

Containing Diarrhoea

One of the post-flood syndromes is the vulnerability of people to various diseases. Of them, diarrhoea is certainly the most widespread and feared one. Thankfully though the disease is easily treatable at the primary stage, it can nevertheless prove very dangerous in an aggravated form. That is because of the prolonged debilitating effects on the patients after their recovery. Reports coming from different areas, where the flood water is receding, are disturbing. Surprisingly, the problem seems to be worse in the flood-affected areas around Dhaka City. According to an ICDDR,B version, 450 patients are coming to the hospital for treatment daily. The number incidentally is twice that of last year's.

The number itself is a testimony to the fact that the disease has the potential to break out in an epidemic form. Before that happens, emergency measures should be taken to arrest its further spread. The proximity of the worst affected areas certainly gives an advantage for reaching succour there. The ICDDR,B has already given some instructions for the people of the affected areas to follow. But unless the media carry them regularly as part of a campaign against the disease, not many people will know about the do's and don'ts. One of these is the safe disposal of the excreta of a diarrhoea patient. The other important point concerns pure drinking water along with water used for cooking and other household purposes. The bottomline is to educate people not to expose themselves to diarrhoeal bacteria.

However, once the disease has broken out, the curative measures must also be made easily available to the people. Not that they can always afford to seek treatment at the hospital. Emergency medical teams should be sent to the affected areas. We had suggested through this column to keep ready such measures to combat diseases as part of flood preparedness. We wonder why the wherewithal is not rushing to the victims. At a time when the people have lost much of their economic staying power, they have to procure food and other items from a market bristling with galloping prices. The administrative impotence in dealing with the hoarders and manipulators is to blame to a large extent for such abnormal price escalation. Its end-result is that the flood victims are forced to eat the unconsumable and then fall easy prey to diseases. The trading on human misery must stop.

Signal for More Divisions

Sylhet was a district comprising four sub-divisions. The sub-divisions became districts and Sylhet was nowhere to be found except as at par with those former sub-divisions. That was wrong. After all with sub-divisions becoming districts, a Habiganj man or a Moulvibazar woman does not become a non-Sylheti. The older districts, by simply being there for over a century as the administrative, cultural and social framework for a near-homogeneous populace to evolve, had instilled some sort of a sense of belonging and identity, short of nationality but bigger than anything else. Districtism is bad but it takes Sylhetis and Rangpuris, Chittagonians and Dhakaies to make a nation, not some crowds of faceless people.

The Barisal and Sylhet agitations that led to the creation of two new divisions were late attempts to make up for their fractionalised identities. Now that older districts have started reappearing as divisions, but not to any rational plan, the government must apply itself to making the best out of what cannot be prevented.

This must be accepted very plainly as the basis of all future administrative reorganisation that most, if not all, older districts should be made into divisions. And the present divisions into provinces. Why cringe from the idea of having provinces? If the government fails to plan for future with time and all the wisdom in the world about things that inexorably will be here tomorrow or the day after, this state and whatever constitutes it will be made to pay a dear price.

Welcome to Sylhet as a division. We expect this 'promotion' to result in happier days for the people of Sylhet. As things are, there is not much the divisions do to a district's administration. The government must find a more effective role for the division by empowering it in appropriate measures and areas. Whence will this needed power travel to the division? Not from the district to be sure. Devolution of power from the top is the name of the game successive governments have been shying away from consistently. To the detriment of this nation's very vital and basic interests.

Detestable

Salman Shah, the actor, has made a most forceful plea for saving the film industry from the terror posed by *mastans* and extortionists. These criminal elements have found a very good pasture in the FDC. They specially target the film actors and actresses who want to carry on with their exacting professional work without much else to care for. This and their wide public exposure — their fame and/or glamour value, that is — make them ideal prey to threats of violence and blackmail.

Shah's plea must be heeded if only because here is, for the first time, a whole professional community expressly feeling insecure against very real sources of danger. This must be nipped in the bud. This is going to be a great test for the police and their authorities — the government.

