

Health Service Concern

The government is reportedly engaged in a serious exercise to find the ways and means to rejuvenate country's anaesthetised health sector.

There have been renewed accent on the basic priorities like reproductive health, simple curative care etc. A more client-oriented approach has been suggested and efforts to improve hospital-based services in concert with NGOs and private sector have been counselled.

While a larger and better regulated role of the private sector is an important managerial aspect highlighted in the greater part of the package, attitudinal overhauling of the people involved in health sector seems to be holding the key to everything that is being planned or envisioned now.

Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf informed us the other day of the appointment of some 1,042 doctors and the government decision for creating the posts of another 394. How much these new appointments are going to contribute to the improvement of service when the people being entrusted with the job are so full of complaints about being posted outside the metropolis?

The theme of service among health sector activists seems to have been put on a never ending holiday in this land. The attitude of the parents is largely responsible for this problematic reality.

Instead of imbuing them with the ideals of a profession, parents here treat their children as their dream-boats that can have no room for humanity in general.

What we need in this country to bring about desirable effectiveness in the health sector, ahead of the concrete facilities, is a fresh dose of idealism and feeling for fellow human being among the medics.

For that to happen teachers not only have to talk idealism but have to ensure that their wards studying medical science inculcate the spirit that it is not wealth as a return against the investment of merit and money but health of the suffering that should be uppermost on their minds.

Feeding the World

Calls were aired and commitment reaffirmed as countries observed the World Food Day that, in keeping with the unabated march of scientific breakthroughs to keep the Malthusian dread of doomsday at bay, saw an unprecedented flurry of motivational activities that had the stamp of both glamour and mundane.

While it is evident that the world will have an answer one way or the other to the mathematical odds of fixed resources against the enhanced demands of increasing population, there is no guarantee this will necessarily take care of every hungry stomach. The worry does not lie in the fact that for the ninth consecutive year the world is witnessing decline in external assistance to agriculture, nor in the huge figure of \$166 billion required by the developing countries each year to adequately step up food production over the next 15 years but that an integrated approach based on humanism and cooperation is yet to evolve to banish the image of a hungry human once for all.

Nowhere FAO's call this year for government initiative to help the farmers is more relevant than in Bangladesh where the illiterate and unaided farmers have been manfully sticking to the task of feeding an alarmingly increasing population. The government has unveiled an ambitious plan for raising food production to 25 million tons from an average 19 but what it needs to focus on, something we counselled earlier in this column, is supporting the small farmers. In a world that is inexorably shifting to a diversified notion of food, think-tanks cannot afford to be conceptual prisoners. Afforestation as an idea seems to be at the heart of today's environmental concern. Why not use it to the good effect of adding to nation's feed by planting more fructiferous trees?

The government also has to network with the private sector and the NGOs to educate the peasant who needs to be informed of the perils of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

An Old World Hero

Recognition of merit and service has throughout history been full of vagary. Societies fallen in evil times seem to have a spilling supply of this problem — social focus is most times on those that did neither have a past deserving recognition nor will have a future worth remembering. Society ticks on, as it has to, benefiting from the travails of here a moral man, there a workaholic or quality-maniac. Such a one was dear old legendary huntsman, known by no better than a humble Pachabdi Gazi, as humble as his origin but extraordinary by his feat. This killer of at least 28 man-eating Royal Bengals died on October 10 in native Satkhira in depressing circumstances of want and indignity.

A woman circumnavigates the world in a yacht all by herself — and the world marvels at her. For the rest of her life she is relieved of the worries of getting jobs, etc. The world hardly benefits from her exploit. Still her performance is valued by all the nations. Pachabdi did not only excel in the difficult art of stalking a man-eater and getting it at the end, he did much more than that.

He was an insurance against molestation by tigers of the mawalis and other small poor communities that live off the Sundarbans. His record would remain unsurpassed as tigers are no more prizes of big game hunting and are now to be protected and increased to fill a sanctuary of a forest.

