

DOWN TO EARTH

Deplorable Aspects of Medical Practice

By A S M Nurunnabi

Many patients in the city, as in other urban areas, are victims of physician's self-referral. Sending patients to facilities in which the doctor has a financial interest. In recent years, self-referral has spread quietly into many areas of medicine, including physical therapy and rehabilitation, X-rays, laboratory testing, etc.

Self-referral operates on a simple principle: The more patients doctors refer, the more money they make. The practice has made many physicians rich, while potentially undercutting patient-doctor trust. Although most doctors do not participate in self-referral deals, no one knows for sure exactly how many do. It is difficult to uncover all the doctors who invest in joint ventures because they try to hide it.

It is a fair guess that, across the country, many of our independent clinical labs and physiological labs are owned wholly or partly by referring physicians. Many doctors justify self-referral by saying it helps assure quality care. In the opinion of independent observers, that is just not true.

It has been observed that self-referral entrepreneurs usually offer limited partnerships in joint-ventures — so-called, because many doctors have ownership shares. In many cases, doctors are asked for a minimal investment. The amount the doctor invests may be ridiculously small because owners do not want the doctor's money. They want his patients. Owners choose physicians selectively, concentrating on specialties guaranteed

to produce a high volume of patient referrals. The more patients a doctor has, the more desirable he or she is for self-referral.

Self-referral mostly preys on patients stricken with a serious illness, people who trust in their doctors to make decisions for them. Many doctors choose to wear ethical blinders. Money, of course, is the obvious reason. The money is not earned from any service performed by these doctors. It is just a kickback for referring patients.

Among other things found deplorable is that it is anti-competitive. That is why, in many cases, self-referrers charge prices that are often higher than they should be. Self-referrals also run up profits by another method — ordering expensive tests and procedures for questionable medical reasons.

Is the quality of care delivered by joint ventures equal to that provided by independent, self-owned facilities? There is no conclusive proof one way or the other.

The practice of self-referral potentially brings about erosion of patient-doctor trust, which is bad for medicine and bad for patients. There is little reason for self-referral other than the doctor's business interest. This may be avoided if conscientious doctors are careful not to allow commercialism to encroach on the practice of medicine.

Even as casual observer, the condition of government hospitals in the city will seem appalling. These hospitals are the

victims of three maladies: The ineptitude and apathy of the authorities, overloading by patients and widespread corruption.

Viewing the situation, one observer commented that the nation's health authorities have seemingly abandoned all thoughts of ever salvaging these hospitals from their present chaotic condition. It may not be far from the truth to say that people often come out of these hospitals more ill than they went in.

Apparently, public health is chronically underfunded, so much so that they are short of drugs and equipment. According to the experience of some patients, some do not even have the blood-pressure measuring machine or surgical thread for stitching up cuts and gashes.

Public health seems to have collapsed. The private sector is taking over. Here also the picture is dismal. It is alleged that these private hospitals, with a few exceptions, tend to fleece their patients and yet do not have their own surgeons and doctors or even the necessary equipment. The sinister aspect is that the government hospitals are used by their government appointed doctors as patient recruiting centres for the private hospitals. This has led an observer to comment that this utter lack of professionalism has, more than any other drawback, including the absence of even basic medical equipment, been contributing to the undoing of the main body of our collective medical enterprise.

US-Bangladesh trade show begins today

By Staff Correspondent

The third annual 'US-Bangladesh Trade Show' will open at the winter park of the Hotel Sheraton in the city today.

The three-day show, organised by the America-Bangladesh Economic Forum, will be inaugurated at 10 in the morning by Industries Minister AM Zahiruddin Khan.

Companies offering products and services in computers and telecommunications, food and beverages, transportation, financial and engineering consultancy, banking, insurance, textile machinery, and air-conditioning will participate in the show.

The representing American companies include the Caterpillar Inc, American Life Insurance Company, ITT Sheraton, Dell Computer, 3M Company, GEC, Coca Cola, Kelvinator, Apple Computer, Singer, American Airlines, IBM World Trade Corporation NY, United Parcel Service, Hewlett Packard Inc, Motorola Communication Inc.