There is, however, irony in this detestable fall of the law and order situation. Bangladesh films, being no exception to money-spinning footage around the world and specially across the border, panders to both sex and violence, so blandly epitomised by both the villain and the hero. In both roles the element of *mastani* is glorified and celebrated. Ask any of the criminals pestering the artistes about who he has modelled his role on, you will get very interesting answers.

LESS than seven per cent of all vehicle driving licenses in the capital city are genuine — the others are "found to be fake" — the Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) made a statement to this effect on Monday last while addressing a discussion on the "Streets of Dhaka." Apparently, the Commissioner's observation was based on spot-checks conducted by the DMP over the last three years. The statement of the DMP chief was, however, challenged by the country's chief license regulator — chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) — who believed that the number would be the other way around. According to him, only a maximum of 10 per cent of the licenses could be fake.

Given the state of information and statistics in Bangladesh, there is no doubt that it will take many more years to have correct statistics on anything — be that number of fake vehicle driving licenses or national economic growth rates. The fact remains that an overwhelming number of vehicles — somewhere between the 93 per cent of DMP chief and 10 per cent of BRTA chief — are run by drivers who have no legal rights to drive. And our authorities are well aware of it. Fellow citizens of the cosmopolitan city, stop for a while and think — where you and your dear and near ones live, work and enjoy life!

DISCIPLINE is what differentiates the Armed Forces from a mob. The strict and constant application of it ensures that the difference remains. Before an officer reaches field officer status, that is, a Major for Squadron Leader equivalent in the Air Force and Lieutenant Commander in the Navy, he must pass the "Captain to Major Examination"; among the subjects he must qualify in is "Military Law".

Not only is the application of military law important in the discharge of his duties, the individual officer gets to understand the full implications of violation thereof. One of Germany's outstanding commanders in World War II, Lt Gen Erich Von Manstein, obtained eight out of a possible 200 in "Military Law" before the war in attempting to pass the requisite examination to Major's rank. His comment "Thank God for war!" serves to illustrate the limitations of good soldiers in tackling this important subject. If the World War had not (fortuitously for him) come around, the future three-star general would have remained a captain.

Recently a major general has been prematurely compulsorily retired by the COAS Gen Abdul Waheed on grounds of moral turpitude. Caught literally with his pants down, the general officer decided that discretion was the better part of valour and chose to go quietly. Professional competence aside, the man's succumbing to worldly pleasures in this manner is a double tragedy both for him and the army that invested 30 years in him.

Not the first one to become fallible in this manner in this world, he will certainly not be the last, his bad luck was in getting caught. At the other end of the scale, a couple of soldiers were convicted in Karachi by court martial on charges of abducting and molesting a girl. Both incidents involved swift applications of military justice to serve as an example for discipline. These incidents tend to show that the Manual

To the Editor...

One-eyed attitude

Sir, We came to know recently that the National Curriculum and Text Book Board has completed a workshop which included specialists on all subjects of secondary and higher secondary level. They evaluated new syllabus of 24 subjects, but did not evaluate the new syllabus of Islamic studies. In this connection we have discussed with some of the related officers of the workshop. Few of them commented that only the major subjects were evaluated.

To answer this comment we would only say that in general education system of Bangladesh this subject is taught from the beginning of the student life to the Masters. In college level after Bengali and English it is a compulsory subject and even majority of the students give option to read this subject in Higher Secondary and Degree classes. So, how can this be a minor subject? We like to add that while the aim of 1996 new syllabus is to maintain religious, social and cultural values then how without evaluating Islamic studies subject as a major one these values can be upheld? It may be mentioned here that including Great

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One wonders how life's safety can be ensured in a city where most of the drivers carry fake licenses? How can one ride a bus, take an autorickshaw, cross a street in front of truck or a private car knowing fully well that overwhelming majority of the drivers may not have required training or are not screened through appropriate authorities? How can a fellow driver be assured that the other driver approaching or crossing him knows the rules of traffic? Above all, how the authorities — that know that overwhelming number of drivers carry fake licenses — can allow such drivers to drive vehicles in the streets of the city? One of the discussants at the "Streets of Dhaka" discussion mentioned that almost 60 per cent movements on the city roads are carried out on foot. Perhaps concerned authorities should ponder a little about the safety of these people from the willful or ill-trained drivers who carry fake licenses.

