Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Thursday, January 20, 1994

People are not Pawns

With the doctors' strike dragging into its 10th day, the country's medicare system is on the brink of total collapse. Yesterday specialist doctors and surgeons stopped their private practice and if the stalemate continues, their junior colleagues will join the fray from next week and then private hospitals will also close down their business. Each stringent step taken by the doctors is delivering a more telling blow and the pains are already quite excruciating for the suffering multitudes. But all this drastic arms-twisting by the doctors has surprisingly failed to produce any contortion of the face the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) made a target of. Rather, the government - the BMA's target - is putting on a brave face.

In the unending episode there are two parties - the government and the medical practitioners. The ailing people who are no party have been made the sacrificial lamb in the bargaining ritual between the two parties, both of whom are advancing their respective positions and, in the process, tightening the noose around the neck of the suffering people. One does it by choice and the other by default of the role it should be playing. While the doctors' refusal to serve the ailing people cannot but be treated as a cruel decision, the government's indifference to the issue is also unacceptable. Sooner or later, the two sides will have to come to a sort of agreement. Then why the government behaves like the ostrich that tries to pretend there is no storm, while in fact the storm is in full fury, by just digging its beak into the sand?

Many a tragic death could be avoided had the government moved fast and tried to solve the problem across the table. Both the government and the doctors are blamable for treating human lives so disdainfully - in effect. It may be convenient for them to test the limit of each other's patience, but diseases will not wait to see who wins in the cruel game.

The striking doctors have ignored one fundamental principle which is that theirs is a profession unlike any other. Like other essential services, medicare too is equally - and sometimes even more - indispensable. The decision of stopping medical practice en masse is too serious a business to be left alone with the practitioners themselves. If the doctors are so cocksure that they mean to bring about improvement in the medical service, they needed to mend their own ways in the first place. Their distraction from their professional duties most of the times does not conform to their introductory oath.

On the other hand, this government now has to prove it is in control. There is no point conceding to unrealisable demands of any interested quarters. Both persuasion and firmness are required qualities for governance. Why allow yourself to be under undue pressure when by moving fast you can take advantage of the room for manoeuvrability? A government must take people into confidence first if it wants to counter the unreasonable offensive of an organised group. But the Health Ministry seems keen on keeping the people in the dark as long as it can and will never make its position clear to the public. There is already a misgiving in the public mind that both sides are going their separate ways even more than before, jeopardising further the chances of any meaningful dialogue. We are keenly awaiting a reversal in the trend.

 The common people have had more than their share of maltreatment at the hands of different organised and interested lobbies. Only the doctors' strike is hurting them more. This will not be taken by the people in good grace. If the government does not come clean on this and the doctors fail to sympathise with the patients, it will send a message for the people—one that is bound to - if not anything - at least erode the credibility of both. But it is certainly for the government to lead the way to a negotiated settlement.

Message from Los Angeles

News has come of all Bangladesh nationals living in San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles escaping Monday's earthquake devastations unhurt. Homes of many of their families have been damaged and crumbled which is quite expected considering the vastness of the destruction.

At the same time our heart goes out in sympathy for all the victims lost to the deep crevices or otherwise left maimed, let alone the loss of homes and property sustained by the families. The disaster in the farthest possible area from Bangladesh helped make us aware of the presence of our people even there - and so possibly everywhere else on the globe. If only for a day we felt to be belonging to one big family. One hopes the feeling stays in times less unfortunate.

The death toll has risen to 32 after two days of search and rescue operation. This is very impressive coming as it does from a very densely populated and intensely built up area. The buildings and bridges, roads and townships that crumbled in minutes could bury dead thousands. The magic reprieve has not been explained by information travelling to us. This must have something to do with wise reactions to the strike on the part of the populace and instant response of the civic services. What strikes us inescapably is the fact that a 32-death disaster in the world news brought up the fear of what kind of a toll in life could the tremor take if it jolted Bangladesh on a similar scale.

But some insensate folks went on a looting spree making the most of a nightmare that the earthquake brought and, a curfew had to be clamped for reaching out to the affected smoothly

enough without any odd distraction. Forecasting an earthquake continues to elude

human ingenuity. This is rather hard to take at a time when man has hit upon ultimate constituents of matter, energy and time by spanning the world from its minuscule quantum dimensions to the relativistic expanses of tens of billions of light years. With reliable forecasting would have come appropriate management to minimise loss of life.

Bangladesh is tectonically fortunate in not being in the tremor-prone zone. But that is little consolation for the cyclone-and-tidal bore-prone Bangladesh. And tremors are not either total strangers here. We now know a little of how to prepare for a watery and airy visitation and how to follow it up. We know nothing of what we must do in the case of an earthquake. Not before life of tens of thousands have been sacrificed to tremors. We would care to know our ways about these. Must this situation be continued as such to the imminent millennium?