The last of the old world heroes that fought the most ferocious and powerful in the canine group over tens of thousands of years all over the globe, Pachabdi is well worth remembering as one consigned to history.

They Dare to Dream and Dare to Act

"Among the Kung San hunter gatherers of the Kalahari desert", writes Carl Sagan, "when two men... would begin to argue the women would reach for their poison-arrows to put the weapons out of harm's way." And he wonders whether in our world today, "the women — and the children — will put the poison arrows out of harm's way."

I grow old I grow old I shall wear the bottom of my trousers rolled... Do I dare to part my hair behind Do I dare!

I never dared except for once. I was a mature seventeen then. Not me alone, but with my peer group. Our elders advised caution. We said No. Our language is our birthright and our culture. We spoke truth to power and power succumbed.

Seventeen, perhaps, is a magic age. Twenty-seven years back, it was the seventeen-year olds who flaunted death and agony in their face. They came from the cities and from the countryside. Together they won the freedom for their people to shape their own lives and the country themselves.

Power operates at various sites. A large number of autonomous darings or should I say, movements from below are required to transform the power-relations. An Asian minister of agriculture, herself a political and social activist once told me about the powerlessness of the peasant farmers and the marginalised women in rural Bangladesh. "Subvert authoritarian male ego at home, workplace and beyond," she said. "Subvert downward directed power at strategic sites where it impinges on the creative freedom of the farming communities and the disadvantaged. Subvert reductionist science alienated from social practice. Women and peasant farmers are helpless individually. Organised, they are empowered. They can then stand up to the establishment — political, bureaucratic or pedagogic. And dependence is transformed into collective self-reliance."

As I was listening to the minister, I recalled a grandfathers peasant farmer told me in China long time ago. "We, the peasants, are like cherry-flowers. Red and beautiful to look at. But one gust of wind we are scattered about. If we get together in a bundle like the roots of a tree, come hail or storm, we shall overcome."

Professor Yunus, who dared to turn the banking system on its head, has proved it not only for the resource poor women in the countryside of Bangladesh, but elsewhere. Peer-groups of the disadvantaged have got together and claimed their fundamental right of access to credit. Today, they are the ma-

jeority share-holders of the Grameen Bank. Power-relations are changing not only within their homes, but also in the community and the sophisticated banking institution.

In a similar vein, women farmers in Tangail and in the villages of Western Java, Jogjakarta, and Madras are standing up to the powerful pesticide-lobby and the conventional green-revolution wisdom. They are saying 'No' to chemicals and asserting community rights over seed-selection, preservation and germ-plasm conservation.

Ibn Sudaryanti is 45 years old and a mother of four children. She and her husband have several small rice-fields in the village of Ngalang in Jogjakarta. In total they form about 4 acres. Her husband does the land preparation and fertilising. She takes care of pest-management and water-control on the basis of his field observations of predator-pest ratio, health of the plant and overall eco-system analysis. She says, "It has been three years since I have used any pesticide. Sure there have been pests, but I haven't sprayed since the friendly insects were there to take care of the pests. Our yields have been the same as our neighbours. No matter how busy I am I keep up my work in the rice-field. I need to know what is happening in the field and what actions I need to take. Also, this field work serves to increase the trust of other farmers."

Ibn Sudaryanti and the farmers' group she leads have succeeded to establish their village as a 'poison-free' area. They do their observations and experiments in their field laboratories and they continue to wonder at the intricate balance of nature and the inter-relatedness of all beings — sun, water, soil, plant, insects and people. The lives of the crops, they are aware now, have to be joined to the lives of the people in one comprehensive group of the interrelationship of the whole.

Sudaryanti explains, "Before getting together in their own field school, farmers were very dependent on pesticides dealers and government officials. If

there are a few pests in the field, these farmers run to agriculture officers for help and spray pesticides. Now, they are able to think for themselves. They make their own observations and discoveries. They take their decisions and act on their own."

Another anecdote from Tonle Bate, a village approximately 35 km from Phnom Penh: It was April, 1996. Farmers there were conducting their own field-school for growing poison-free rice. The minister for agriculture came to visit.