40 troops killed in ROK plane crash

A South Korean military transport plane, with between 30 and 40 troops aboard, crashed into a hillside in Boun county in the central province of North Chungchong, reports said. There was no immediate news in casualties or survivors in the crash, which occurred some 100 kilometers south of Seoul, Yonhap news agency said, reports AFP.

US cold wave toll 130

WASHINGTON, Jan 21: The cold wave gripping central and eastern United States has killed at least 130 people, according to a new official toll released today, reports AFP.

Most of the victims in the week-old bitter cold front died in traffic accidents on icy roads. Several had heart attacks or froze to death.

Temperatures of minus 27 degrees Celsius were registered early today in Albany, New York, and Indianapolis, Indiana.

Weather forecasters said slowly rising temperatures would bring some relief over the weekend.

Steps taken to manufacture paper, pulp-making machinery

Steps have been taken to manufacture paper and pulp-making machinery, for the first time, in the country, reports UNB.

Under a memorandum signed yesterday, Khulna Shipyard and Chittagong Dry dock - two enterprises of the Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) — will fabricate globe digesters for production of pulp from green jute at the Karnaphuli Paper Mills and North Bengal Paper Mills.

The fabrication of the pulp and paper digesters will open up a new vista in attaining technological self-reliance of Bangladesh, BCIC sources said.

Chairman of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation Waseq Al Azad and BSEC Chairman A I M Nazmul Alam signed the memorandum of understanding on behalf of the respective corporations at a simple ceremony at the BCIC Bhaban.

Industries Minister A M Zahiruddin Khan and Industries Secretary A H M Abdul Hye were present.

BCIC Chairman also handed over a cheque of one crore Taka to the BSEC Chairman as advance payment on account of the price of the digesters.

Hanif

From Page 1 Col 7

During his mass contact programme AL leaders, including Matia Choudhury, MP, Mozaffar Hossain Paltu, Mirza Sultan Raja, Mofazzal Hossain Choudhury Maya, Akhterul Alam and Kamal Majumder, were with him.

Besides, senior leaders of the Awami League toured different city areas to solicit votes for Hanif and the party's commissioner candidates.

AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman, accompanied by Advocate Shahara Khatun and Abdul Hamid Siddik, visited Kuril, Bhashantek and Manikdi of Cantonment thana.

Presidium member Abdul Razzak, MP, addressed an election rally at Jatrabari to seek votes for Hanif, whom he termed as an 'honest, efficient and sincere' candidate.

Similarly, Presidium members Toafel Ahmed, MP and Abdul Razzak, MP solicited votes for Hanif at Demra while Mozaffar Hossain Paltu and others canvassed in different areas of Motijheel thana.

Rashed Mosharraf, MP, addressed an election rally at Dhanmondi.



A giant fooster, the election symbol of a DCC ward committee candidate, takes a ride on a pushcart in the city yesterday.

Two western advisers to Yeltsin resign

MOSCOW, Jan 21: Two leading western economic advisers to President Boris Yeltsin, Jeffrey Sachs of the United States and Anders A Slund of Sweden, said today they had resigned following the government's change of course, reports AFP.

"We can no longer help the Russian government. The aims and the policies announced by the Prime Minister are strongly opposed to our own concepts," they said in a statement.

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said today his new cabinet would shift priorities from capping inflation to putting Russia's failing enterprises back on their feet.

The two economists said in a letter to Yeltsin they regretted the lack of consistency in the government's economic

policy, and warned of the danger of worsening an inflation rate already among the highest in the world.

They pointed to the fact that in Russia's former communist neighbours, Estonia, Latvia, the Czech republic and Poland, tough reforms in changing to a market system had brought inflation down and revived the economy.

The pair said they would continue to work in Russia in a private capacity with the leading pro-reformists.

DCC polls diary



By Staff Correspondent

Run Run Run. The election race has become a prolonged marathon for the candidates. The pace intensifies particularly at weekends. Yesterday, the last but one Friday before the January 30 polls, the candidates were seen shuttling to and fro in their respective areas, knocking at as many doors as possible. Besides, they were also seen attending the Jumma prayers in the neighbourhood mosques to seek blessings — both divine and those of their voters.

At some mosques, the imams were heard requesting the congregations over loudspeakers to pray for the candidates so that all of them could win!

