

## Pharmaceutical Performance

Although belated, the government move to review the drug licences of all the 197 drug manufacturing companies of the country is welcome. It is a move aimed to salvage the fast losing confidence of people in the locally produced life-saving drugs. How the review will be carried out will ultimately decide whether the move is going to be enough for restoring the lost confidence. The review will, we hope, separate the bad drug companies from the good ones. People have ever remained unconvinced of the integrity of some of our drug companies since the withdrawal of different brands of medicine from markets by a number of pharmaceutical companies in the recent past. The row over paracetamol syrup dealt a mortal blow to their trust in the local pharmaceutical companies. But a most drastic and unbiased review of the performances of the drug companies will be in order to do the job.

A review of the companies' licences does not necessarily mean that all of them will fail to pass the standards set. There are definitely some genuine drug companies. Such responsible companies deserve not only government patronage but also some kind of rewards for maintaining the integrity and business ethics. This reward can be in the form of an annual performance report where the best companies will be listed on top and also be given a symbolic reward. Such a recognition is essential for confidence-building of the people, specially in the prevailing circumstances.

Similarly, companies compromising qualities for profits should be meted out punishment according to the law of the land. However provisions should be left open for some defaulting companies to conform to the criteria within a specific period so that their licences are not cancelled. But if they fail to lift them to make up the gap within the stipulated period, permission for them to manufacture medicines has to be totally withdrawn anyway. Nevertheless, such a one-time review will not be enough to ensure the quality of drugs, if a system for regular monitoring of the drug companies is not developed. It is too dangerous a business to leave the responsibility of ensuring the quality and standard of drugs with the pharmaceutical companies. A central competent authority like the Drug Administration should be assigned the responsibility to regularly test the quality of different pharmaceutical products.

In this context the determination of the quality of the raw materials used for manufacturing medicines is also essential. Raw materials need to qualify the specification standard of the International Non-proprietary Name (INN), the British Pharmacopoeia and the United States Pharmacopoeia. The two testing laboratories in Dhaka and Chittagong are not well-equipped to determine the raw materials or their quality. Testing facilities of the raw materials have to be up to the standard. At the same time, the sole emphasis on bringing the prices of medicine down has to be removed. Sometimes, if not always, the compulsion for making medicines cheaper leads to the compromise on quality. Government restrictions on price control are acceptable up to a point where the manufacturing companies are not forced to sacrifice the standard.

## Europe without Borders

Overshadowed by the turmoil in Bosnia, the split of Czechoslovakia into two independent states and conflicts elsewhere in the region, the European single market was born on the New Year's Day without much of a bang. True, there was some celebration in Brussels, the home of European Community (EC), and bonfires were lit across the 12 member states to mark the official launching of a single market, a region without borders, of 345 million people.

However, the reality has fallen short, much short, of expectations. The Community's seven-year old plan of doing away with all kinds of border restrictions in the flow of trade and people has yet to come into force. Immigration authorities have been still guarding the frontiers, checking passports. Even on the question of removing these controls, there are differences. Britain, in particular, now argues that it has plans only to ease the immigration formalities, not to eliminate them altogether. One assumes that these restrictions will remain in force, in one form or another, as long as some EC countries face the threat of influx of refugees from East European countries, looking for temporary sanctuaries or permanent homes.

The disappointment may well be premature. According to the EC president, Jacques Delors, "Much of the programme for the single market is already in place, and January will not bring any miraculous change." It is really upto the member states to exercise the political will to enforce plans already agreed on by the members. However, even when backed by strong political will of member states, many of these plans cannot be implemented all that easily. The ratification of the Maastricht treaty — the EC's blueprint for political and economic union — may not come about before the middle of next year. At a time when most member states are passing through the worst ever post-war recession, many EC countries may tend to place their pressing short-term national interests above their long-term regional goals. The case of adopting a single European currency, a crucial tool for a unified market, is a case in point. It seems now doubtful if this can come about even by the end of this decade.

In the final analysis, the doubt is about the pace of the changes finally leading to the emergence of a single market, not about Community reaching its goal. Meanwhile, the rest of the world will be watching the development with mixed feelings, wondering how Europe without frontiers will affect other regions.