After his formal speech he sat down on the ground with farmers and asked what they were doing. The farmers explained the role of natural enemies in the control of rice-

eat. Farmers: "What type of grass-hoppers are you talking about?" Scientists: "Why do you ask?" Farmers: "Because the short-horned grass-hopper only eats small amounts of rice leaf. And the long-horn grass-hopper, which is more common, eats the egg masses of stem-borers. Why should we kill them?"

Farmers learn to work with nature. They become experts. As a farmer-researcher in Kalensari village in Western Java told me, "Guests come to visit and learn about our story. I tell them we hold doctorates in rice-production."

Coming back to our neighbouring country, let me recount the story of a day in the life of Sreemati Radha, a one acre farmer in the village of Melgottivakkam in Madras.



pests pointing to a series of large eco-system diagrams which they had prepared during the preceding weeks. At a certain point, the minister interrupted:

Minister: "How do you know that the spiders are eating the leaf-hoppers?"

Farmers: "Because, sir, we have observed it in the insect zoo."

The farmers then showed the minister the zoo which they had constructed. Inside a cage made from clear plastic was a pot containing a rice plant and a combination of insects. Soon the minister was on his hands and knees with his nose up against the plastic. After some moments he announced "I saw it!" He then turned to the officials who had accompanied him and said "I am learning something from these farmers."

A young researcher thought that he would show off his knowledge and put the farmers in their place:

Researcher: "Spiders can eat leaf-hoppers, but how do you kill grass-hoppers? They

are too big for the spiders to eat."

05:00 am, Friday morning, Smt Radha wakes up earlier than usual. She finishes the laundry soaked the night before and prepares food for her family. By 06:30 am she is already in the tiny vegetable-garden in the backyard. She waters the plants. She goes back to the house to prepare for the weekly training session in the field school of her village, Melgottivakkam. She gathers her group members Ramani, Ranjani, Rosie, Venita and Yammar. They discuss about the tasks in the field school that day and divide the assignments, namely field experiment observation, defender-pest dynamics, nutrient management etc.

It is 07:30 am. Some 30 farmers get together in the field. Mr Raghu, a paddy-farmer in less than one hectare holding explains the flow of the day's assignment for the five groups

and the rationale behind each activity.

After this Radha and her group, as also others armed with their own note-books, sweep nets, and plastic bags go to their respective areas in the farm-site. It is divided into six plots for the five groups.

Radha's group observe the water in the field. It is stagnating. Divided in pairs, they calculate the pests and natural enemies in approximately 10 hills per pair.

A nearby group is observing the spider population while yet another is carrying out defoliation experiment against leaf-folders.

By 12:00 noon, the field work is over. Radha and her friends clean their feet in the water-channel and come to the make-shift discussion space, open on all sides with palm-thatch on top. They squat on the mats covering the mud floor. One draws the sample plant. Another one looks at the insects she has collected through a magnifying glass and draws the same. Her little son sits beside her carrying the crayons she will use for colouring the insect. Another one struggles with the pencil pen to write the brief analysis report for the group. Some others compute the numbers of tillers and number of leaves per tiller.

The charts and reports of each group are held up by designated members for all to see.

Smt Ramani from Radha's group presents her report. They have observed 12 pests and around 35 natural enemies. The ratio being 1 is to 3, the ecological balance is most favourable. She explains that the field needs to be dried and top dressing applied to the plant.

Another group reports that the number of friendly insects identified in the field are lower than the previous week. A farmer asks what will happen to the insect-pests in response to that situation.

Smt Radha speaks up. She explains that the presence of defenders, even if few in number, is already an assurance that the pests will not be able to destroy the entire crop and that there is minimal effect until the damage reaches the economic threshold level. One natural en-

emy can take care of five to even fifteen pests.

