS patients must not be cut out of society. Indeed, in the absence of hospital care or if it is not necessary, the best way to treat AIDS patients is at home.

Those only infected with the AIDS virus and has not yet developed full-blown AIDS could still live relatively normal lives.

### Health officials fear AIDS will reach epidemic proportions in Sri Lanka if preventive measures are not taken now

preventive measures are not taken soon. This island country is certainly a potential and fertile breeding ground.

Already, residents are viewing the resurgent tourism with some apprehension, especially indignant that the island is being advertised in some European underground magazines as a 'Homosexual or Gay Paradise.' Even genuine tourists in some seaside resorts are being embarrassed as they are mistaken for gays.

Dr Gamini Jayakuru, director of the AIDS Control Programme, says that besides female prostitutes, there may be around 30,000 male prostitutes in the country.

There are also about 37,000 drug addicts in Sri Lanka, most using glue intoxicants. But as they gradually shift over to injectable drugs like heroin, they tend to share needles which may be infected with the AIDS virus.

Transmission of AIDS through blood transfusion is minimal as most donated blood is screened for diseases. Already 99 per cent of donated blood is screened but more testing kits will be provided by the government.

AIDS is also transmitted before and during childbirth. It is thus important to inform women of the dangers of AIDS and its implications on child survival.

In August, the government entered into an agreement with the WHO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a three-year AIDS prevention programme. The project will be executed by the WHO and the Health Ministry. The UNDP will provide US \$1.5 million in technical assistance.

UNDP officials say people are yet to realise that AIDS is not merely a health problem but can have many development implications. AIDS will have a chain reaction on several other areas like the national economy, the national budget, social life, families, and so on.

The economic aspect of the disease is vast and expensive, officials say. The disease strikes the most active age group — from the early 20s to the 40s — which supports the young and the old. With an already limited

patients who are poor. The anti-AIDS programme will include a comprehensive national plan. A National AIDS Committee will monitor the continuous assessment of the AIDS situation.

ABIES of epidemic proportion threatens the residents of Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan, but it seems authorities are running around in circles not knowing how to tackle the problem.

According to official statistics, as many as a hundred people were treated for dog bites in the city last year. Nearly 60 others were given anti-rabies vaccination in less

# Man's Best Friend No More?

than two months. These statistics, of course, are not reliable; heaven knows how many similar cases remain unreported by even the victims themselves.

According again to Bhutan's national newspaper 'Kuensel', the number of people actually bitten by dogs could be far

more. This means that at least one person is bitten by a dog every day.

The big jump in rabies victims is attributed to the burgeoning canine population in the city and suburbs. More than a year ago, the oversized dog population was recognised as a major health hazard but no

action whatsoever was taken to solve it.

Doctors have appealed for urgent action. But people are frustrated. As reports say, the Department of Health, Animal Husbandry and the City Corporation are all helpless.

