

Where High-ups Don't Dare

Hospitals, specially the government ones, have come to be bashed as the great sources of affliction to the patients and their attendants for quite some time now. Yet, nothing seems to have changed and there is hardly any sign that things will improve in the foreseeable future.

Public sufferings owing to varied forms of corruption under the protective shield of 'unionism' is going unabated. An investigative report published in a leading Bangla daily on June 11, provided us with an insight into the bedevilled administration of the ICGMR Hospital. It is a real mess in the medical facility in the heart of the capital, popularly known as the PG Hospital.

Employees at the lower tier, reportedly those belonging to class three and four, have virtually turned the hospital into their personal property. Delinquency or utter disregard for professional obligation is not the only problem with them.

While some of them are involved in lesser specimens of violation of the extant rules like setting up tea stalls, hair-cutting shops etc at the compound, a section of them is allegedly involved in big financial deals over tenders for regulation hospital requirements. No wonder those microbuses at the hospital premises are allegedly owned by some of these employees.

The saga of corruption does not end in the revelations like the appointment of six telephone operators when actually three would suffice but extends to much more sinister practice of forcing the attendants of dead patients to use their transport, the 'microbuses'. These transport owners charge exorbitant price in the name of smooth and efficient service and when refused make sure the attendants rue their decision of not paying heed to the 'advertised and on hand assistance' by switching on a spell of non-cooperation in every conceivable manner. As it were in an invisible network of shared interest, the whole staff contribute actively to the sufferings of the attendants.

Complaints evidently do not work. Doctors and the administrative high-ups have confessed their helplessness in the face of organised criminality of these employees. The fact of the nature of their job being non transferable seems to have made them immune to the concern of accountability. Sitting smug with their situational invincibility, they understandably consider the doctors as 'guests' and do not feel the necessity of listening to them.

The fact that these lower tier employees are able to hold the patients and doctors hostage in a reign of utter corruption is because they, under the banner of unions, enjoy the blessings of people in power, the people who matter. These powerful elements who must be distributed pretty evenly in the government and the opposition have created virtual monsters out of their petty lust for power.

Accountability has been the buzz word in the recent times as we all chime in our commitment to democracy. But nowhere the idea is more sorely missed as it is in our health sector. The ministry would do well to go all the way to clear PG and other hospitals from similar vicious circles of corruption.

Costly Procrastination

Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant, envisaged as a vital aid in meeting city dwellers' growing demand for water has become a painful study in procrastination. Although the estimated cost for the project has gone up to Tk 750 crore from 538 earmarked initially, hardly anything has been done until now and almost entirely we owe this tale of procrastination to the WASA officials and employees.

With the bulk of the cost to be borne by the World Bank, French and Japanese governments, there was never any practical fear of the project hitting snag due to fund shortage. But non-cooperation from within the agency concerned in meeting the conditions given by the creditors has led to the stoppage in the flow of funds.

World Bank, one of the financiers of the project, had set some mandatory conditions for the release of the fund. Notable among them were scaling down systems loss, increase in revenue and leasing of two of the six zones of the WASA on experimental basis. According to a leading Bangla daily, all but one of these conditions have been met. The one yet unmet and which has apparently kept the project from getting underway, is the survey of the private sector management of the water supply service.

Going by history, it is easy to understand the reason behind the trend of non-cooperation. WASA like other utility agencies in Bangladesh, has been an epitome of corruption and inefficiency. Any attempt that may expose this trail of corruption will be resisted by people whose interest will be at stake.

The past governments have done nothing to break this bastion of corruption and bring about a touch improvement in its service. It is about time something is done to weed out the elements causing problems to the implementation of a project of so vital public interest.

Corruption in NSC

Few among those who have been around in the sports arena ever had any doubt that the National Sports Council (NSC), country's governing body for sports was a great den of corruption. While the nation's achievement in sports registered a suffocatingly steady pattern of stagnancy, the 'red building' continued to be a dripping roast, some time for the army generals, some time for the civilians who managed to have a stint there over the years.

Recently, a study conducted by a committee of four has unearthed some of the traces of rampant corruption by the officials of the agency. Sixteen specific charges over various irregularities ranging from delay in building Chittagong Jila Krira Parishad shopping complex to that of the payment of a Chinese coach during the SAF Games have been laid out in the report.