Next comes the special topic, "which parts of the human body are affected by pesticide sprays?" Some farmers report that it is the lower part of the body which is most affected. One farmer explains the different percentages of the spray affecting different parts of the body. The other participants agree. They also point out that because of spraying, mud-fish, cat-fish and frogs have disappeared from the rice fields, thus making pest-resurgence possible.

The women in Smt Radha's village have formed their own self-help group. Empowered by group-solidarity, they have eradicated alcohol abuse from the village.

From the woman-activist in Madras to 10-11 year olds in a rural primary school in Chaudagram, Comilla. Led by the headmaster's wife, they spend a day in the week wading happily through the paddy-fields of their parents and elders.

Knee-deep in mud, they observe the health of the plant and the presence of different insects. They collect specimens and wonder why nature is the way it is. Field trip over, they go back to the class-room. They draw up eco-system diagram and there are colourful insect art-works. The insect-zoos which they have put together themselves provide the basis for conducting hands-on experiments. They determine which of the insects are predators and parasites of the insects. They are intrigued with the infinite subtleties of interaction in Nature. They need to be cared for, cherished and encouraged. But encouragement is not enough. Science in field-schools provide them with the essential tools to think with.

And that brings me to the end of my story. I recall a passage from Carl Sagan's book, "Science in a Demon-haunted World".

"Among the Kung San hunter gatherers of the Kalahari desert", writes Carl Sagan, "when two men... would begin to argue the women would reach for their poison-arrows to put the weapons out of harm's way." And he wonders whether in our world today, "the women — and the children — will put the poison arrows out of harm's way."

Perhaps they will. Because they dare to dream and dare to act.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Israel's Favourite King Comes to its Rescue

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

King Hussein made an emotional speech at Yitzhak Rabin's funeral, which was fine. The King canceled an European trip and flew to victimised by a deranged Jordanian soldier. He released Israeli Mossad agents attempting murder on his soil, to carry out another murderous mission. A recent Israeli poll showed that King Hussein is the most popular Arab in Israel.

What gave credence to the story was that Israel suddenly released the spiritual leader of the Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and several Palestinian and Jordanian prisoners from jail. This at a time when Israel was pressuring Yasir Arafat to apprehend Hamas leaders. Israel released more Hamas members than Arafat could put in jail! King Hussein continued to insist that there was no deal with Israel.

Finally, on October 6, an Israeli army helicopter went to Amman and flew the two Mossad agents back to Israel in full view of the world. Press. His Majesty King Hussein still insists there was no deal. What actually happened is intriguing. The two men approached Hamas leader Meshal as he got out of his car and headed for his office. They gently put something to his head momentarily. Meshal did not feel anything. His bodyguard, who witnessed the incident, chased the two men down and got into a fierce fight with them. A police patrol arrived and arrested all the three men. Within hours, Me-

shal was feeling bad. He started vomiting and having difficulty breathing. Suddenly everyone realised what had happened. Incensed, King Hussein demanded that Israel provide the antidote and doctor to save Meshal's life. Israel complied. The hot line between Israel and Amman became hotter. King Hussein threatened to cut off diplomatic relations with Israel, for using Jordanian territory to launch state-approved terrorism. When Netanyahu went to Amman secretly to apologise, the King refused to see him!

America ordered Israel to do whatever that was necessary to mollify the king. Hence the prisoner release. Meshal himself was released from hospital six days later. At the end of it all, the two Mossad agents went home to carry out another mission. Now that the truth is out, will King Hussein continue to insist that there was no deal? Why did Israel use fake Canadian passports? Because the Canadians are perceived as harmless, who do not retaliate.

Why did Israel choose Jordanian soil for the crime? Because they know that when the chips are down, the Jordanian king will bail them out. The Muslim world has always known an unpalatable fact — if Egypt, not Jordan, was put in charge of the West Bank and the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock, during the partition of Palestine, they would still be in Muslim hands. The West deliberately created a weak link in the Arab defense against Israel — Jordan.