Dhaka has long been known for its rickshaws — manually-run three wheelers. They keep most of the city streets occupied most of the busy hours. But no body seems to know how many rickshaws the city has. Every-

body, however, has his estimates, not necessarily based on factual evidence or appropriate knowledge. After all, just how many people in this society bother about facts, factual evidence or the truth?

The Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) — who is responsible for issuing licenses to the rickshaws — thinks that the number of rickshaws in the city will ex-

ceed 300 thousand. The Mayor's figures were challenged by a representative of Rickshaw Owners Sanity and a professor of BUET — both of whom believed the exact number would be around 120 to 150 thousand. Who knows, the exact number of rickshaws in the city may be bigger than the two figures taken together. But one thing we know for sure — whatever their number, only 80,000 of them are licensed — that would be 27 per cent of the Mayor's figures and 53 per cent to 66 per cent of the

numbers mentioned by others. Question arises, how one-third, two-thirds, or one-half of all rickshaws ply in the city streets regularly — for years — without legal rights? Rickshaw owners and rickshawpullers allege that corruption on the part of a section of police personnel and a section of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) staff have

pullers to be a little more responsible on the city streets.

Aside the traffic mess, perhaps another big concern of the citizens of this city lies with the endless, mindless and stupid digging and re-digging of the streets. Although no definitive figures can be given, there is no doubt that the majority of the city-dwellers are sick and tired of the mind-boggling levels of non-coordination and mal-coordination among the utility and development agencies such as DESA, WASA, PDB, T&T and Rujuk. The digging projects of these agencies regularly contribute to creating greater mess in the city's awful traffic system.

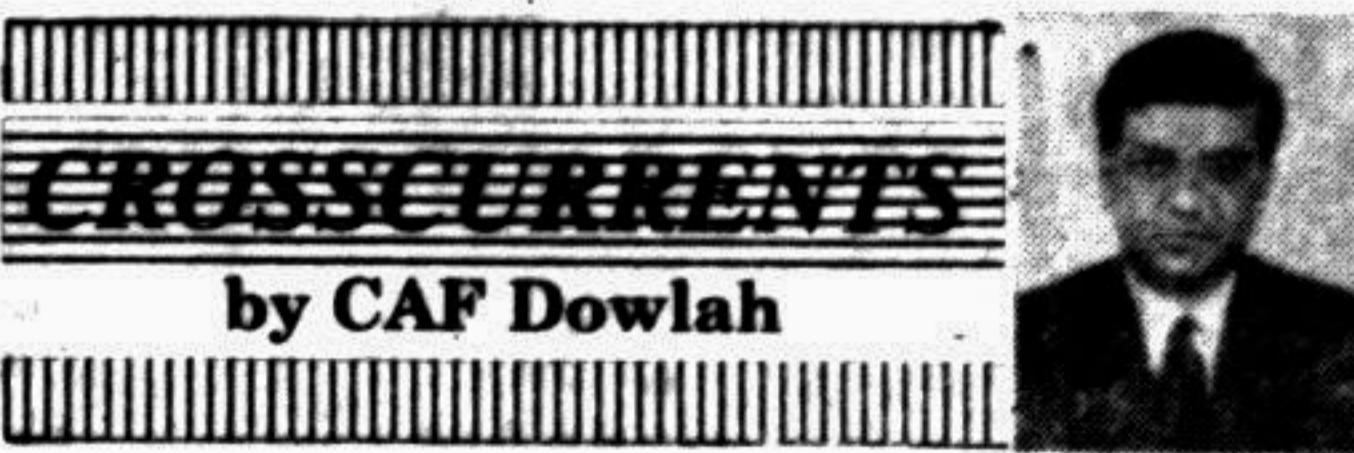
This simply cannot continue — even dead consciences can hardly stand such a level of stupidity, wastage and backwardness.