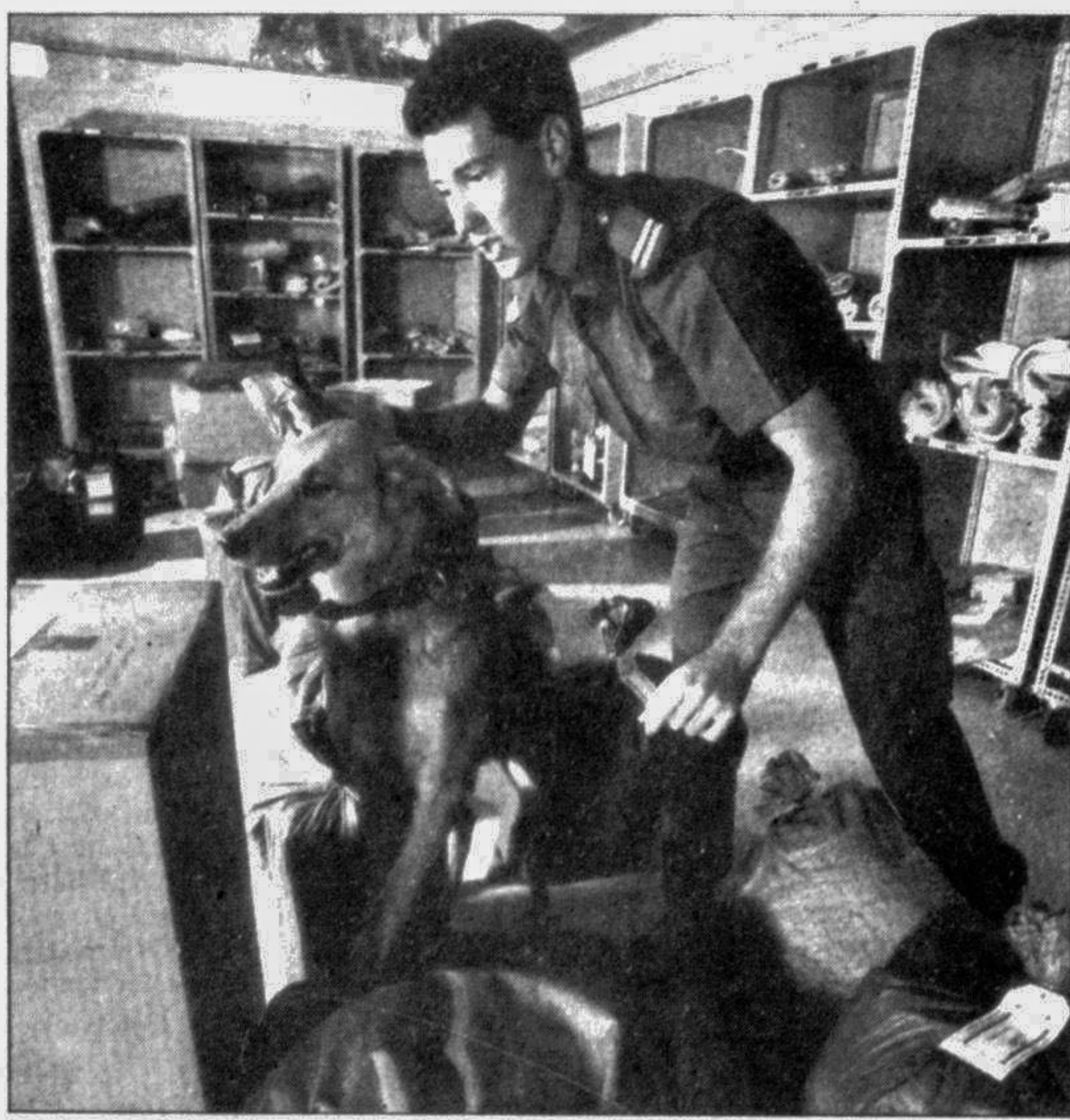
The Director of the Health Department, Dr. J. Norbu, said

*There is a sharp difference of opinion between the Buddhist clergy and health officials. Some officials are blaming the clergy for blocking efforts to eradicate the rabies threat by killing the stray dog population. But it is said that the monastic body has never commented on the problem.*

the problem has been aggravated because of the rampant and unchecked growth of the canine population. He has suggested that all pets should be vaccinated.

He points out that earlier the City Corporation had shot stray dogs, particularly those which were sick. But this was stopped because of public pressure. The Bhutanese people are very religious and they back Buddhist teachings against killing animals.

Another senior official, Dr. M. K. Rai, Director of Animal Husbandry, offered to provide technical assistance to any initiative taken by the health department. Dr. Rai said that the department had recently vaccinated some 500 dogs in a door-to-door campaign. But health analysts doubted if dog vaccination was a tech-



Against all odds they can still be friends.

nical solution since thousands of the animals roam free everywhere. They are migrating to urban centres because of the increasing amount of garbage and other foodstuffs available there. Dr. Rai added.

City Corporation officials likewise are resigned to the danger. They have a dog killer on their rolls all right but as the Kuensel newspaper reported, the man committed suicide over a domestic squabble by injecting himself with dog poison.

Lack of funds had hit the project for dog-pounding, which the corporation claims would have helped solve the problem. 'But we do not have a single penny to finance this project,' say corporation officials. The Director of Animal Husbandry has also run short of money.