We appreciate the belated crusade against corruption but would urge the authorities to exercise their wisdom and watchfulness before rather than after a project is undertaken for, posthumous drives do little in addressing the problem of wastage of public money.

People would like to see proper punishment being meted to those who have fattened purses with their hard earned money. And with a major project like the cricket stadium just around the corner, we would like to see the agency concerned of the government focused on it in its drive against corruption in the same vein it is going now.

In the City of Boeings

A dozen years after Wright Brothers' first flight, William E. Boeing took his first aeroplane ride in 1915. The Boeing company was established in 1916 — as a builder of wooden float planes. Today it is the largest aeroplane manufacturing company in the world, rolling out one of USA's top most export products.

THE international visitors programme with the theme "The globalization of Business and Markets" duly took off from Seattle on the 1st May 1997. We were 23 in a group — representing ourselves G-23 — representing 23 different countries of the world. The aim of our visit to the US was to have a glimpse of the nature and degree of integration of the US economy into the growing globalization. But exchange of ideas exclusively amongst ourselves while living and moving together added a further flavour to our visit and at the end, to the total stock of our incremental knowledge. However, we all first landed in Washington state and ended in Washington DC — from the economy of tradables where trade activities reign supreme to an economy of non-tradables where most activities are public services!

Seattle is the capital city of Washington state. The people are kind, warm and hospitable. The port of Seattle is the closest US major port to Asian markets and via this port the total value of the waterborne trade ranges between \$35-40 billion a year. Because of its nearness to Asia, possibly, Asian minorities seem to outweigh other minorities in numbers. Seattle is called a trade dependent city where one in every five persons is engaged in trade related activities. It is called King County, named after civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. It homes 1.5 million people thus making it one of the largest counties of the USA. The population of the

King County is almost evenly divided between the city of Seattle, the county's other incorporated cities and towns and unincorporated suburban and rural areas.

The presence of big giants like Boeing plant, Micro soft etc. with their omnipotence makes Seattle a high-tech city. Brain-drain from other places is, reportedly, taking place with good brains flocking into Seattle towards high-tech jobs. And it is education which goes to

his first aeroplane ride in 1915. The Boeing company was established in 1916 — as a builder of wooden float planes. Today it is the largest aeroplane manufacturing company in the world, rolling out one of USA's top most export products. With the roll-out of its 777 model in 1995, Boeing is poised to compete successfully in the 21st century. We were told that there are enormous spin-off economic activity in the King County. The Boeing purchases

billion miles — the equivalent of more than 250,000 round trips to the moon! Some more mind-boggling numbers: each day Boeing jetliners around the world carry 2.5 million passengers; the company's telephone network handles more than one million telephone calls per day; the main factory building at the Everett site (which we visited) is the equivalent in size of 911 national football courts, 75 national football league fields, 2,142 homes of 2,000 square feet each; if all the covered floor space (factory and office) where Boeing employees work were housed in an office building, it would take more than 30 skyscrapers of the size of New York's Empire State Building.

We visited Tellico village in Blake Island off Seattle. Few years back, the APEC Summit was held in that village. We were entertained with a dance drama called "Gone with the winds" staged by the Red Indians to capture their rich heritage.

By and large, the visit to Seattle impressed us not because of its technological supremacy alone but also because of its abundance of cultural assets. Forest and fisheries are what gave Seattle its start in 19th century. Seattle's economy is not merely air-space or micro soft based, it's growing diversified with resource-based industries emerging as main economic activities. We left the kindly King County the 6th May for lowland agriculture dependent state.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



explain the difference between Seattle and others: nearly one-third completed bachelor's degree and one-tenth have graduation. The University of Washington alone accommodates 34,000 students and is one of the largest research institutions in the country. For a larger part, the high-tech plants dictate the curricula of the university. However, the campus is covered by trees and green grasses to remind me of my campus, Jahangirnagar University back home.