It seems, however, that the concerned authorities are also gradually becoming aware of their highly visible insensible activities. It is indeed quite strange that the otherwise inefficient and corrupt T&T Board seems to be showing the path. It is now engaged in city-wide digging task — to install underground telephone lines. Its chairman stated proudly — give us one year, and we

shall not touch roads in next 30 or 50 years. No doubt, installation of underground telephone lines will not only leave the city streets untouched for decades, but will also help substantially in reducing system loss of the company. Other utility companies should follow the example and save the citizens from their inexcusable abuses.

No doubt, solving the problems of street-digging, footpaths, rickshaws or motorized vehicles are necessary, but they will do little in transforming the city into a cosmopolitan central of living. None should forget that Dhaka is one of the most densely populated cities in the world and estimates of its population range from seven to ten millions. It houses the capital of the country, the political and administrative headquarters as well as diplomatic missions. The inhabitants of the capital city deserve better coordination and management. Time has come to think of upgrading the DCC further — by entrusting it with policing power, by having its own utility departments and city-wide administrative apparatus. Only then — a single authority would be able to provide a comprehensive package of services in a uniform way.

Otherwise, the citizens will remain hostage to the nuances of non-coordinated national bodies.



been responsible for sustenance of such a large-scale illegal activity for years. Perhaps both the agencies responsible for maintaining law and order in the city — DMP and DCC — should look into this allegation a little more seriously. May be the DCC can also make a policy of issuing a certain percentage of rickshaw licenses to rickshawpullers — instead of issuing all licenses to rickshaw owners. Besides promoting egalitarian objectives of the society, may be such a move can inspire the rickshaw-

The Last Refuge

Samuel Johnson stated that 'patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel'. Unfortunately in Pakistan it seems to have become the only sanctuary for scoundrels who sacrifice the interests of their country at the altar of greed and ambition.

of Pakistan Military Law (MPL) is not to be taken lightly, being applicable without fear or favour from soldier up to general's rank.

All underscores the determination of the military hierarchy to keep the forces within the ambit of strict discipline. The present COAS, with less than six months to go till his own retirement, intends to see that the concept of discipline remains supreme is praiseworthy, given that some of his predecessors, though honourable men, had chosen to ignore rank rascality in not only tolerating some undeserving individuals but even promoting them, a la the officer caught blatantly telling lies in the Tando Bhalwal incident.

If a certain "gentleman" makes it to COAS, given that after planting false rumours about his colleagues he will do nothing more than plant real trees in Gujranwala (which should do wonders for the environment), the Tando Bhalwal character is a potential three-star general. The individual's negative attributes are just what those who themselves go up the ladder through intrigues look for in subordinates.

The enforcement of military discipline is very important during times of martial law (ML) or in duties in "Aid of Civil Power" when less than 10 per cent of the professional army is involved in the enforcing and not more than one per cent of that (i.e. 0.01% of the whole army) comes into contact with civilians in any capacity. Of this lot of about 6000-7000 individuals from soldiers to general's rank, less than 100-150 have the tendency of misusing their authority for personal gain but unfortunately the army as a whole invariably gets a bad name, becoming vulnerable because

of their failure in being more strict in bringing in the corrupt and greedy to justice. The same story is repeated in "Procurement" and in "Test and Trials" during peacetime where only a very small coterie of greedy and corrupt people within the department may benefit individually but the whole army gets labelled with the blame.

Over a period of last 25 years less than 1000 individuals may have benefited by misusing their authority whereas millions of service-

men, serving and retired, face public approbation. This tarnishing of the army's reputation spoils the clean wholesome image which is the touchstone of the army's reputation. This erosion can only be contained if the military hierarchy resolves not to accept chicanery of any kind within its ranks and the punishment ratio is enhanced. The compulsory retirement of a major general at short notice for breaking the law of the land is a significant step as it will serve as a salutary example for others not to emulate.

