

## Inhibited Health Goals

The World Health Day passed yesterday rather quietly, if not unnoticed. It is symbolic no doubt of the importance we attach to the health sector. A lot of fanfare on the occasion could not quite give a different picture of our health system. With rare exceptions in certain areas of health care, it is a distressing tale that sums up our endeavour in this basic human rights area. Everyone can see the yawning gap between the requirement and the delivery of health service. In fact, 25 per cent of the population have no access to any kind of medicare. Of the rest only 32 per cent receive treatment from qualified and trained doctors.

The slogan, "Health for All by the Year 2000" is more of an illusion than a reality, specially when the conditions and environment necessary for the purpose are mostly absent here. The provision for health care has to be made in two different kinds: preventive and curative. The point that medicare falls far short of the need looks even somewhat consoling if we compare it with the facilities existing on the preventive side. The only silver-lining is that 85 per cent of the village population have access to tubewell water. However, the sanitation situation is yet to considerably improve. The rate of sanitation coverage still hovers around 30 per cent in the rural area. The urban records on these two counts are not any better. Water supply accounts for 47 per cent and sanitation for 42 per cent of the population there.

In this context, it is important to know about the caloric intake by our population. With only 1850-k calories per capita consumption and a gross maldistribution of the available foods, the country has little chance to ensure the primary conditions for sound health for its people. Even the dietary imbalance sometimes becomes a cause for poor health or diseases where poverty is not at issue. The unequal distribution of food acts as a stumbling block not only between different classes of society but also between sexes within a family in which case a girl child or woman is the deprived one. This social injustice in the long run badly affects the physical and mental growth of a nation. The complete physical, mental and social well-being which the World Health Organisation considers to be a prerequisite for health, therefore vanishes to the distant horizon.

On the curative side, our records are far from encouraging. In each of the succeeding five year plans, the allocation to the health sector increased but what is noticeable is that the percentage of its share in the total budget has actually fallen each time. In the First Five Year Plan it was 4.49 per cent and has shown a gradual fall in the following two five year plans at 2.57% and 1.55% respectively. Only in the Fourth Five Year Plan it has marked a slight rise to 1.86 per cent. Against such a backdrop, the United Nations (UN) bodies have played quite a laudable role in that they have concentrated on building the infrastructure on the preventive side. They can almost solely claim the credit for creating the existing provisions for drinking water and sanitary latrines.

The government and private organisations here were mostly locked in a wrangle over the manufacture of medicine and tried to pass it as a health policy. With only one doctor for 5200 people and one hospital bed for 3,200 people, some one ought to be lucky enough to get the right treatment at the right time.

## Action against Muggers

Muggings in the metropolis are tapering off. The Daily Star taking note of it on the authority of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police published a front-page news item to this effect on April 2. The declining trend in street snatchings which make commuting by ladies on rickshaws in particular extremely risky has been attributed by the DMP to some back-stage work. Spreading a dragnet in the capital city since mid-February up until the end of March, the police took into custody some 800 known hoodlums, absconders and ex-convicts. This has led to a 3-times fall in the mugging incidents compared with those in the corresponding period of last year.

The DMP is advised against taking into its head the success which is far from any unqualified one. As a matter of fact, a very large number of snatches in the avenues, let alone numerous abductions in the city, go completely unreported to the police, the victims stupefied by the suddenness of the blatant acts in broad day-light. So, to cut corners, they have to replicate the success story many times over.

As a visiting Interpol Chief had confided to a Dhaka journalist a couple of years ago, the police here is 'primitively' equipped to cope with as primitively perpetrated crimes. The DMP's limited numerical strength, in a stark contrast with the growing numbers of criminals, its poor equipment for instant networking in case of giving a chase or lying in animated wait for the hoodlums and indeed its over-all capability to patrol the city streets, are all so very known factors inhibiting any effective police work.

With such constraints, the only way out for tackling crimes in the metropolis seems to lie in an assertive police role, not in any secretive or "it-is-entirely-my-business" way. It has to relate to the ward-by-ward information network for all practical purposes. One cannot miss the fact, whatever decline in the incidence of mugging has been lately achieved is the result of picking up the criminal elements from their hide-outs or shelters. This involved using the details the police already knew. The general feeling is that the police cannot be unfamiliar with the names of the criminal sets, their whereabouts and maybe even where such persons are likely to hide or seek shelter in. Only that they cannot, or perhaps do not, always act according to their knowledge.