The visit to the Boeing plant would remain as the most memorable and vivid. A dozen years after Wright Brothers' first flight, William E. Boeing took

approximately \$7 billion in goods and services from 5,000 suppliers in and around Washington State. Some of its inputs also come from countries like India, Pakistan and Korea and it has its large regional networks. How much is the revenue? In 1994, it exceeded \$21 billion and more than half of its revenue is from foreign sales worldwide. Boeing and its subsidiaries employ about 105,000 people. Of the 14,000-plus commercial airline's made since the jet age began, Boeing has built almost 8,000. They are flown by about 600 airlines, business and governments and have carried an estimated 13 billion passengers some 130

Corruption sans Punishment

A proper team of honest lawyers and independent police officers should be assembled and put in place to efficiently conduct prosecution in a manner which would inspire public confidence.

NOT long ago, people read with refresh the law court's agility in issuing notices to those involved in *hawala* and other scandals. They applauded when the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was supervised by the judges directly. It was a catharsis of people's pent-up anger against corruption. They felt relieved.

Today, they read with bitterness the acquittal of political leaders and former ministers. The courts may justifiably say that there is no evidence to convict the accused. But the judgements have not convinced many. People just shrug their shoulders in disbelief. Their perception is that, dishonest politicians are being left off, both by government and the judiciary.

Probably, there is something in the allegation that the CBI did not do its homework seriously. When the agency does not produce any evidence to substantiate the case it has filed, what inference people should draw. It seems that CBI Chief Joginder Singh has been more occupied with hogging headlines than with gathering evidence. Still, it is not explainable why the CBI sleuths failed to produce anything tangible even after scouting practically the entire world. Indeed, what has been alleged against the CBI has come true.

Vineet Narayan, who first brought to light the *hawala* case through an application under public interest litigation, has complained to the court against the CBI's lackadaisical attitude. In his application he has written: "The public is entitled to an answer and the question arises whether the investigation and, more importantly, the prosecutions already instituted are safe in the hands of the CBI and its present team."

Anil Dewan, the lawyer helping him, made a written submission as far back as on April 9, 1996, that the "CBI is weakening the case in an effort to help the accused." Three weeks later, he again pointed out in writing: "Deliberate inaction of the CBI... (creates) responsible apprehension and perception that no action is being taken by the CBI to please its political masters."

Still, the agency did not act. There was no raid on any house, no questioning of associates of the accused, not even the mod-

icum of effort to trace money. At one time, even Delhi High Court got so exasperated that it stated that it "was clearly an attempt to mislead and over-reach this court."

The judgements in the *hawala* case are bad enough but the verdict on the St. Kitts case is worse. PV Narasimha Rao has himself admitted that he had the signature of VP Singh's son, Ajeya Singh, authenticated at the behest of "the highest," meaning Rajiv Gandhi. K. K. Tewari obtained Ajeya Singh's passport renewal application from the Indian High Commission in London where it had been submitted for extension. This too has been proved. True, Chandraswami was involved. But he was only the hatchet man. The conspiracy was that of Rajiv Gandhi, Rao, Tewari and few others.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

I only hope that the CBI will go in for an appeal to the Supreme Court. The judgements on the *hawala* and the St Kitts case are palpably wrong. Only the Supreme Court can set things right. Even earlier, it came to the rescue whenever the cases took a wrong direction. Justice J N Verma, now the chief, pursued the *hawala* case almost single-handedly. He even made the CBI Director responsible to the court and kept watch on how the case progressed. He was criticised for judicial activism. But he did not relent. Once the case went to other courts, it was out of Justice Verma's orbit. And we see the results.

The exasperation of people is evident from the call by the Lok Sevak Sangh, a Gandhite institute of constructive workers. It has announced a relay fast for 24 hours if the Lok Pal Bill is not introduced in the first week of the monsoon session of parliament. The series of fasts will last till parliament has the Bill before it.

"We are unable to bear the agony of political corruption any longer and are unable to tolerate the reluctance of our political leadership to accept, even after 50 years of indepen-

deny it. But he is non-pulsed over the government attitude. He says that the Deve Gowda government pressed them hard "to come out with a report as soon as possible," because it wanted to pass the Bill in the budget session. But after the submission of the report on May 9, he says, "The government has been completely silent and I don't know when it will be brought up."