Their unholy scheming was made easier by the current King's grandfather, Abdullah's, insistence that, as the heir to the Hashemite kingdom, he had a right to be the custodian of Islam's third holiest site. Especially after he lost the custodianship of the two holiest sites, Makkah and Madinah, to the Saudis. It is said that the British Premier Winston Churchill took just one morning to draw up the boundaries of Jordan. However, it was King Abdullah, King Hussein's grandfather, who did the great-

est damage to the Muslim cause by earlier accepting the infamous Balfour Declaration, that promised a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. King Abdullah paid dearly for the betrayal — he was assassinated in Jerusalem. Because King Hussein's father was mentally unstable, the Kingship skipped one generation, and the western-educated teenager became King Hussein. Without regard to Israel's overwhelming military superiority, King Hussein joined Egypt, Syria and the rest of the Arab world in attacking Israel, in the "six-day" war in 1967. On the third day of the war, Israel counter-attacked the Jordanian forces, and very quickly over-ran the whole of West Bank, and Muslim East Jerusalem.

Although initially Israel promised not to interfere with Muslim holy sites, lately it has been far more accommodating to Jewish extremists who want to establish their lost temple on the site where Al-Aqsa stands! In the second year (1988) of the Palestinian uprising, the In-

claim, King Hussein gave up his claim to the West Bank. In 1994, he signed a peace treaty with Israel. It was some "peace treaty" — Israel won all the battles! Whereas Egypt got back all of the Sinai peninsula by signing the Camp David Peace treaty in 1979, Jordan got nothing back. The West Bank and East Jerusalem are still in Israeli hands. Moreover, Jordan leased some of Jordanian agricultural lands to Israel for 99 years! During the Gulf War in 1991, I remember seeing Benjamin Netanyahu, then Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister lecture King Hussein disrespectfully on CNN television: "Hussein (not King Hussein or your Majesty), keep out of it (the war)". The New York Times columnist A. M. Rosenthal disdainfully kept referring to "the plucky little king."

How things change when one party gives in. Israel has neutralised Jordan without yielding anything in return. Jordanian airplanes fly in and out of Israel every day. King Hussein made an emotional speech at Yitzhak Rabin's funeral, which was fine. The King canceled an European trip and flew to victimised by a deranged Jordanian soldier. He released Israeli Mossad agents attempting murder on his soil, to carry out another murderous mission. A recent Israeli poll showed that King Hussein is the most popular Arab in Israel. What a surprise!

To the Editor...

ODI spectacles

Sir, "Naughty, naughty, what are you doing?" Waqar Younus must, and his captain and his manager and his country must also give an answer because this is a demand from the cricket lovers who always wish and pray that fair play prevails and through games real friendship develops. Failure to answer will surely mean that the Pakistani team as well as the spectators on the ground, as opposed to those around the TV sets all over the cricketing world, do not want fair play or who have no fear of having to answer to God for their actions. They do not have the capability to even admit that the genuine cricket lovers have not received their due spectacle.

The very fact that skipper Tendulkar had to walk out with the team on the second one-day international or ODI at Karachi stadium on 30th September at the Wills Challenge Cup, speaks for itself. Three large rocks had been thrown from the same place. Three times... which had it been in a place like England would have caused the game to be stopped — totally.

It is the current norm in a cricket game that security at the boundary is a must. Whereas on this particular day nobody seemed to have even bothered the culprit or perhaps culprits, proving that security for the players, as promised by a Karachi Police boss was below the standard. We hope that Pakistan or some spokesman on

behalf shall give us the due explanations.

Syed Monirul Rahman 2/A, East Rayer Bazaar, Dhaka.

Over-loaded trucks and covered vans

Sir, I would like to draw your kind attention to the fact that trucks and covered vans authorised to carry a maximum load of 9.2-ton have been seen violating their load limit. It has been found that 9.2 tons capacity vehicles are frequently carrying much more than the authorised load. Sometimes, those trucks are seen carrying 20 feet loaded containers. The covered vans are also equally flouting the rules by transporting goods weighing more than 15 tons.

