

Women on the Move

Breast Cancer Won't Kill You if You Don't Let It

by Gemini Wahhaj

BREAST cancer is easy to detect and treat. Yet, an alarming number of the 22,500 Bangladeshi women diagnosed with breast cancer every year do not survive.

lump, which means it is not painful. A lump may not necessarily be cancerous, but it should not be ignored.

refers many women with breast cancer. "We need to build awareness of breast cancer in this country through the mass media.

Those women who do think something is very wrong drag themselves to a (female) gynaecologist, only to be referred to someone in surgery.

help if more women doctors go into surgery, although Dr. Kohinur doesn't think this is make a significant difference.

"Most people who come to me are not concerned about going to a male doctor if a lump is found," she said.

This is what happens when a woman returns home: as the cancer progresses, it spreads to the lymph nodes, bone, liver, lungs, and brain.

Palliative surgery to remove the diseased breast may provide some psychological relief, and she may be given some chemotherapy, but her chances of survival are at most a few more months.

There is some good news. More women go to a gynaecologist in the early stages of cancer than before.

But breast cancer has been sadly neglected. We need to bombard women with information, through TV programs, magazine articles, and brochures.

Also, tell them that nobody needs to die from cancer.

Self-examination: Stand or sit. Raise one arm above waist. With other hand, examine breast with palm flat against chest wall.

Diagnostic Tests: Physical examination, mammography, ultrasonography, FNAC (a needle is inserted to extract cells for examination), and biopsy.

Staging: There are four stages in breast cancer with different prognosis of ten year survival.

Stage I: Lump on breast, freely mobile (65% survival)

Stage II: Lump on breast fixed and freely mobile lymph node (25% survival)

Stage III: Lump of breast and fixed lymph node (5% survival)

Stage IV: spread to other regions (almost 0% survival)

Treatment: Chemotherapy, Radiotherapy, surgery (lumpectomy or mastectomy), and hormone therapy.

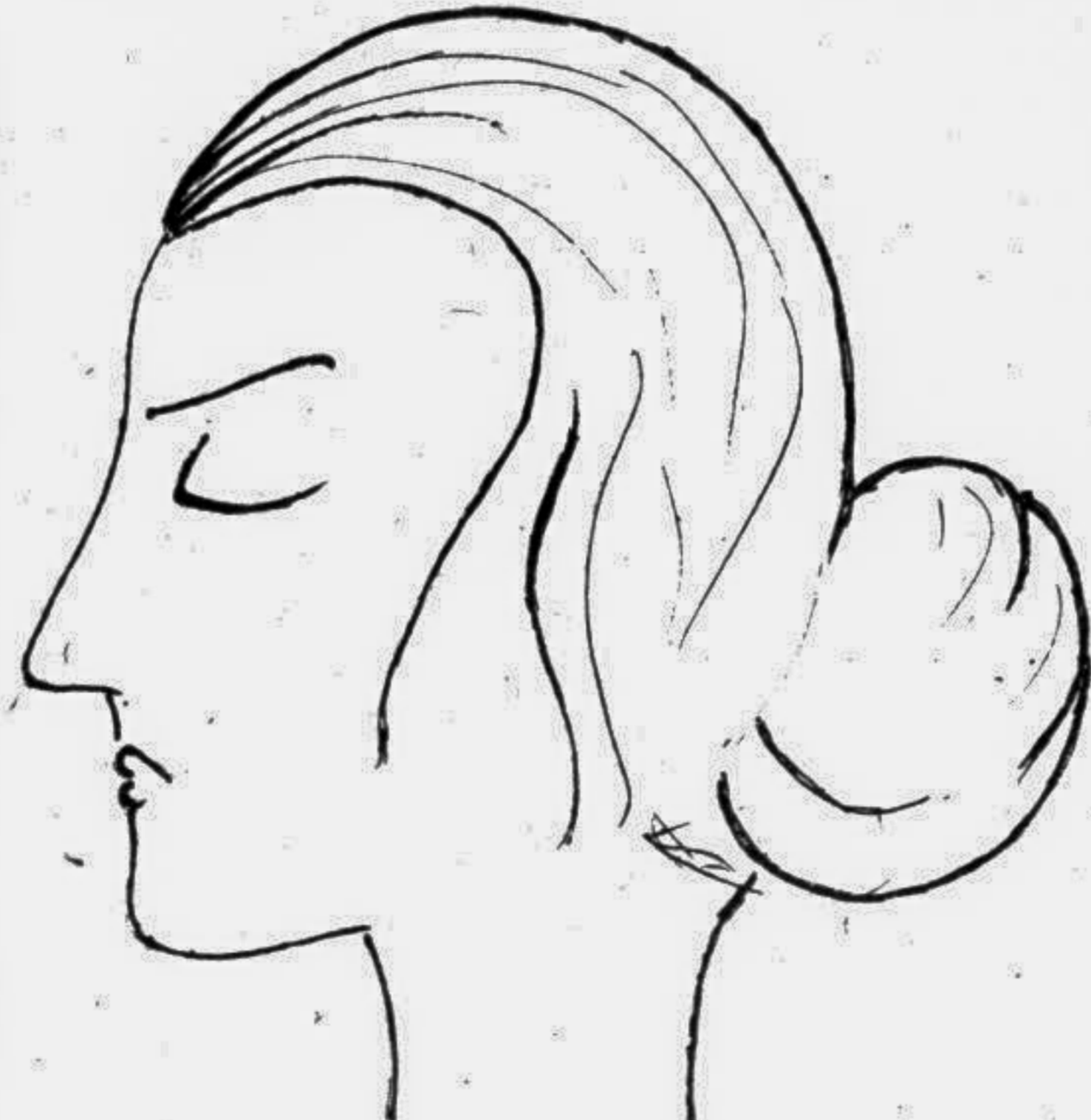
treatment becomes more and more hopeless.