This is where Dhaka's Mayor Mohammad Hanif comes in with his latest idea of forming an all-party committee in each ward of the city corporation with the elected commissioners as the linch-pin in it. The committees will prepare exhaustive lists of terrorists and extortionists in each locality — regardless of whose patronage or refuge they are enjoying at the moment. Then they will make the lists available to the Home Ministry and the various police stations for an all-out crackdown on the culprits. The advantage of having the city corporation headed by someone who does not belong to the ruling party needs to be utilised in our peculiar situation where bipartisanship seems to be indispensable for crime-control.

THE Indian Commerce Minister Pranab Mukherjee is a poor salesman. He tried to sell Sanjay Gandhi during the emergency and landed the country in mess. Now he is selling the Dunkel proposals, which will be governing international trade among 120 odd countries, including India.

Finance Minister Manmohan Singh got away with economic reforms without any prior debate in the country because the general feeling three years ago was that India was in dire financial straits and any step was good enough to increase the depleted foreign exchange reserves. Poor Pranab has got stuck in the midst of explaining. He too has committed the mistake of not raising the debate in the country before agreeing to the proposals at Geneva.

People are afraid of consequences. Word has spread like wild fire, even in the countryside, that the proposals will bring them untold sufferings. Political parties have been slow to react. Now both extremes of the spectrum, the CPM on the one side and the RSS on the other, are agitating vehemently against the proposals.

The Narasimha Rao government is taking the criticism lightly, as it does in all the cases. There is a deliberate attempt not to tell everything. But if the fears aroused remain unmodified, the country may witness a storm which it has never seen before. The Congress (I) may suffer not only in the assembly elections, due in 10 states in the next one year, but also in the parliamentary poll in 1996. The more the Centre is vague or

perfunctory in its observations, the deeper is the suspicion.

There are valid reasons for doubt. The government did not even care about the advice tendered by the parliamentary standing committee on commerce — the Congress (I) members are in a majority — "not to take a final view without ascertaining parliament's opinion." Now any discussion in parliament is only academic because New Delhi has already given its assent.

The government says it was helpless because it was alone in its fight against the Duncan proposals. But this is not true. Even Malaysia put up a bitter resistance and minced no words in condemning the West. New Delhi just caved in under pressure.

What remains unexplainable is why India agreed to an arrangement that tilts heavily against it. Developed countries have technology and the underdeveloped manpower. The Dunkel proposals have everything favouring the products of technology but nothing that may lessen the employable force. Arun Nehru, former commerce minister, at least told the West that if they wanted access to India's market, they would have to admit its labour into their countries.

Before dispersing from Geneva, the third world had got developed countries agree to the appointment of a board to consider how labour migration could be effected. But they made it clear that the visa restrictions would not be relaxed. Then how do third world people get employment in the West? The basic fact is that America, which has been losing ground in the manufacturing field, is wanting free trade for making up its loss. That is the reason why the Dunkel proposals have been expanded to include telecom-

— and labour — kept the West away from the third world. Most people are employed in this sector. It is not that our farmers produce the maximum from an acre or that the West is not doing better. But self-sufficiency or an effort to achieve it has been the pride of India and the third world countries. Now the whole agriculture sector is being brought under the purview of developed countries.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

munication, banking, insurance or transmission, which never constituted part of the General Agreement on Tariff Trade (GATT), the predecessor to the Dunkel proposals.

In fact, any advantage that the third world had because of cheap labour has been blunted. Take garments. Developed countries have fixed quotas as if some crumbs have been thrown to the poor. This arrangement will continue for another 15 years. The third world plea to reduce the period to 10 years was outrightly rejected.

Agriculture is another field where the traditional wisdom

The Dunkel proposals have prescribed minimum imports. The commerce ministry claims that India will escape this because it is in the midst of a balance of payments crisis. The finance ministry, however, says that the crisis is a thing of the past. Therefore, a specific quantity of foodgrain imports will be pushed down our throat.

In the matter of subsidies also, the Dunkel proposals discriminate against Indian agriculture. The subsidies have to be limited to an upper limit of 10 per cent of the output value. Because of increasing cost of energy and other in-

gements with the countries to which they are accredited.

China opted out of the GATT. The country is none the worse for it because all developed nations are now vying with one another to enter China's markets. India enjoys a similar advantage; the West is hankering after the 220-million middle class, which can afford to buy consumer goods. It has a clout which it has not used.