HE pattern of bilateral

Committee (DAC) donors shows

great variation and no clear

focus on poverty. In 1990, the

World Bank argued that more

than 40% of world aid was

directed to middle and high

income countries largely for

political purposes'. Evidence

from non-governmental organi-

sations (NGOs) illustrates

clearly that for many countries

aid and development coopera-

tion is a 'soft sector', whose

overall shape is determined

more by historical, political and

economic considerations than

by the needs of poor people and

aid programme and the distri-

bution of French and Belgian

aid clearly have as much to do

with the colonial past as with

ities. The same is true for

Spain, whose US\$ 1.2 billion

aid budget is spread across

some 107 recipients. Portugal's

heavy focus on Portuguess

speaking African countries is

another product of historical

economic ties (though all of the

recipients are LDCs - Least

focus of DAC donors on poverty

and vulnerability is the fact that

only the Nordic countries and

Portugal devote more than one

The failure of donors to allo

cate funds to countries where

the need is greatest is even

better illustrated by the figures

on ODA received per poor per-

son. Egypt and Nicaragua, with

12.1 million and 0.8 million

people respectively living below

the poverty line, both received

son in 1989, four times as

much as Somalia and 20 times

Botswana, and Tunisia all re-

ceived 100 times as much aid

per poor person as India, which

with more than 400 million

poor people, has slipped from

first to sixth among recipients

of DAC aid during the last 20

years and from being the largest

recipient of EC aid in 1980/81

states affected by the Gulf War,

from countries as diverse as

Japan and Ireland, and the con-

tinuing prominence of Israel in

ODAY the credibility of

question. The socio-economic

conditions of the people do not

show any significant improve-

ment; law and order situation,

health status, literacy rate,

employment position have not

improved as expected. Critics

believe that civil servants are

largely responsible for the

maladministration which is

subverting the development

accountability and trans-

service. Thus with the emer-

gence of a democratic gov-

ernment in Bangladesh in 1991

make civil service truly ac-

of the people necessitate revi-

servants are expected to exer-

judiciously and spend scarce

countable to the citizenry.

the civil service in Ban-

gladesh seems to be in

The major shift is aid to

to 10th largest a decade later.

El Salvador, Honduras,

as much as Bangladesh:

more than US\$ 40 per poor per-

third of their aid to the LDCs.

One indication of the weak

Developed Countries).

present day development prior-

and interdependence.

issues of global sustainability

The 'long tail' of the British'

assistance From Deve-

lopment Assistance

Political and Economic Factors behind the Flow of Aid by Judith Randel and Tony German

> For many countries, aid and development cooperation is determined more by historical, political and economic considerations than by the needs of poor people and issues of global sustainability and interdependence. This is the last of the three-part overview of the current aid scene; the first and second parts were published on January 11 and 15, respectively.

the US aid programme are illustrations of aid being used for foreign policy rather than devel-

opmental purposes. The use of aid as a political reward and of aid conditionality to achieve foreign policy or development objectives are two sides of the same coin.

The observance of human rights and adherence to the principles of 'good governance' have now been added by donors to the economic conditionalities of the 1980s. The impact of these new conditionalities is now visible in the pattern of DAC aid disbursements. The majority of Western donors have halted aid to Burma (Myanmar). Denmark and Norway have withdrawn from Kenya and Germany has stopped all aid to six countries and made substantial cuts in a further five because they fail to meet governance and human rights criteria. Austrian NGOs point out that the aim of working in countries where human rights are respected has, as yet, had no recognisable practical consequences.

The case of Indonesia shows the urgent need for more effective donor coordination. The donor community looks incoherent when DAC members such as Canada and the Netherlands cut aid to Indonesia because of human rights abuses, only to find other donors queuing up to take their places. This lack of consistency makes calls by NGOs for transparency in the application of governance criteria particularly

Women, Environment, Poverty and the Role of NGOs

In recent years, as NGOs have expanded and governments have attempted to implement sustainable development programmes, the relationship between the official and non-government sectors has become closer. This is welcome. both because it represents an increasing willingness on the

part of donors to take on participatory, long-term development and because it may give opportunities to scale up the impact of the people-centred community development that charac terises NGO work.

NGO experience is being sought on the issues of environmental sustainability, women's participation and poverty reduction and the links between them, to inform donors' policies and practices. As yet, most donors disburse only a very small percentage of official aid through NGOs, whose influence on the basic framework of development cooperation remains very limited.