Apparently, there is a sharp difference of opinion between the Buddhist clergy and health officials. Some officials are blaming the clergy for blocking efforts to eradicate the rabies threat by killing the stray dog population. But it is said that

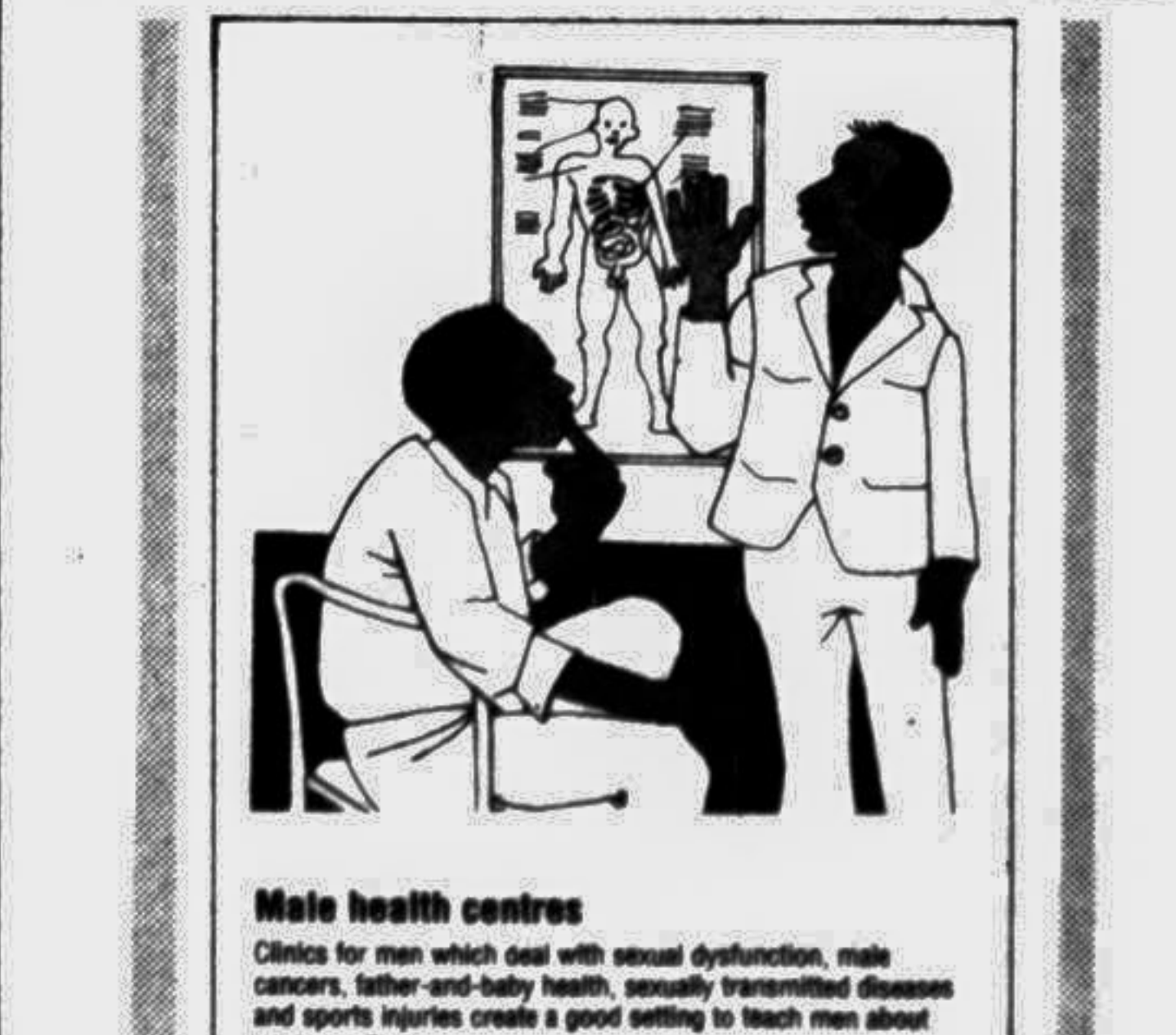
the monastic body has never commented on the problem.

According to an anonymous source connected with the clergy, monks are sensitive to any threats to human beings. 'We realise that each government organisation has its responsibility. If someone comes to ask us if they should kill, what are we to say? But if the City Corporation or Health Department or the department of Animal Husbandry have a solution, which would be of benefit to society, why should they ask us?'

Yet, the City Corporation does not have money because of a financial crisis which hit them last year. The dog project could cost 1.5 million Nu (the Bhutanese currency).

Thus, human life remains precariously poised between the Buddhist pressure not to kill dogs and the government's cash crisis.

The Kuensel newspaper sums it up: 'The relationship between man and his best friend remains highly strained.' That's probably putting it too mildly. — Depthnews Asia



Male health centres

Clinics for men which deal with sexual dysfunction, male cancers, father-and-baby health, sexually transmitted diseases and sports injuries create a good setting to teach men about contraception.