# Recollections of a Journey to My Ancestral Home

In most parts of the world, the year is divided into four seasons but we, in Bangladesh, have six of them. Most foreigners who live in this country do not seem to understand this because, to them, we have really three seasons — the wet and the hot seasons and the winter. For them, it is the few dry and cool winter months in Bangladesh which make it worthwhile to suffer the heat, the humidity and the dampness of the climate for other months. The Bangalis also love the cool comfort of winter but the month of romance and poetry for them is the rainy season. We seem to have learnt to appreciate and enjoy the beauties of the changing seasons through the eyes of Rabindranath Tagore. Indeed it is Tagore who, perhaps after the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa, re-discovered the majestic beauty of the dark monsoon clouds and the lightning and thunder. He made us see and feel the charm of the rain drops softly falling on the tin roofs and taught us how the playful nature can be a source of joy. Some of his greatest poems and loveliest songs are on this theme. He opened our eyes to the pleasure of looking at the dew drops on the grass in the front yard of our homes.

This long introduction is just to tell my readers about a journey I made recently by road to my ancestral home in the interior of the Habiganj district. Many people find irony in Tagore's description of the country as golden Bengal. This time I saw how right he was. The golden rice paddies ripening in the winter sun and the patches of mustard fields with their startling yellow colour create the impression of a golden land dazzling under the blue canopy of a cloudless sky. It reminded me of the fall foliage of the

New England region of the United States where one can see flame colour leaves creating a riot of colour turning the whole country-side into a land of magical beauty. Most of the year Bangladesh is very green — but during this season the flat rice fields are spread wide under the December sun like a cloth of gold. Farmers carrying the heavy loads after harvesting the rice crop give an impression of a contented land at peace with itself. This, of course, is an illusion. The army of beggars at every point where one happens to stop on the highway is a brutal reminder that Bangladesh is a poor country with per capita annual income still hovering around two hundred dollars.

Was it merely a flight of fancy on the part of our great poet to describe this country as 'golden Bengal'? Perhaps he wrote our national anthem in an emotional moment during the movement for the annulment of the partition of Bengal. Or, he may have visualized the enchanting beauty of the landscape during the harvesting season. The depressing reality of life that one comes across is so different. Poverty is all around us. Indeed one is not allowed to forget it even for a moment. Wherever one stops the car it is surrounded by all kinds of people — beggars, street urchins and just curious onlookers; they crowd around the car as if they have nothing else to do. In all probability they really have nothing better to do. The employment situation is so hopeless in the country-side that most people one meets are already thinking and planning to go away either to the Middle East or the UK or some other destination in the East. Certainly in the greater Sylhet area, the sole ambition in life for most people living in the villages is to go abroad to work and earn lots of money. They are willing

to work for a decent wage but we are not able to make them work. The leaders of the country and the elite of the society have failed them. A journey by road on a low-slung Japanese car can be hazardous. There are few roadside service facilities. But one rather unexpected hazard is posed by the speed breakers. This menace for the motorist has spread to the length and breadth of the country. Their height must have been inspired by the conquerors of the Everest. They were certainly too high for my car and there were too many of them. It seems that the builders of the speed breakers believe that the motorist has no right to travel unless he travels by jeep or some other vehicle such as a bus or truck.

when it celebrated its centenary. It was with a sense of pride that I made the journey from Bangkok to attend the celebrations as the chief guest. A school plays a major role in moulding our lives but we seem to realize this only much later in life. I felt nostalgic when I saw my old school, standing there, looking a bit aged but otherwise without much change. Indeed, lack of change is one thing that hits one hard when one goes to a place like Habiganj. Life seems to follow its slow and unhurried pace and the only movement one notices is that of the rickshaws. These little machines are to be found everywhere in Bangladesh to answer our transport problem. There are no industries worth mentioning and naturally the economy

formulate some projects to inject dynamism in the economy of the district. Given the current political environment it seemed too much to hope. My next halt was my ancestral village in the Nabiganj thana. Once again I had a heart warming welcome from the people of the area. The warmth and the scale of the reception was almost embarrassing. I had done so little for them to deserve it. The village looked exactly as it did ten or even twenty years ago. The school building looked as dilapidated as when I saw it last time. The number of students seemed to have increased and what is encouraging, I saw a good number of girls in the school. The local bazaar has not changed a bit though it happens to be one of the oldest rural trading centres dating from the Muslim period. The river Gopa which used to flow by its side has almost fully silted up and the bazaar has to depend entirely on trucks to transport merchandise. My own village as well as the surrounding villages are awaiting electricity. The Power Development Board has put up the electric poles some years ago but then the Board stopped, for unexplained reasons, all activity. Electricity is one of the most important factors for the development of a country. As the head of ESCAP, I had stressed this to be the most potent force for accelerating the pace of modernization and economic growth. After this journey, I am convinced, more than ever, about it. While electricity will not immediately change the village economy, it seems to have a tremendous impact on the attitude of the people. Their outlook tends to be more open, forward-looking and receptive of modern influences. A village without electricity, after darkness descends on it, seems to disappear into the past. A light bulb not only brightens up a home but brings it back to the twentieth century. I hope the vast number of people of this country living in villages will not enter the twenty first century in the darkness of pre-electricity days.