It is a truism that women are half of the world's population do two-thirds of the world's work, earn one tenth of the world's pay and own one hundredth of the world's property Most DAC donors have now started to develop Women in Development (WID) policies which address the particular needs of women. Some donors have gone further and are building on the fact that aid programmes which properly mobilise women's skill and recognise their role within society can be particularly effective in achieving sustainable poverty reduction.

Significant progress has been made by several donors towards integrating gender considerations into the mainstream of programme design and implementation. A small number have introduced WID training for all their staff.

As a result of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process, many DAC donors have also incorporated environmental sustainability criteria into the planning, implementation and appraisal of projects. In Norway, the concept of sustainable development has been so integrated into the aid programme that 'recipient responsibility' has become the new watchword. In the Netherlands the whole Ministry, not just environmental special ists, has been trained on environmental issues and the operation of environmental checks. The progress made by

donors towards integrating gender issues and environmental considerations into aid programmes and administration is encouraging. But as the Earth Summit showed, it is one thing for aid and environment departments to adopt policies, and quite another for donor governments to rise to the much greater challenges of Agenda

In 1990, DAC members agreed that development cooperation must become a more central policy concern. NGOs argue that a sustainable development perspective must be brought to bear on areas of government policy which affect the relationship between North and South, such as trade and the global environment. The way that aid and development issues are managed by many DAC donors underlies the low political priority they are given.

Making Development Cooperation a Central

Policy Concern

In most DAC countries, aid departments do not have Ministers of Cabinet rank Consequently, the extent to which sustainable development considerations make a strategic contribution to government policy at the highest level depends on the inclination and influence of the senior Minister in the charge of foreign affairs.

There is no clear pattern among DAC donors as to whether development policy should be detailed in legislation as in Switzerland and Italy, laid down in a major policy document, as in Canada and Japan, or based on a collection of speeches, reports and statements, as in Britain.

The lack of clarity and political weight means that aid administrations often find their work being undermined by the activities of another government department. The public accountability of governments for aid spending would also be improved if donors were to adopt clear aid and development policies and clear lines of political responsibility for their imple-

mentation.

German NGOs argue that the principles governing aid programmes should be extended to the policies of all Ministries so that, for instance, German support for the military and police in recipient countries, or export guarantees, do not undermine the objectives being pursued under the aid programme. One of the ironies of the post-Cold War era is that donor governments are encouraging domestic arms manufacturers to seek new markets while telling aid recipients to reduce arms imports as a proportion of gross national product (GNP).

Some countries, however, have explicitly recognised and then prioritised between development and other policy considerations. In Denmark, the interests of Danish business can only be considered after poverty alleviation criteria have been met. Similarly, Canada's ODA Charter states that development priorities must prevail over other foreign policy goals.

The Swiss Government's decision to address domestic consumption and production processes as part of its overall approach to énvironment and development predates UNCED and is an unusual and welcome example of a donor government making the link between the effectiveness of aid and lifestyles in the North.

Many NGOs see public education in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation on Dévelopment (OECD) countries on issues such as the links between environment, consumption and population as being vital for two reasons. First, to maintain and increase support for aid. Second, to create conditions under which governments will have public support for the policy changes needed to respond to global challenges in

areas such as trade. AIDS, resource use, migration and employment.

Creating the Conditions for Aid Reform

Most donors give a low prior-

ity to public education on development issues, spending very little and often devolving the responsibility for public education to NGOs. The DAC has suggested that the level of aid acceptable to the public is, at least in part, determined by public knowledge and understanding. It is certainly true that countries which rank high in the proportion of GNP allocated to ODA also spend more on development education. In Switzerland, public opinion polls show a growing consciousness that the problems of development cannot be solved by aid alone.

The widespread public support for aid and compassion for people struggling to overcome poverty needs to be matched by knowledge and understanding of the causes of poverty and what can be done to reduce it. A government's efforts in this area are one indication of the seriousness with which it is addressing sustainable develop-

A Broader Concept of Security

In this report, the evidence from NGOs shows clearly that most aid is not being used to reduce poverty.

If the twin aims of UNCED the eradication of poverty and progress towards protecting the global environment - are to be realised, sustainable development will have to become a key political priority for governments, not simply a subsidiary matter dealt with away from the Cabinet table. The narrow concept of military security which dominated thinking during the Cold War era must be replaced by a broader concept of security, founded on the satisfaction of basic needs, environmental protection and interdependence.