I am told that the government is afraid of a St. Kitts case where someone can open a false account in the name of the prime minister. It is being argued that by the time the charge is proved wrong the damage to the PM's reputation would have been done. Such an allegation was hurled at former prime minister V P Singh. None would take such a charge against a minister seriously. A prime minister's credibility — and the Lok Pal's vigilance — will be the best insurance. By excluding the prime minister from the Bill, the old debate will start once again and delay the Bill.

Even when the Bill is enacted, certain outmoded rules will need to be revised. The government permission is required before booking a government

servant or minister. These rules are of Rajiv Gandhi's days. He had framed them, prohibiting the CBI from registering any case against officials of the rank of Joint Secretary and above. The United Front government has added bank officials of the rank of general manager to the list.

I see no logic behind the order to get the government permission. Protection against frivolous litigation is understandable. We are not talking about the public but the CBI, which can never be a party to false case, then why such a rule? I know of a Punjab IAS officer, who has been charged for the last decade, but the government permission has not yet come through. Even in Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav's case, it is the court which has hastened the government permission by fixing June 24 as the deadline. Otherwise, the government might have decided the matter in his own sweet will.

Prior permission is only an irritation. The real challenge is the independence of the investigating agencies. No doubt, Prime Minister Gujral has himself kept away from the CBI. But I am talking about the institution. Persisting with the CBI will not help. The inaction of the agency's officers leads one to believe that they have no heart to carry out their duties as required by the law. In fact, there is every likelihood that in the unstable political situation of the country, the CBI will be under immense pressure. It will be still more afraid to act.

The Lok Pal should have an independent investigation agency to pursue the cases referred to him. The CBI can be merged into that agency. A proper team of honest lawyers and independent police officers should be assembled and put in place to efficiently conduct the prosecution in a manner which would inspire public confidence.

America faced a similar situation. The Watergate scandal made no headway so long as the FBI had the charge of the case. The truth came out after an independent public prosecutor was appointed. He constructed an independent machinery for the enquiry and proved the charges. Only then did President Richard Nixon face the truth that he had to quit.

Bad teacher?

Sir, A few days ago, I met a school teacher. We shared a lot of views regarding the problems of education in the country. She told me boldly: "A teacher is a very minor part for a student. I'll try but it's a losing cause. Only parents should have idea how to raise their children or what ideology they will follow in their social life. They should teach their children first what she or he will do the rest of their life."

She told me this without any hesitation. I fail to understand how a teacher can be only a simple part.

Mostafa Sohel
4/8 B.B. Quarter
Banani, Dhaka.

OPINION

From the Frying Pan into the Fire?

Naeela K Sattar

"Safety", no doubt, is a relative term. If you're not safe in the house, may be streets are safer. Or better still, the jails. Even better — vagrant homes (very suitably renamed "rehabilitation centres" or "shelter homes"). No harm in calling a spade a spade, but whatever terminology one may denote to these places, they are detention centres. Whether ruled by the Ministry of Home or the Social Services, they sometimes detain people against their will for undefined reasons and for undefined periods. Whether or not there are flowers in the compound, better food and training facilities than the jails, these are places where women and children of various ages, categories, backgrounds and classifications are jumbled together. Here, Hashi (alias) 26, and the ex-sex workers stay with Rupa (9) the lost girl, Shelly (14) the garbage picker is now going to be befriended by someone like Seema Chowdhury whose only offense was marrying the person of her choice.

So what is going to be different for the safe custodians of the new millennium? "Out of sight, out of mind", the saying goes. Out of sight of the law-enforcing agencies, non-caring jail administration and lawyers, legal aid associations and all those hoop has of the complex legal procedures but surely not from the scavengers who have a knack of smelling out their preys wherever they may be!