I found much greater awareness than in the past about the need for education and health care though I did not see similar interest in programmes such as family planning. The government can utilize this heightened commitment to education for generating local level support for schools. The community must be made responsible for the local school in terms of overall management. Financial grant can supplement local support. I do not like the idea of government bureaucracy running local primary or secondary schools. Surely the local elite and the parents have a role and responsibility. The return journey was uneventful though we had to wait for a rather long time for the ferry for crossing the Meghna near Bhairab bazaar. On both sides of the ferry ghat, small bazaars have sprouted. Their spontaneity is a testimony to the strength and resilience of free enterprise but looking at the ghat and the little shops I thought a bit more of state control could not do us any harm. A fellow traveler told me that any attempt to organize and regulate these places will only lead to more corruption. Perhaps he knows better than me how this country runs and perhaps it is wise to refrain from too much reform too quickly. Looking at the placid river sleeping under a veil of evening mist, I thought: life must follow its natural course. Perhaps one day these ferry ghats will become bustling little towns but that day did not seem too near.

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

Surprisingly the trucks and buses are not greatly affected by them though these barriers are probably aimed mainly at them. Is this the only way to prevent speeding and accidents? To my mind the speed breakers are more successful in breaking up the low-slung cars than in controlling the trucks and buses. Will our engineers in the roads and highways department care to look into this matter? The remedy for the problem of speeding must be sought in the mind of the drivers. It is these people who need training and education. The drivers must be motivated to accept the discipline of the road and respect the law. I lived in Habiganj and studied in the local government high school for five years. Those were happy days. I had the privilege of revisiting the Habiganj high school in 1984

is essentially that of an administrative centre. Government officials, lawyers, clerks and shopkeepers are the mainstay of such district towns. Unless they can attract industry and commerce, these towns will not acquire truly urban character. The existing infra-structures of these towns make them suitable for small and medium size industries. In the case of Habiganj I intend to take up the matter with the local elite when I visit the town next time. I spoke to them, when I was given a reception in the old town hall during my recent visit, on the need for a change in the nature of politics. We must move away from the politics of slogans and demonstrations and devote our attention to constructive enterprises. The leaders of the district, instead of fighting among themselves along party line, must seek a

# The Demand that could Escalate Yugoslav War

Michael Jansen writes from Nicosia

Delegates from 50 Islamic countries have demanded that the UN arms embargo on Bosnia be lifted. The move reflects growing popular anger at the inability of Europe and the UN to end a conflict that has cost 138,000 Muslim lives. The delegates set a deadline of January 15. This has led to fears that the civil war in former Yugoslavia may further escalate.

FOREIGN ministers and representative from 50 Muslim countries meeting in Jeddah have made a major move towards Islamic involvement on the Muslim side in the civil conflict in Yugoslavia.

The involvement is expected to take the form of a massive injection of funds by members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). This would enable Bosnian Muslims to buy weapons to defend themselves against well-armed Serbs.

Provision of funds would indirectly flout the embargo on armaments to Yugoslavia imposed by the United Nations Security Council. The embargo hurts Bosnian Muslims who, unlike the Serbs, do not have access to arms dumps of the dismantled Yugoslav army.

Such action by OIC members will put pressure on the Council to meet the Muslim demand to use "all necessary means, including force..." to ensure total respect by Serbia of Council resolutions calling for an end to the Serbian offensive in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The language used in Jeddah was much tougher than that at a meeting held in Istanbul in June. Another departure was the deadline of January 15 set by the OIC for the UN to work out how to implement its resolutions. The OIC implied that it would not be bound by UN constraints after that date.

Because it is dominated by



ALIJA IZETBEGOVIC  
President of Bosnia

allies of the West— Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia — the OIC has been reluctant to criticise the handling of the Bosnian crisis by the US-dominated Security Council and the European Community.

These and more independent Muslim governments have been forced to go beyond previous limits they set for themselves by growing popular anger and anguish in the Muslim countries over the inability of Europe and the UN to

end a conflict which has cost 138,000 Muslim lives and made hundreds of thousands of Muslim civilians homeless.