What is of concern is that an attempt was made first to give it the colour of (1) dissent on grounds of patriotism with an afterthought of (2) persecution because of ethnicity. Both innuendoes were totally false, deserving contempt.

There is always a small group of ex-servicemen in most countries (Pakistan is no exception) that takes for granted that they are the inheritors of the military earth in their respective domain.

"patriotism" on their sleeves. Being influential by virtue of their military lineage, this despicable lot derides honest, professional officers on the straight and narrow who make up "the great silent majority" of this army. In utter contrast to what they preach, for the most part this inner circle is involved in everything from influence-peddling, kickbacks, graft and corruption, smuggling, blackmail, etc.

Whenever caught red-handed their usual fall-back position is the refuge of "patriotism". They do not hesitate in spreading rumours to give ethnic colour, a disease that the armed forces

have managed to avoid until now, at least since 1971. The refuge on the plane of patriotism is an all-too familiar laughable defence, quite apparent to the whole army that knows the actual truth. The tragedy is that given such a twist, distortion of facts do tend to become coloured as the "truth". The general in question was certainly a professional and a nationalist, for the sake of the army he professed to serve honestly he should stand up like a man and take his punishment without bringing the army's name into disrepute.

The military hierarchy cannot remain oblivious to individuals who have misused the mandate of office to destroy the careers and reputation of their colleagues by systematic defamation, ostensibly in the name of a higher duty to the nation but really for their own selfish ambitions. If this was confined to one aberration, one would even be forgiving but when dastardly methods are used repeatedly for personal gain, this must be taken note of. Consider coolly the patriotism of a man who aspires to high rank if he has to lobby a foreign power for support? To the extent of manipulating in the posting of a person over whom he holds a Sword of Damocles as blackmail into a key diplomatic position? This happens to be the truth and whether

one likes it or not the country's destiny is at stake when we appoint our senior officers to key posts, we cannot afford to look the other way or bury our heads in the sand like ostriches and hope for the best. The army cannot be reduced to having their senior appointments confirmed like that of SHO's of police to a lucrative thana. The navy is well on the way to becoming a gone case while the air force is under some subtle pressure, the army remains for the time being the last bastion of integrity and hope for the nation. If lieutenant generals and major generals could be sent home for various misdemeanours much less potent in the national context, what is the divine power that protects such latter-day Rommels from retribution as per the dictates of uniform and a code of conduct that separates gentlemen from outright rascals? Samuel Johnson stated that "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel". Unfortunately in Pakistan it seems to have become the only sanctuary for scoundrels who sacrifice the interests of their country at the altar of greed and ambition. In retrospect, the major general who was compulsorily retired can be called most fortunate as instead of being stoned to death under Islamic Laws for being involved in an affair of the heart with a consenting adult he can at least go home satisfied with the knowledge that this was an individual act with another man's wife, that he was certainly far removed from the type of rape, pillage and loot that every institution worth mentioning in this country is presently being subjected to in the name of the Constitution.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

men, serving and retired, face public approbation. This tarnishing of the army's reputation spoils the clean wholesome image which is the touchstone of the army's reputation. This erosion can only be contained if the military hierarchy resolves not to accept chicanery of any kind within its ranks and the punishment ratio is enhanced. The compulsory retirement of a major general at short notice for breaking the law of the land is a significant step as it will serve as a salutary example for others not to emulate.

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OPINION

Save Dhaka: Another View

The Daily Star correspondents Reaz Ahmed and Monirul Islam Khan had made a good deal of exercise in reporting "Overhaul of Medical Education Needed" in their piece "Save Dhaka Healthcare" on July 23. One wonders how only overhauling of medical education will save Dhaka in its healthcare programme. The Daily Star may bring out a supplement on medical education or a series of articles like the present Save Dhaka series, for medicare is an important issue for the ailing society and is a part and parcel of healthcare programme.