Now the government plans to change the "rules" of safe custody. (Plan to change rules of "safe custody" Daily Star, May 17, 1996). Practices yes, vile and unfounded by any legal mandates; but rules? The only "rules" we are aware of are the words of cautions, warnings, regrets and even directions given by the High Court through its judgements time to time about "not" putting people in safe custody in jails. Is that "rule" going to be changed? Are these so-called "rehabilitation homes" going to function as "neutral homes" with protection to the inmates needed as important witness? Are they going to be caged in like the vagrants and given sermons on decency and morality and forced to learn skills which will give them economic independence? Is that what Seema Chowdhury (who

died in safe custody in Chittagong after 5 years of incarceration) had needed? What about something called "constitutional rights"? (Forget human rights and don't even mention women or children's rights)

At least, one thing is apparent: the government with a steady pressure inside and outside the Courts is now ready to reckon with this issue (better late than never). Congratulations! But, please don't get derailed! Safe custody is a witness protection plan. It exists in almost all the countries. Yet, in most countries they are allowed to continue with their normal social, educational and economic activities under state supervision and surveillance. In extreme cases, they are given new identities and a new life until disposition of the case even after fearing repercussions. Such service cannot be imagined to the teeming millions in Bangladesh. The least that the government can do is to classify them separately from vagrants, vagabonds, undertrial prisoners and house them separately under strict protection in an environment conducive to their normal way of life.

Finally, why do Courts entertain the "kidnapping" cases when it is obvious that parents use the law on kidnapping as a measure seeking vengeance against undesirable marital unions of their offsprings (usually inter-religious unions). One can rarely, if ever, see this activism in Courts when unequal social strata parents themselves arrange undesirable unions of under-age girls. If the Courts and lawyers are conscious, the hidden motives behind these cases could possibly be taken cognizance of and judicial discretion applied to settle these by simply taking a statement from the girl in good and kind confidence and respecting her wish. So if the government is happy to change "rules" please make sure that those are changed are the ones of repressions, depressions and oppressions and the new ones ensure the rights of all as humans beings. Please don't put innocent people in homes meant for correcting people with deviant social behaviour and throw them from the frying pan into the fire.

The writer is an advocate at the Supreme Court

Hostel for Working Women

M M Ahmad

The regime is committed to the emancipation ('empowerment' is the catch-word) of women and to equal job opportunities. For the single unattached woman employee, it is easier to find a job than a place to stay in this conservative society, now changing fast with economic and development trends. The accommodation problem has to be solved, so why not try some pilot projects?

Government initiative and encouragement is necessary for establishing a chain of hostels all over the country. Before the private sector will invest in this sector, during the first phase, the NGOs (several combined tie-ups between local and foreign NGOs) may set up some pilot projects, to enable the private investors to evaluate the market and then come in. They may take over the hostels under the pilot projects after a year or so, and then go for the chain in phases.

Initially the government

may provide some facilities and amenities to reduce the capital expenditure, to encourage employees/workers with modest income to be boarders. Later the type of accommodation available may be graded, say, according to star-rating system (economy, one-star, 2-star, etc.).

The hardest part of the operation is to evolve and set up a code of standard practices with this new type of clients, namely the boarders, who are at present not at all happy with the facilities and arrangements available both in the public and private sectors. There are several sensitive areas of service: security, privacy, personal freedom, minimum standard of food and room services, including hygienic environment and stable essential utilities. Various models are available abroad (advice may be available from agencies such as the YWCA who have wide international experience). The target is clear: good hostels at popular prices, with acceptable standard of service.

The Power of Silence

A Smoker

I am penning these thoughts on the No-Tobacco Day sponsored by UN and the rich, industrialised, developed societies; and which is humbly and obediently imitated by the Third World, because the latter have no choice or option to offer to the propaganda machine controlled by the West.

Why we cannot offer them the choice to start a campaign against the widely popular, and universal passion for drinking (alcohol), which has been accepted by their societies? Can we have some data: the world has more smokers or drinkers? Millions of smokers and non-smokers drink daily, privately and socially. Drinking is a part of life in the rich and poor countries (what is the lure, psychologically speaking?).

The bad effects of drinking are many times worse than smoking. But there is no propaganda by those who 'control' this planet Earth, to stop or cut down on drinking. Why?

A smoker can drive a car (the senses under control); run his office, and carry out his normal duties or business, and not damage his liver (which is the more medical priority: the liver or the lungs)? A smoker does not show the symptoms of being drunk, intoxicated, and of abnormal behaviour. Drinking breaks up homes and families. The evils of drinking need not be enumerated here, as these are well-known even to the non-smokers and the anti-smoking campaigners. Why the non-smokers love the drinkers and support them indirectly?