These people are seen by Muslims as "new Palestinians", a people in the process of losing their homeland. And if that is allowed to happen the Bosnian Muslims will be in an even more desperate and tragic situation than the Palestinians who could find refuge with their Arab brethren. The Bosnian Muslims have nowhere else to go but Bosnia. They are not Turks or Arabs but Europeans.

Since April, when the conflict in Bosnia escalated, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran, the West's main antagonists, have competed to help the Bosnian Muslims. The Jeddah meeting was an outcome of that competition.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati used the strongest language to describe the situation of the Bosnian Muslims. He called the Serb policy of "ethnic cleansing", of driving the Muslims from their towns and homes, "genocide" and sharply castigated the international community for not acting decisively.

In the past Tehran pro-

posed creation of an Islamic army to intervene militarily on behalf of the Muslims, but recently Iran has confined itself to offering troops for an international force. Turkey, which hosted a Balkan conference in November, has also offered to provide troops for a UN or European force.

So far Islamic governments have merely provided humanitarian aid. Saudi Arabia has sent \$100 million, the United Arab Emirates \$3 million and Kuwait \$1 million. Iran has sent supplies, 100,000 tonnes of oil and some arms. There are also 400-500 Islamic "Mujahideen" fighting a jihad or holy war against the Serbs in Bosnia, most of them veterans of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan.

The fact that this has not satisfied Muslim peoples was shown when 50 Muslim countries turned up in Jeddah, the largest ever meeting convened by the OIC. Forty-five OIC members attended, with Sudan boycotting and Iraq absent, along with five prospective members: Bosnia and Albania from Europe, and three Central Asian republics. Sharp confrontation at the

conference between Muslim ministers and the West's mediators, US diplomat Cyprus Vance for the UN and Britain's Lord Owen for the EC, widened the already wide gap in understanding between the Muslim world and the West.

Both rejected the use of force and the lifting of the arms embargo and warned against providing arms to the Bosnian Muslims on the ground that this would escalate and expand the conflict. Muslims see the Serbs doing just this in the absence of "defensive arms" for the Bosnian Muslims.

Muslim-Christian relations, historically fraught with difficulties and misunderstandings, were seriously disrupted by Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 and the rise of militant Islam in the eighties. The Bosnian conflict has exacerbated this.

Muslims are convinced that the Christian West is using double standards in dealing with crises involving Muslim and non-Muslim peoples. Muslim ministers in Jeddah compared Washington's creation of a coalition to drive Iraq from Kuwait against US

and European reluctance to become involved militarily in Bosnia, where the human scale of the tragedy is far greater.

Muslims cite the examples of Iraq and Libya, where economic sanctions have been imposed and enforced, in contrast to those imposed on Serbia which continues to receive supplies and to trade on the international market.

This political gap has been increased by the cultural rift between Christendom and Islam, exposed by the death sentence imposed by the late Ayatollah Khomeini on the author Salman Rushdie for his novel *The Satanic Verses*, deemed offensive by Muslims. Western condemnation of the Ayatollah's decree, repeatedly reaffirmed by his successors in Tehran, has only served to heighten tensions.

Violence perpetrated against Muslim immigrants in Europe by French, British and, now, German right-wing extremists convinces Muslims that the spirit of the anti-Muslim Christian crusades has revived and that Western Christian inaction in Bosnia springs from Christian Europe's determination that there should be no Muslim-dominated Bosnian state within Europe.

— GEMINI NEWS

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## To the Editor...

### "Commentary"

Sir, When a person is being 'biased', especially a person who has the honour to edit a certain paper and has the 'honour' to write too in that same paper then certainly the whole issue will turn out to be different.

That when you, Mr. Editor, have on December 23, 1992, tried to defend yourself (there was no need though, the issue being "A Rejoinder") you brought up points that dated back to two years when, I am certain, the BNP Government did not exist nor the two Ministers whom you claim to have named for their individual dismal performance.

That when you speak of 'dealing with AL quite extensively' you do not mention about a single occasion when you have 'dealt' with the BNP leader who has been often making "insinuating" remarks in her public meetings and saying "only one party is responsible for hindering the present process of development and that the same party was responsible in resorting to terrorism to tarnish the image of the democratic government."

That, as much as I can remember, never have you mentioned that the BNP leader was making unnecessary issues in her public meetings and making 'false' claims in turning the

state laws for the betterment of the mass. Had this been true then she would not have required to 'explain' the issue of Anti-Terrorism Act 1992, in several public meetings.

That if indeed you were a 'sincere' and a 'dedicated' editor you would have at least once had the courage to point out the follies played by the present Government. Did Begum Khaleda Zia in reality want to change the Presidential form of government into a Democratic one or had she any desire to do so?