- Third World Network Features JUDITH RANDEL and TONY

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For an Accountable Civil Service

by Syed Naquib Muslim

resources prudently to achieve developmental goals. The main challenge of civil service today is to prove its accountability and capability to run in a parliamentary democracy. Another important challenge is reduction of administrative inefficiency, corruption and waste which pose as chief barriers to development.

activities in Bangladesh. It is In Bangladesh, diverse also believed that this mechanisms are in practice to maladministration springs hold civil servants accountable. mainly from the absence of Financial mechanisms like budgetary process, audit proceparency at various levels of civil dures; legislative mechanisms like parliamentary committees. question-answer sessions in the parliament; judicial mechathere is a public pressure to nisms represented by lower or higher courts, tribunals; administrative mechanisms in the The growing complexities of form of conduct rules; discipline social life in Bangladesh and rules, financial rules, anti-corchanging needs or aspirations ruption laws and acts, have been operating to cheek adminsion of the traditional role of istrative malpractices and Bangladesh Civil Service. Civil frivolities. These however did not work effectively before 1991 cise authority and discretion because of the absence of a true

press in this country.

Factors impeding practice of administrative accountability are both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic factors relate to the inadequacy, inconsistency and obsolescence of the existing laws, rules, and procedures. Extrinsic factors imply interference and illegal pressure of the external or extra-departmental

It is believed that to enforce and promote accountability in the civil service, it is necessary. in the first place, to demystify the meanings and ramifications of this notion to the civil servants. For building professionalism, continuous training is a must. "Professionalise or perish" this should be the motto of the government. But before that, meritorious and morally sound persons need to be recruited through stringent recruitment

A culture of transparency

and the rule of law need to be established. A truly independent judiciary as provided in Article 22 of the Constitution can help establishment of these core democratic values. The government, of course, is seriously examining this issue. And not merely a free but a responsible press can keep civil servants constantly worried on matters of public interest.

Laws and rules framed by the colonial rulers are still in vogue and these need to be revised or replaced to suit democratic needs. Such laws/rules as help the civil servants to practise initiative and innovation, need to be introduced.

Installation of the office of the Ombudsman as provided in the Article 77 of the Constitution is the demand of the day. It is expected that the Ombudsman will work as an effective instrument not only to

supervise administrative activi-

ties but also to establish transparency by creating easy access of the citizenry to justice and

It is possible to exact or achieve accountability of the civil servants if and when accountability of the elected public representatives is ensured. A code of political ethics needs to be evolved for regulating con-

duct and activities of the politi-

A responsive and an accountable civil service is an asset; its role in and contribution to the development of the nation is vital. In order to meet the changing needs of the citizenry. revision of the traditional role of civil service is a practical necessity. And with the revision of the civil service's role is needed the reshaping of the structure and process of administrative accountability.

OPINION

erage of the round table dis- fun. cussion on education -Primary Education for all by the year 2,000: Problems and Prospects." The very distinguished group of participants raised some very important questions that urgently need to be addressed, in the process of responding to this "critical challenge" that is confronting

the people of Bangladesh. While it is generally easy and tempting to point the finger of blame or offer simplistic advice and opinions when examining different problems, the round table group has provided something of much greater value: a deeper recognition of the basis and fundamental causes of the current situation. Without accepting and fully understanding the underlying conditions of the present context of education in the country, any attempts to promote change or improvement in the current system will be of no avail.

As an educator myself and one who has spent several years engaged in the practice of experiential learning, I strongly concur with the conclusions of several of the participants that good ideas and suggestions are inadequate without, as Dr tion, as we move into the next Yunus suggests, a heightened millennium, is not one that is sense of personal responsibility unique to Bangladesh or third and motivation on the part of world nations. It faces all socithe students and their families eties, including those of the in the learning process itself: "It western world. It is to transform they don't feel responsible they our view of the learning process won't get educated, despite the in a way that generates the good intentions of the world." conditions that create a vital Without an environment that context for education, one in promotes a sense of personal which children and teachers are accountability which fosters a mutually supported, and fulsincere desire on the part of filled in a spirit of dignity and students' parents and teachers respect. Such a transformation to engage cooperatively in the may not be quick or easy to belearning process, all of the good ing about, but consider the alideas and outside help in the ternative. More importantly, it world are worthless.

of the speakers suggest, have to do with a national will or commitment to quality education, a perspective that recognizes the personal and social costs of illiteracy and under-education. But more importantly, the alternative? learning process itself must be transformed at a fundamental level in order to foster a universal perception of education as

I would like to commend The being desirable, relevant, valu-Daily Star for its excellent cov- able, interesting, and fun. Yes, Education which comes from

the Latin "edu care" which means to draw forth from within, literally refers to the process of engaging students as active participants in the learning process in a way that generates and strengthens within them a developing sense of trust and integrity in the sufficiency of their being. Education is actually more about the process of building self-trust empowerment, and personal competency, than it is about receiving information that is being uninspiringly delivered by "knowledgeable authority" who relates to the students as passive recipients rather than responsible, engaged, active participants in the learning pro-

When children and adults are inspired and empowered by a learning process that relates to them as partners rather than subordinates, they will begin to experience learning as compelling, personally enriching, and relevant to their lives. In such an environment, inviting and retaining students is no

The real challenge of educais possible if we see it as such The question does, as several and commit our energies to work together in this direction.