Doctors recommend regular self-examination, a practice that has never gained popularity in Bangladesh.

When a woman finally seeks treatment, she is often in the last stages of cancer, when the disease has spread wide, her breast is fungated and ulcerated, and she is suffering from intense pain.

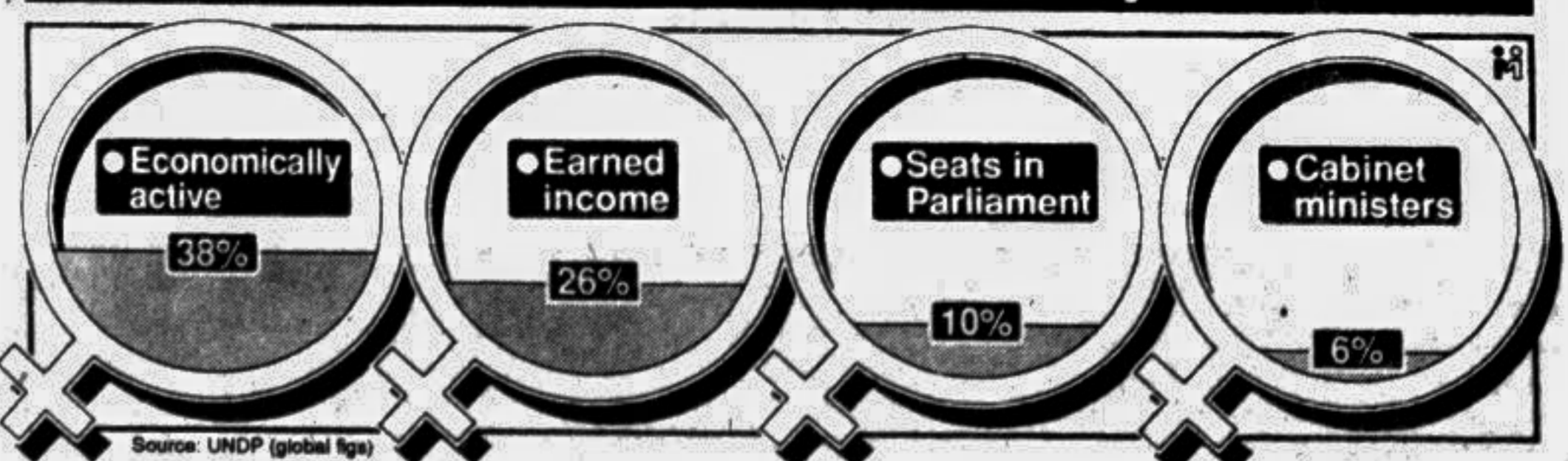
Breast cancer is most common in women aged 45-55 years. During the reproductive years, the breast cells are very active.

The first sign of cancer may be abnormality of the breast shape and size, and abnormalities of the nipple.



Dr. Latifa has seen some preference for female doctors among her patients. Dr. C H Kabir, a senior surgeon who has treated many instances of breast cancer, thinks it will

Women's share in an unequal world



Equality a Myth in Our Politics

by Shamima Islam

THE night I saw the newly formed Advisor's Group taking their oath, I felt a dilemma in my mind.