Now, in case of articulated trailers, which are specially designed and purpose-built with all necessary technical support for bulk transportation of goods and commodities across much of the world, are being denied the permission to ply along many roads and highways in the country. The reason cited by the authorities for such restrictions is that roads and bridges — particularly the bridges and culverts in Bangladesh lack the strength to take the loads of such trailers. But it may be argued that if those roads, bridges and culverts could take the over-loaded trucks and covered vans, why those should not be able to take

the loads of technically-built articulated trailers whose loads are scientifically distributed onto their axles ensuring that no damage is caused to the roads or bridges and culverts.

In this context, the examples in many neighbouring countries may be cited. Roads and highways in countries like India and Pakistan are comparable to those in Bangladesh. But the authorities in those countries are allowing the plying of articulated trailers in the greater interest of their economy, industries, foreign trade and export.

We hope that ministry of communication, ministry of home affairs, the BRTA and other authorities concerned would look into the matter and take necessary steps to allow articulated trailers to ply roads and highways across the country and stop trucks and covered van from plying roads with the load more than their capacity and 20-feet containers.

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The office timing

Sir, Our Prime Minister is said to have expressed her views before the journalists that the new office timing has afforded enhanced time for works and therefore there is no possibility of reverting to earlier timing. The PM would have done well if

she could please take stock to the real situation accruing out of the changed timing.

In fact, most of the employees in Dhaka offices being not used to such long stay, just make the hours after launch a good leisure devoting to gossip or talk of the town, and loitering from this room to that room.

Candidly speaking, the work output is no better anywhere. The officials are quite dissatisfied at their being compelled to incur extra expenses for launch which they can ill afford, out of their very meagre income. The two-day weekly holiday has come of no use to them. When they can barely keep the wolf from the door it is simply a mockery to ask them to use the 2-day holiday in pastime or social stunts.

If it is boon for anybody, it is for the members of the higher echelon who have the affluence and means to go for excursion or sight-seeing.

As for the people in district offices the new timing has undoubtedly benefited them for when one-day holiday was in practice they used to observe timing from 10am to 5pm but hardly they reported before 10-30 or 11am and very few were seen in offices after 4pm. Now they are doing almost the same but they have gained one extra holiday.

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The Opposition and the Public

Sir, Like me, the peace-loving people of this country are perturbed to read statement of political leaders who threaten to go on the streets if their demands are not achieved. We wonder what is the intrinsic value of the Parliament when political leaders think streets are their alma mater. Why will their money be spent on election and sessions of Parliament? Many would be aghast to read news items when a very responsible opposition leader in party meetings in various places often threatened to go on the street if repression on their party workers are not stopped.

The nation had enough of anarchy. We do not want a turmoil in the society. We want peace and harmony.

When a terrorist is caught with arms or when a person is caught while breaking the law will any peace-loving person support him to go scot-free? For all rational value, a person disturbing peace and tranquility in a society is an outcast which party he belongs to. These are the persons who always try to seek refuge under an umbrella of political parties. Therefore to shed tears for such outcasts and threaten to embark on movement are denying people's urge for peace and tranquility. The political parties should avoid them for greater interest of the nation.

When this done, only then the political parties can reap the fruits of their popularity.

G M F Abdur Rob Park Rd, New DOHS, Dhaka

Price-balancing strategy

Sir, It seems that the present government has developed a tendency of 'price-balancing' with the neighbouring country. In last one year, the government has enhanced the prices of fertiliser and petrol. One of the major reasons, as clarified by the government, is to stop smuggling. With the increase in smuggling of the items like petrol and fertiliser, the people are deprived of getting proper supply. So the price has to be as close as possible with the neighbouring country. What a unique idea? We read in the newspapers of the 2nd Sept. 1997 that the price of petroleum products has increased in our next-door neighbour. Now we shall possibly think of increasing our price once again.

If this policy is adopted, in order to hinder smuggling, we shall possibly find other smuggled items one after another and go for price-balancing. Now the question is: how long shall we continue to do so? The strategy does not seem to be a calculated one.

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