Even non-drinkers do not campaign for non-drinking, but non-smokers are pointing the finger at the smokers all the time, on the plea and danger of 'passive smoking'; and sticking no-smoking signs everywhere.

This is, of course, senseless, as the non-smokers 'smoke' as equivalent of three cigarettes a day by inhaling Dhaka's polluted air; this is not advertised by the anti-smoking lobbies, official or otherwise.

The UN should ponder over the bad effects of drinking, instant, short and long-term, and start a worldwide campaign; and threaten sanctions on member-nations where drinking is popular. Why this silence and discrimination? Perhaps the world's most powerful present may like to respond to this fair question, as the lone wolf threatening sanctions indiscriminately over weaker countries (except Israel), in the self-appointed role of police man and pious man. Hell will be surely bigger than heaven, population-wise!

This is the power of silence in not using the power of the mass media in a fair and impartial manner. Campaign against drinking is taboo. Why? When we cut trees we are threatened with the dangers of the greenhouse effect (disputed by a section of the scientists who has on the zoned-out agenda line). The new marginal users are hauled up, forgetting the past users since the industrial revolution started.

Propaganda 'Time capsules' are released by the likes of the so-called G7 group to protect their own interest in the guise of scientific jargons and garbage (why non-smokers have cancer; and why such a large percentage of the victims are non-smokers?). All injustices are permissible to save one's life. As a harmless and honourable smoker, I feel cheated when I am singled out for official reprimand and sermons, and the drinkers are condoned indirectly.

To the Editor...

Who visits the redlight area?

Sir, It is learnt that several hundred prostitutes were evicted from Kandupatti in old Dhaka by a group of local people. About one thousand people, chanting slogans against prostitution and armed with lethal weapons attacked the brothel at 11am on May 12, 1997, and made a havoc inside it.

It is quite understandable and justified, as prostitution is a very hateful occupation, people will feel revulsion living near to such an establishment.

But, those who live in the redlight area are the victims of circumstances, they are compelled to earn their livelihood in that way, they are not doing it for any other reasons. They are doomed for life and could not escape from it, if by chance anyone is lucky to escape, she is not accepted by the society.

But is it not a fact that a section of males are the true culprits in this respect? No product would be on sale if there are no customers for it, I think it could be applicable in this case.

So, I ask those people, who are taking drastic steps against prostitutes, to also hunt down

those persons engaged in different occupations, living in different places, who frequent these redlight areas? I think those males are thousands times more guilty as they are hiding their true nature and many of them must be deceiving their wives.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong.

Premium Bus route

Sir, The present Premium Bus route from Hotel Sheraton to Park Avenue via Bally Road via Kakrail Mosque does not serve many, particularly girl students studying at Vicaroon Nessa Noon Girls' School/College, Moghbazar Girls' High School, Siddeswari Girls' College on Bally Road and Habibullah Bahar College on Circuit House Road. People including many girl students from Tongi, Uttara, Banani, Mohakhali, Farm Gate daily come to attend offices, schools/colleges located at Bally Road.

Many gazetted and semi-government officers' quarters and flats, and judges' quarters are located across Park Avenue.

Persons from the areas namely Moghbazar Square, Park Avenue, Bally Road, Circuit House Jame Masjid and a little bit further Santinagar, Malibagh Squares have to come to Hotel Sheraton via Minto Road to board Premium Bus. Only private cars and government and semi-government staff buses ply on Minto Road. There's no rickshaws. So it is costly, inconvenient to go up to Hotel Sheraton.

If Premium Bus is diverted towards East straight from Hotel Sheraton to Park Avenue via Minto Road crossing Bank Bhawan, Office of Deputy Police Commissioner (CID) and then towards the south with a new stop at Bally Road Square in front of Officers' Club crossing Circuit House Jame Masjid and afterwards reaching the present route via Kakrail Mosque, many people, particularly girl students, will be benefited. There is no public procession, political agitation at Park Avenue because of its serenity due to government officers' and judges' quarters, and Metropolitan Police Headquarters.

In this context, we urge upon Premium Bus authorities to di-