The token inclusion of a lone woman member in the term of Advisors (one in ten) is nothing but a mere expression of the prevailing stereotyped attitudes.

I am surprised to see a top-level formation of the Group of Advisors for the Interim caretaker Government which in a way, violates constitutional right for women and women's quest for equality both in national and in global perspective.

Bangladeshi women are struggling for equality at least since 1975, if not earlier.

Instead of being mere watchers, let us ask openly about the reasons for this vacuum and what can be the possible responses?

The second myth can be that neutral women are not available, and since majority of women don't practise politics there is no scarcity of neutral women who can participate in this neutral Interim Government.

Let us obey and guarantee the constitutional rights which proclaims, "steps shall be taken to ensure participations of women in all spheres of national life" (19.1) and "Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and of public life" (28.2).

There is no dearth of able women in this country and the proportion of women advisors has to conform to the proportion of women population. It is nothing but a desired expectation in a free democratic country like Bangladesh.

Now the genuine concern remains - how can it be done? I strongly believe that if the highly-powered Election Commission can be re-formulated, the Advisory Council in the Interim caretaker Government can also be re-constituted merely with addition and inclusion and no deletion and exclusion at all.

Let us not be silent anymore!

(The writer is a researcher on women's issues in Bangladesh. She heads many organizations in women and children's issues.)

Getting Kids to Class: Ending Exploitative Child Labour

by Jon Schaffer

SCHOOLS are too far away, they cost too much and just don't teach the right things. These are the complaints of many parents in developing countries that send their children to the fields or the factories rather than the classrooms.

Almost 25 per cent of children in developing countries do not enroll in primary school, and another one-third of those that enter drop out before completing sixth grade, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

In a report released May 17, the World Bank found that primary school enrollment in Africa is declining, the quality of education in most developing countries is very poor and public spending for education has tended to favour the affluent.

Finding a way to get children back in school, say global labour experts, would be the single most important step toward ending the exploitation of some 100 million to 200 million children workers in developing countries around the world.

"When schools are inaccessible, prohibitively expensive, or of poor quality, they exacerbate the child labour problem; when they are plentiful, relevant, and free of cost to the poor they act as a powerful brake on at least the most negative aspects of child labour even if they do not stop children from working outside school hours," said Anthony Freeman, director of the ILO's Washington office.

Teresa Albanez, special adviser to the executive director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), says

that countries must be innovative in looking beyond traditional public school systems.

If school is to be more appealing than work, classes must be held in more convenient locations, class schedules need to be more flexible, what is taught needs to relate to the reality children are facing, and child-centered and non-authoritarian teaching methods need to be introduced," Albanez said.

Freeman and Albanez, during a recent US Department of Agriculture hearing on child labour, also said that increased access to relevant and affordable education needs to be supplemented with programmes to provide alternative sources of income to families.

Education is Cost Effective

Albanez says that stopping child labour is simply good economics and that sustainable development cannot be built upon cheap labour.

"Increasingly, the global economy is demanding highly skilled, well-educated workers," she said. "So it is not only morally imperative for corporations to put an end to child labour, it is also good business."

Studies show that in countries where school enrollment for girls is less than 75 per cent of what it is for boys, the rate of economic growth is 25 per cent lower than in countries where boys and girls have equal opportunities, according to the Alliance for a Global Community, a group funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

"Developing countries must give a higher priority to education, especially for girls, if they are to continue to reduce poverty in the next century," according to the 1995 World

Bank report. "The productivity of labour is to a large extent determined by people's skills, which are largely a result of schooling."

The report estimates that had 50 per cent of Guatemala's children attended secondary school in 1960 rather than only 7 per cent, the country's per capita income today would be almost 40 per cent higher.

It further argues that educated women have fewer and healthier children. An additional year of primary schooling for 1,000 girls in India would prevent an estimated 300 births, 43 infant deaths and two maternal deaths, it said.

The World Bank views investment in education as one of the key elements to East Asian development.

However, Andrew Samet, US associate deputy undersecretary of labour, says there remains a wide disparity between those governments that say they are going to expand the years of compulsory education and those that enforce mandatory education.

"There have been a number of countries that say they have compulsory education and you find that is more a vision or a goal than a reality of the situation," Samet said.

What's Being Done

The World Bank is the largest single source of external finance for education in the developing countries, investing more than \$2,000 million in 1994 and \$13,700 million between 1985 and 1994. Basic education, which now accounts for one third of the Bank's lending for education, is the most rapidly growing category of education lending. However,

access to educational opportunities for a million poor children, girls and socially disadvantaged groups in 42 rural districts. The remaining 292 targeted rural districts will be reached during the next 15 years.