As Mr Carriere has suggested in his reference to Dr Walsh's statement, "We are in a race between education and catastrophe." Can we afford the

Charles Bloom, M.S. G P O Box 504 # 627 Dhaka Bangladesh

BTV drama

Sir, I would like to suggest the Bangladesh Television to critically examine the drama stories from the standpoint of our social sentiments and socio-psychological values of our common people before passing for screening. It seems that some of the present BTV dramas are contributing to social degradation instead of reconstruction. Often superfluous episodes lead less privileged people of the society to utopian thoughts and expecta-

In my opinion, a TV drama should focus on the real social problems, directing possible solutions to such problems on the basis of existing social values and stratifications.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor Bangladesh Agricultural Institute. Dhaka

Government servants

Sir, Due to tug of war between BCS administrative cadre and BCS non-administrative cadre (doctors, engineers and agronomists) the loss of the public exchequer on the one hand and the sufferings of the people on the other knows no bounds.

We strongly feel that whether BCS (Admn) or the BCS (Professionals), all are government servants. They equally draw their pay and allowances. Government service rules and regulations and discipline and

conduct rules are also equally applicable to them.

democratic culture and free

We wonder why some government servants in defiance of service rules and regulations resort to hartals and strikes, remain absent from their duties and draw their pay and allowances and why the government do not take any disciplinary action against them?'

Is it not true that government service rules and regulations are British made and outdated? And it is also true that during British colonial rule in our country no government servant could dare to stage any demonstration, strike or hartal or remain absent from duty unauthorisedly. But today when we are a free and a democratic country illegal and objectionable activities by many a government servant have become a regular affair. Do'the government servants of the USA, UK, France or Japan behave or resort to hartals and strike and remain absent from office duty or hospitals as we do?

Why is our democratic government reluctant to take disciplinary action against the government servants indulged in activities detrimental to the interest of the people and the state?

We would request our government to take disciplinary measures against all the government servants, officers and staff, individually for their unauthorised absence from duty and prejudicial activities, and issue warning letters to all of them in the greater interest of public service.

We would also request our

Members of the Jatiya Sangsad to examine, recast and modify the government servants' sercipline and conduct rules keeping in view the requirements of a free and democratic country, welfare of the teeming millions and smooth and efficient administration of the

We would also like to emphasise here that our government servants of any cadre, asgovernment rules and regulain the Jatiya Sangsad. If any submit his representation individually to the higher authorities for consideration.

Dhaka graveyards

big city of nearly seven million up of new graveyards. Due to

acute scarcity of land in the metropolis, it may become difficult to find suitable sites for the purpose. The proposed graveyards should not have reservation system. After lapse of a reasonable time, say six months, the existing graves should be levelled to make room for new graves. A change of attitude, specially in the higher strata of the society, is also required. Banani graveyard where land for each grave costs Taka sixty thousand at the moment has almost been filled up.

It may not be impertinent to mention here that reservation system and making the graves pucca is not prevalent even in Saudi Arabia, the birth place of Islam, where land is abundant and population is low even in urban areas. Hence, the richer section of city dwellers should not unnecessarily be fussy about reservation of graves and making the graves pucca and using costly tiles etc. This will in no way help their near and dear deceased relations. Instead, if they donate the money spent for this purpose to poor people or for some other good cause this will help the deceased. However, the graveyard authorities may maintain a list of people buried in a graveyard along with their address and other relevant particulars.

May I, therefore, request the Dhaka Municipal Corporation to ponder over it and set up a few public graveyards in different areas of the city considering for the convenience of the general public.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment

vice rules and regulations, dis-

country.

sociation or union are not supposed to make service rules and regulations of their own. They are legally and constitutionally bound to accept and follow the tions framed by our law makers government servant has any grievance or objection he may

O H Kabir

Sir, Dhaka was grown into a

people. Size of the population will grow further. But there are only a few graveyards for this vast multitude of people. Existing graveyards cannot cope up with the growing need. Hence, some more graveyards are needed to be established in different areas of the metropolis. However, if there is a system of reservation of graves, the graveyards will be filled up soon which will necessitate setting