The answer is 'no' and you know well that AL practically had to press her to such a state that she was left with no other alternatives. The same is likely to be repeated regarding the 'Indemnity Ordinance (Repeal) Bill'. That although you knew all along this law was not passed by the Late Sheikh Mujib's government you never admitted it not did you mention the name of the person who took 'power' following the killing of Bangabandhu. You were also aware that it was under the leadership of late President Zia this law had been ratified, in 1979.

That if you fail to see the "evidence" that the meetings dealt with the demolition of the historic mosque in advance.....; I too would fail to get the same if you claimed that those issues were not dis-

cussed or taken into consideration.

That when the question of BNP being in power now has been mentioned and question asked about its inactive role regarding the 'termination' of the 25 years pact with India and the repeal of Special Powers Act to you, you said nothing in defence nor did you ask the proper authorities to explain themselves. Please Sir, don't try to be so 'dumb'! Your readers are not never been so.

However, whoever is in charge of your 'to the editor' column shares your same feelings which is why he does not print letters that 'touch' delicate issues like: the censorship done on CNN by the BTVA authorities; the Prime Minister calling a certain party 'Jatio Baitman' or the Education Boards playing mischief with the 1993 SSC exams with the help of the ruling party that led to turmoil and loss of property worth crore of Taka and injuring hundreds etc.

That Begum Khaleda Zia mentioned Late Zia's name before Late Mujib was not made a front page issue 'asking' or 'advising' her to refrain from doing so. That you have not made it a front page issue when on the medals 'Bangladesh Zindabad' was inscribed to show 'holiness' by the ruling party and 'Joy Bangla' seems to have turned into a 'sore' to the BNP. Let us not forget millions of people

gave their lives and shed their blood not for 'Zindabad' or 'Muradabad' but for 'Joy Bangla'.

That it is hoped in good grace you shall print this piece in your paper and show and prove your dedication towards performing your duty and giving a 'fair' chance to one of your readers. It's democracy!

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### II

Sir, I have gone through the rejoinder by Zillur Rahman, General Secretary of Awami League and the reply by S M Ali, Editor of The Daily Star, published on December 23 in which Rahman has accused Ali of "toeing the lines of BNP/Jamaat axis". I could not resist myself from writing a few words of my own.

Like many, I was of the opinion that "The Daily Star" toes the AL line in politics, because of the presence of AL stars like S A M S Kibria, Zillur Rahman Siddique, Rehman Sobhan well known one time BAKSALites in its columns. But the party could not tolerate a moderate opinion/commentary of S M Ali and made some unkind remarks about him.

Thanks to Zillur Rahman that he did not go to the extent calling S M Ali as 'Razakar', because those who

dare not toe Awami line are usually branded as "Razakars" by them.

Awami brand democracy is: you must not say anything against the party, its leaders and any action taken by it. The glaring example was, during the Ershad regime, when the whole country was prepared for a showdown with Ershad, on election under him, the Awami League decided to join in and abandoned the public. Even they abandoned their own workers who were writing on the walls that anyone participating in election under Ershad will be termed as "new Razakar".

Awami League maintained a double stand when they joined hand with Jamaat, seeking blessing from Golan Azam. It is no crime but when other party does the same they make Razakars out of it! Awami League and its allies are perhaps under the notion that the IQ of their fellow countrymen is below standard and since the country is a producers' market, anything is produced will be just consumed by the countrymen.

One cannot support what Begum Khaleda Zia did by placing Zia's name above the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. After all the war of independence was fought in the war field as well as in the political circle and nobody should deny it. But at the same time it is also unfair to claim whole credit by either party or by any

single political party. We must remember that, with a few exceptions, the whole nation unitedly supported the liberation movement.

The IQ of the nation should not be underestimated, they show it through ballot and the political parties are under constant surveillance of the half naked and illiterate millions living in the countryside. They are the silent majority and the judges.

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### III

Sir, Mr Zillur Rahman's (GS, Awami League) sharp reach on to Mr S M Ali's commentary is not unexpected. Ombudsmanship is not the job of an Editor. He can only publish news items persistent to his paper's Editorial policies. Conscious readers will draw their own conclusions. Especially the subject Mr. Ali touched upon is so sensitive that it deserves very careful handling.

In my view, all major publications are subjected to sophisticated manipulations by the authority. Print media is not independent and unbiased as claimed by Mr Ali, or by others who are in the danger of losing their professional solemnity and integrity at the height of their chequered career.

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