Mexico, also with World Bank help, has launched a



primary education project in 10 of its poorest southern states. Separately, the World Bank announced on May 18 the establishment of a special fund to promote education for poor girls in developing countries.

USAID recently announced a new 10-year, \$100 million initiative to increase girls' school enrollment in some 12 nations, the first being India. Other countries will be announced soon, with likely recipients including Nepal, Honduras and South Africa. The money will provide grant funding for technical assistance and small demonstration and research efforts.

In Bangladesh, UNICEF is working with the departments of Social Services and Labour to establish new "child-friendly" drop-in centres where education, basic hygiene, health and legal services can be provided.

In addition, there are thousands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to improve the lives of children, including the long-standing South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude in India and the defense for Children International. In one region of Pakistan, an NGO called the Academy for Educational Development has, through partnership with local government, created 122 new schools and enrolled more than 70 per cent of eligible school-age girls.

A number of countries are in the process of raising the minimum years children must be in school. According to child labour experts, Thailand intends to raise the minimum number of years a child must be in school from six to nine years. The Thai government also is expected to introduce legislation soon that would impose every strict punishments on those involved in child prostitution, one US Labour

Children Working at Bidi Factories

by M M Islam

According to industry sources, about 20,000 children are working bidi factories in and around the thana headquarters. They work with tobacco, and other harmful substances that cause serious health hazards. Factory owners usually prefer child workers as they cost less.

INSTEAD of going to school, thousands of children at Daulatpur, a frontier administrative unit of Kushtia district, are working at bidi factories to supplement their families.

The children, mostly aged between six and 14, are toiling dawn to dusk to earn their livelihood, risking their health. Born and grown up in a dirty and unhealthy environment, most of them are malnourished. Moreover while working in the bidi industry, they indulge in smoking at an early age, further injuring their health.

According to industry sources, about 20,000 children are working bidi factories in and around the thana headquarters. They work with tobacco, and other harmful substances that cause serious health hazards. Factory owners usually prefer child workers as they cost less.

Most of the labourers at bidi factories are suffering from serious respiratory problems and other illnesses which include constipation, asthma, TB and liver infection. Local doctors attributed the causes to continuous inhalation of pungent tobacco dust.

Most of the employees working with tobacco fall sick with serious bronchial diseases. Even within only five years of their services many of them are forced to take leave," said a local physician.

"But they do not care nor abide by the doctor's advice. These people are so poor that they do not have any other option," he said. The doctor expressed concern at the indifferent attitude of the mill-owners regarding health and hygiene of their employees.

Workers in bidi factories normally work in two ways - contract basis and wage basis. Workers, especially the women and children who belong to a family, prefer to work on contract basis while the regular employees work on wage basis.

The number of families working with the factories in the area is about ten thousand. Each family has a contract card which approves the manufacturing of 10,000 sticks a

day. Instead of working individually the children work with their family members.

The factory authorities supply papers, filter, gum, tobacco and other necessary materials. The elderly members of the family prepare the paper rolls and fill them with tobacco mixtures while the children plug them and make the bundles, sticking band rolls around each bundle.

A five-member family can manufacture as many as 20,000 sticks daily. They earn eight taka per 1,000 sticks. On an average, a medium size family earns Tk 400 per week.

There are about six small to large scale bidi factories, at Allar Darga Bazar, about 10 kilometre west off the thana headquarters, which employ about 10,000 workers. Of the employees, about 75 per cent are women workers, mostly deserted by their husbands.

The bordering township Daulatpur is inhabited by about 360,800 people, mostly living in abject poverty and doing odd jobs to earn their livelihood. Of them 1,75,229 are women. Many of the local people are engaged in some illegal trade with neighbouring India, which has a 43 kilometre bordering line with the township.

When asked most of the workers and employees, working with the bidi factories, replied that they worked in the industry accepting all the hazards, as there were no alternatives. "Where will we go, if we leave the job," said a middle-aged woman who was deserted by her husband five years ago.

"I am now well and running my family quite smoothly, with sufficient means for subsistence. My children help me in the work," said the woman, mother of three children. "At least we could evade the starvation which we experienced at my parents' house just after my divorce."

She is now happy. The only dissatisfaction that haunts the family is the lack of education facilities for the children who are now at the prime of their schooling age.



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by Jim Davis