It is not yet clear why New Delhi has compromised the country's long-term future. It was bold and unyielding in the seven rounds of discussions, spreading over 1948-79. No reason has been given for the capitulation of Dinesh Singh, then commerce minister, in 1980 because the GATT began talking about interference from then onwards. After that, it has been going down the hill.

This time the pressure was many times more. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) too had joined hands and it has been the nation's experience that when they take upon an issue they can make India sign on the dotted lines.

If nothing else, New Delhi can defer the signing of the agreement. Japan is doing so by one year. A lot of dust would have settled by then and a clearer picture of the intentions of developed countries would have emerged. The course on which the Indian ship has been set is flinty and uncompromising. One fears lest the Dunkel proposals should lead the ship to face a Dunkirk-like disaster that the British did during the Second World War.

## Amid the Guns and Knives South Africa is Optimistic

Derek Ingram writes from Johannesburg

ANDTON is like the latest in American-style up-market shopping malls. It is vast and vulgar, with fountains, glasscase lifts, escalators, a banking hall and a carpark on the roof. At one end stands the towering Sandton Sun hotel, where sometimes three Rolls Royces are to be seen awaiting their wealthy owners.

The spacious supermarkets, jewellers, bookshops and boutiques filled with highly-priced artifacts are generally packed, and these days the faces are far from all white.

On Saturdays in particular, black families are everywhere, the kids sucking at the straws in their tins of Coke and guzzling ice cream. Mixed couples window-shop hand in hand. Young blacks line up at the till in Edgars clothes store with armfuls of expensive jeans and tracksters. White and black youngsters fill the fast-food cafes in noisy, jolly groups.

At day's end, families push trolleys loaded to the brim to distant pavements where they pile the shopping into minibus taxis or, in many cases, into their own cars.

It is a scene far removed from the bitter and often violent political battles being fought in some parts of South Africa today and one that was inconceivable a decade or so ago. The black middle class is growing and asserting itself and invading even white sanctuums like Sandton.

By building satellite towns such as this one a few years ago the whites took downtown Johannesburg to their comfortable suburbs. In turn, the old city centre became truly African. Once-white Johannesburg, where blacks used to huddle unwanted in doorways, is now filled with black men and women traders setting out in their street stalls fruit and vegetables, shirts and trousers and every kind of local



jewellery. Tomatoes and bananas stand neatly stacked on coloured tin plates on the pavement.

Today Johannesburg is a vibrant and uncomfortable city for white and black alike. An occasional shot might be heard, a knife flashed, a person mugged — incidents usually of no political or racial significance but of criminal intent. At night the Johannesburg streets are silent and vegetables, shirts and trousers and every kind of local

have given up. Disgracefully, in the view of outside police experts, downtown Johannesburg has been surrendered to the criminal. In defence, the police say there are just not enough of them. Thousands have abandoned the dangerous life.

All this might sound bleak news for the election prospects and for the future of the country. On the contrary, there is a remarkable amount of optimism around. The most unlikely people talk of the bright prospects ahead once

the elections are over. One taxi

I jumped into had a bullet-shattered windscreen and was driven by a young, rough-looking Afrikaner.

Yes, he said almost casually,

a man had fired a pistol at him and only because it was an old car with tougher glass than is now used was he still alive.

And then he went on to wax eloquent about the way in which South Africa could take off after the voting.

These days no one has a good word to say for apartheid, except the Terre Blanche ex-

tremists. It is as difficult to find an apartheid supporter in South Africa today as it was to find a Nazi in Germany after World War Two. The whites at last see what the world saw long ago: that apartheid has put this country into a hell of a mess.

Everyone lives behind walls. Security businesses are among the most lucrative in the country. Every house in the white suburbs is high-walled, barbed-wired, equipped with big dogs and displays at its entrance the message "Immediate armed response," which means you are likely to be shot if you try to enter.

Guns abound. In Sandton you can watch them being sold over the counter in shops next to the supermarket. A man recently pulled out a gun in a crowded store and shot his wife. It was not a rare event.

If you are a white working in downtown Johannesburg you probably drive out of your electronically-controlled suburban garage doors each morning on to the freeway and straight into your city underground carpark. You take the lift to your office above and leave in the evening by the same route without having stepped onto the street all day.

Nonetheless, the political change is dramatic. The frequent violence obscures the fact that in many parts of the country election campaigning is going on peacefully. It is amazing to see ruling National Party MPs, who had had it all their own way for so long, now appearing on television panels

defending themselves against vocal African opponents. Often they are confronted with withering accusations.