However, in one case, two ward commissioner candidates of the city's Chowdhurypara area were led out of a mosque after the prayers when they almost came to blows over who would address the congregation first!

Mirza Abbas of the BNP was seen waiting at the gate of a Gulistan mosque after the evening prayers yesterday. When the congregation broke, Abbas shook hands with an estimated 200 people who came out from the mosques one by one.

JSD leader Hasanul Huq Inu, while campaigning for his party's candidate Manzurul Ahsan Khan at a rally at Nawabganj, was heard accusing that the large political organisations do not want to eliminate mosquitoes because they serve the interests of the insecticide companies.

"The Left parties do not take part in polls with money from the coal companies," Inu said. "Dhaka city will be free from the mosquito menace only if the left alliance's candidate is elected," he said.

The Midnight File

Mandela, Winnie on ANC election list

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 21: Nelson Mandela leads the list of African National Congress candidates for Parliament, as expected, and his estranged wife Winnie is included despite her 1991 kidnapping conviction. The ANC is considered the likely winner of South Africa's first all-race election April 27, and Mandela, the ANC president, tops the list of 200 candidates for the National Assembly announced Friday. The list, drawn from nominations by ANC chapters across the country, includes several whites, Indians and people of mixed race, a reflection of the ANC's desire to portray itself as a multiracial organisation, reports AP.

Bosnian President in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 21: Bosnia's President Alija Izetbegovic arrived Friday night for a four-day visit during which he will speak at a 31-nation conference on the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Alija, whose delegation includes Foreign Minister Irfan Ljubijankic, will hold talks with Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad, a staunch supporter of Bosnia, reports AP.

Peres-Arafat meet in Oslo today

Israel may offer fresh proposals to end deadlock

JERUSALEM, Jan 21: Foreign Minister Shimon Peres left Friday for a meeting with PLO chief Yasser Arafat in Norway, where he was expected to offer proposals to break a deadlock in negotiations over Palestinian autonomy, reports AP.

Peres is to attend the funeral on Saturday of Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jorgen Holst, who brokered the September 13 Israel-PLO accord providing for limited Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho. Holst died last week.

Israel radio and the respected Haaretz daily reported that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin approved proposals dealing with security around borders that link Palestinian-run zones with Egypt and Jordan.

Holst died January 13, after suffering two strokes in a month. Since trading his Defence Ministry portfolio for Foreign Affairs last April, he had spent hectic months travelling.

Abbas urges supporters to abide by EC rules

By Staff Correspondent

Ruling party mayoral candidate Mirza Abbas urged his supporters to abide by all the rules enforced by the Election Commission (EC) regarding January 30 city corporation polls.

Mirza Abbas, in a statement yesterday, said that the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is always law-abiding and its followers should respect the existing rules.

He did not elaborate, but the joint-media coordinator of the party's election steering committee Sanwar Hossain told The Daily Star that Mirza Abbas has asked his supporters to remove the road side makeshift camps and erase graffiti and wall-writings.

He also promised to improve the quality of the WASA water.

The rallies were also addressed by General Secretary of the Workers' Party Rashed Khan Menon, JSD leader Hasanul Huq Inu, BSD leader AFM Mahubul Haq, Samik Krishak Samajbadi leader Nirmal Sen and CPB leader Morshed Ali.

Hosokawa

From Page 1 Col 2

have time," he said.

The coalition would need a two-thirds majority either in the Lower House or in a joint house committee to enact the bills.

That means the measures, which form the core of the coalition's government programme, must now be drastically overhauled within a week or be lost.

AP adds: The vote leaves Hosokawa's 5-month-old governing coalition in tatters, and raised the prospect that the prime minister could be a lame duck — a "dead body," in Japanese parlance — when he meets President Clinton in just three weeks.

The defeat also fed fears that political disarray will prevent the government from taking steps to revitalise Japan's recession-battered economy. The markets closed before the vote, but stock prices have taken a beating in recent months over lack of confidence in government economic policy.

Some observers said even if Hosokawa can salvage the measure in some form, the defeat has dealt him a body blow.

"There's no doubt that Hosokawa's authority and ability to lead have taken a rapid dive," said Shigetaro Iizuka, professor at Nihon University, and a former political reporter. "He's become powerless."

Hasina

From Page 1 Col 7

were elected in the city corporation polls, present taxes would be reduced and new taxes imposed.