Presently, medical education is imparted not only in 19-governmental and private medical colleges as pointed out by your correspondents but also in 19 other privately run homoeopathic colleges under the aegis of the Bangladesh Homoeopathic Board and in one Sarkari Homoeopathic Degree College at Mirpur on the outskirts of Dhaka, one Unani/Ayurvedic college at Mirpur and Tibbi College at Sylhet, besides some other Unani/Ayurvedic colleges in the country.

Since there is a Directorate of Homoeopathy and Indigenous Medicine in the office of the Director General of Health Services, one cannot ignore these alternative aspects of medical education and medicare system beside the regular school of medicine. After all, they are also catering to the medical needs of the ailing society with the approval of the

people and the government.

Moreover, there are varieties of medical educational institutions, they are the postgraduate institutions and auxiliary undergraduate institutions which also need to be discussed about.

All these medical institutions situated in our metropolitan city may provide prompt medical relief in our bellyache for a while only to come back again. But to provide healthcare to the Dhakaies DS correspondents are expected to discuss about the food hygiene and health measures of the caterers of the city hotels and restaurants, big or small, high or low and even the lowliest.

To save Dhaka citizens from the bellyache, for instance, and the accompanying diarrhoeas and dysenteries we really need to establish an efficient Public Health Programme under the auspices of the City Municipal Corporation. Our medical colleges produce doctors that deal with diseases of the individuals and, prescribe medicines. But the diseases that cause the citizens to suffer in large numbers are due to bad environmental management and they become public health problems. Unfortunately, there is little societal awareness about this aspect of health. DS correspondents have mentioned about five medical colleges of the city that provide medicare. Many people do not (care to) know that there is a health institution which pro-

vides the venue for the doctors to gain knowledge in matters of healthcare and this institution goes by the name of National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine. Even the Ministry of Health, the minister and his secretariat are mostly busy with managing the matters of medical colleges and hospitals and dispensaries overlooking the health perspective.

To save Dhakaies from the bellyache, caused mostly due to taking bad food in unhygienic eating places, we propose that the Municipal Health Department should bring it into the clauses of the Food Laws, at least on experimental basis, and make arrangements for inspection of the food catering premises and examine the stool of the food handlers for four consecutive weeks and if the premises are upto the optimum health standard and the food handlers germ-free, and then declare by issuing certificate that the concerned premises are safe places to dine in. And for that purpose even a fee may be levied while and enthusiastic entrepreneurs should come forward to materialise this proposal to boost their earnings. Since no bellyache is there by consuming from these eating places the crowd of patients will be lessened in the hospitals and dispensaries and other medical centres thus getting increased attention. And we will have Dhaka a better place to live and dine in.

Jalalabad Division

Sir, The announcement of the formation of the erstwhile Sylhet district as the sixth administrative division of the country has, though much belated, dawned as a welcome move on almost ten million of inhabitants. As it seems, it is a commendable and wise decision on the part of the concerned authority in so far as the stationing of the divisional H/Q at Sylhet is concerned. Presumably it might have been selected, among other things, for the sacred memory of the great saint Hazrat Shah Jalaluddin Yamani (RA) as the mortal remains of the saint remains there.

But all the tributes to the great saint may, to a great extent, turn futile unless this

Division is renamed Jalalabad Division which is a demand of a great majority of the people.

May the proper authority look into and do the needful to that end.

Muhammad Abdus Shukur
Bhasri, Sylhet

Fake driving licences

Sir, In the 1st August issue of The Daily Star the staff correspondent under the heading "93 per cent driving licences fake!" quoted the DMP Commissioner as saying "our inspection and spot checking have revealed, over the last three years, a fake licence figure of 93 per cent". But the report does not mention what action the DMP authority is taking against these fake licence holders. If the contention of DMP Commissioner is true and actions are taken against the fake licence holders, then there should remain only 7 per cent of the vehicles presently plying in the city and beyond!

Would you kindly arrange a follow-up report on the matter?

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