When one black told a National minister that his government had killed tens of thousands of African people he responded quite coolly: "We never killed anyone. We never killed anyone." Then he stated the party line, which is that it was, after all, the Nationalist government which had abolished apartheid, the introduction of which was now seen to have been a great mistake and was much to be regretted.

In South Africa this extraordinary election is central to everyone's lives. The vast majority of people just want to make it all work. Peace stickers (two doves) and slogans appear everywhere on cars and in shop windows. Blacks and whites simply want to sleep peacefully in their beds again.

On radio, TV and in the newspapers the election dominates everything and gets into every conversation. It sometimes seems that there must be more people involved in running it and observing it than there are voters, that there are more committees and sub-committees than there will be polling stations, which are now expected to number about 9,000.

Yet all but a small minority know it is in a good cause. Along the motorway running into downtown Johannesburg a vast poster for the lively and independent Radio 702 neatly sums up the importance of this election. It proclaims: "Pick your party carefully. The last one went on for 40 years."

— GEMINI NEWS

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## To the Editor...

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

### Irregularities and mismanagement

Sir, Mismanagement, irregularities etc. have become rampant in most of the offices. It is always alleged that without bribing or approaching powerful channels one can hardly make one's work done by the concerned personnel. In addition, widespread nepotism, favouritism etc. are also in practice within the offices.

There are, of course, some offices managed by efficient and honest administration. But under the present circumstances, the good administration may not retain its chain of command and impartial administration for a long time.

Because whenever a good administrator takes a just action which obviously affects certain person or group, the administrator taking the action often finds it difficult to implement his decisions. Sometimes the affected persons or groups approach higher administration even top-ranking executives at the national level or political personalities and place before them false pleas, fabricated

facts and figures which, in many cases, compel the lower administration to deviate from its just stand.

I would like to request our esteemed Ministers, Secretaries and other political elite to verify facts before recommending any favour to anybody who may approach them for seeking justice. Without strong coordination and understanding between all tiers of administration, it won't be possible to contain corruption and mismanagement.

Zahid Dhaka

### The Baker's Dozen

Sir, Number twelve has many references in human history, appearing dozens of time, each time with vast significance. Like, there are 12 signs of the Zodiac; Adam, according to the Talmud, stayed 12 hours in the Garden of Eden; there are 12 tribes of Israel; Jesus had 12 disciples; children in Italy are given presents on 12th night and the Roman, Greek and Scandi-

navian mythologies have 12 major gods.

In Bangladesh, the famous 12 Awls of Chittagong even now exert vast influence in the hearts of our religious-minded people on the 12 Bhuyians of Golden Bangal still remain as our pride. But in present days, in Bengali, twelve could be used in another context — when we express end of everything with a person or state of affairs, we say '12 o'clock has struck'. After the recent municipal elections, the supporters of AL were heard (boasting) using the idiom in the context of BNP's debacle, as if, twelve has been induce to 'unlucky thirteen', as in Baker's Dozen.

Col (rtd) Mirza Shafi Banani, Dhaka

It is definitely not my intention for nor am I implying at a volte-face. I only refer to the perennially stalled and much ignored repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis. Also, vide the DS report recently by Masud Hasan Khan, I refer to the statement of the Pak F M Mr Assef Ahmed Ali during his Dec '93 visit wherein he reiterated that the agreement for repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis between their ex-PM Mr Newaz Sharif and our PM Begum Khaleda Zia will be honored by the Govt of H E Benazir Bhutto.

These stranded Pakistanis spread throughout Bangladesh in 66 camps are occupying prime lands located at Mymensingh, Mirpur and Firozshah, Sher Shah in Chittagong etc etc. Their free consumption of power, water etc may be aggravating the already back-breaking system loss suffered by the PDB, WASA etc. It is also reliably learnt that the Bangladeshi govt issued free ration consisting of 10-20 kgs wheat, oil, sugar, medicine etc, on monthly-basis to about 238,000 stranded Pakistanis. However, physically stranded Pakistanis hardly receive 3 kgs wheat monthly, the balance wheat, oil, sugar and medicines etc. are allegedly gobbled up (by whom, how can they say?) for the last 23 years. However, some blame a part of bureaucracy for the alleged corruption. Whoever they may be, to perpetuate their stranglehold on this evil empire, built over the years, these stranded Pakistanis have become pawns in their hands?

Different propaganda are fed into the media, sometimes with highly optimistic rosy views e.g. follow-up agreements