She also pledged to expedite the development of Khulna city if Awami League candidates won the polls.

Hasina criticised the Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Sk Razzak Ali for canvassing for the BNP candidates in the Khulna City Corporation polls.

Such campaigning will betray his neutrality as the Speaker of parliament, Hasina added.



3 of same family killed in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Jan 21: Three members of a family were murdered by one of their relatives at Nizamia Dhokkhali village of Mathbaria thana under Pirojpur district yesterday afternoon.

The victims are Azizul Peada, 54, Dulal Peada, 13, and Zobeida Khatun 4.

Financial dispute between Mahtab Peada, a relative, and the victims was reportedly the cause of the killings.

Police, with the help of local people, arrested Mahtab from the spot.

A case has been lodged with the Mathbaria police station.

Menon demands more allocation for science, tech sectors

By Staff Correspondent

Workers' Party leader Rashed Khan Menon MP has demanded increased budgetary allocation for the science and technology sectors for the overall development of the country.

"We have to immediately begin spreading of scientific and technological knowledge for changing the lot of the common man," Menon said while speaking at the Shipur Old Boys' Association (SOBA) seminar on the occasion of the 38th Annual Convention of the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) at its headquarters in Dhaka Friday morning.

Menon attended the seminar as the guest of honour.

Renowned scientist Dr Abdullah Al-Muti Sharifuddin presented the key-note paper at the seminar on 'The Science and Technology of Bangladesh on the Crossroad of the Century'.

Former IEB President Dr Anwar Hossain presided.

Foreign aid falls

From Page 1 Col 7

lowest since 1979-80, which was \$153 million dollars. Last year's disbursement was 1675 million dollars, higher than the commitment. This helped ease the pipeline backlog.

However, officials now predict the pipeline will again bulge to around 5.5 billion dollars before the next fiscal year because the commitment this year is expected to be higher than the pledge made at the Paris Club meeting last April. The commitment is likely to cross 2.4 billion dollars this year against a pledge of 2.135 billion.

Currently, the utilisation rate of the pipeline reserve for Project Aid is about 22 per cent. This is viewed as a comfortable one, but still needs to be improved.

"We aim to bring up the pipeline utilisation rate by another three per cent," a highly-placed Economic Relations Division (ERD) official said. "Although 22 per cent is a good rate, yet we have to remain competitive in the global foreign aid scenario to pull the donors."

The donors are now putting in a lot of efforts to marshal their resources in developing the former communist bloc which has emerged from a restrictive economy and has been heading towards an open economy.

"One way to sustain the flow of foreign assistance at the existing level is to make ourselves perform better," a high Planning Commission official said. The implementation rate of the development projects is not very encouraging. Hence the Planning Commission's concern about improving performance.

As a strategy to raise the country's development effort to the required level, the government is trying to make its ADP more realistic through re-allocation of funds. The Agriculture Ministry, one of

the biggest allottees of ADP funds, will undergo some major changes in its projects under the new strategy, sources said.

Moreover, with the increase in the number of foreign aid recipients over the past few years, the donors have toughened their conditionalities. The number of aid recipients in the 1980s was only 17 whereas it has gone up to 43 countries now.

"But we would not accept any more hard conditionalities at this moment. We have to become more and more self-reliant," another senior government official said.

Experts now feel that if the trend in commitment and disbursement continues at the same pace under the changed scenario, the country has to be more and more self-reliant in the future to keep economic growth moving. They believe that foreign aid will be more and more difficult to get and, therefore, the private sector must show a good performance to push up the GDP.

4 cities

From Page 1 Col 4

in the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) and on January 4 hammered out agreement on a 12-point code of conduct for the elections.

The code of conduct enjoins the political parties to abide by the election rules which forbid many things including writing on the walls, setting up camps or stalls on the streets, using more than two loudspeakers at a time in a single city ward, influencing voters by offering even a cup of tea, use of governmental patronage, making false statement against rival, using motor vehicles, for taking out any processions, erection of gates or arches, making cloth banners, etc.

Respectful to the Election Commission's efforts many voters especially those who read newspapers or watch television and listen to the radio, are learnt to have been carefully monitoring the behaviour of the candidates, especially their obedience to the relevant laws and rules.