

# Physicians in Need of Healing: Diagnoses of an Ailing Image

by Syed Saad Andaleeb and Chester L. Wolford

**When a collective effort is launched by the medical community to rebuild lost confidences, everybody will stand to gain: Patients will feel better about their treatment and will seek health services in the country; physicians will benefit from a larger pool of clients who are able to pay for services. . .**

**M**EDICINE is traditionally among the most respected professions in the world, and physicians who practice it are among many societies' most respected, even revered, people. Or so we think in Bangladesh (specifically Dhaka), however, physicians may want to look at current perceptions rather than rely on a time-honoured belief that may no longer be true.

In our recent "Benchmark Study on Public Opinions Regarding Various Professions in Bangladesh," the sixth conducted by the Social Survey Unit of Democracywatch, we set out to assess perceptions that randomly-selected groups of middle- and upper-class residents of Dhaka city have of their public servants. Refined by field tests, the final survey was conducted during 10-12 December, 1996. Ultimately, 434 people were interviewed. The data demonstrate that the public are extremely skeptical about physicians, and in several categories of perception, are downright cynical.

On a 1-10 scale (10 being most favourable), physicians

rated a mere 5.94 for competence. The seventeen other attributes on which they were rated are also listed here; each is followed (in parentheses) by the rating received by that attribute: sincere (5.20), fair (5.47), hard-working (6.03), self-ish (5.76), dependable (5.07), arrogant (4.34), knowledgeable (6.44), dedicated (4.55), influential (5.44), patriotic (4.47), courteous (5.10), honest (4.62), irresponsible (4.88), friendly (5.02), trustworthy (5.28), service-oriented (5.09), and over all satisfactory (5.57). Similar and antonymical attributes provided statistical controls to assess the survey's validity and reliability.

To those who often depend on physicians for their lives, how much confidence is a competence score of 5.94 likely to inspire? And when confidence in physicians is low, whom can

they turn to? Consequently, it is not difficult to understand why many of those who can afford it seek health care in India, Bangkok, Singapore, or even further away. Now competence in a profession so specialized as medicine is difficult to assess accurately, especially by people who are not likely to comprehend medicine's intricacies. But what should worry us all in general and physicians in particular is that the perception is so low. What should worry us is that physicians are not seen as trustworthy and that their reputation for honesty is no longer defensible. It is also unnerving that their dependability barely exceeds a score of 5. If people have little confidence in those who treat their illnesses, mend their bones, and minister to their fears, then no one benefits. Not the patient, not the physician, and certainly not

the country.

While readers may draw their own conclusions, and indeed are invited to, we would like to discuss briefly a few additional assessments of our own. The most remarkable feature of the data is that it is so unremarkable. All ratings, for example, fall between 4.34 and 6.44. Very few, it seems, have a high regard for physicians. On the other hand, given that physicians are entrusted with our health and sometimes our lives and, even more importantly, the lives and health of our families, most people believe that physicians must bear a very high standard. And, according to our survey, the public clearly believe that physicians are not living up to that standard.

If this survey is to serve any meaningful purpose, it should behoove physicians to take a

hard look at the numbers. They should ask what it is about themselves that causes such perceptions. They must also ask what they, as a community, ought to do to dispel the fears that are apparent and that can take root and insidiously destroy a basic faith in the bond between patients and their healers. When a collective effort is launched by the medical community to rebuild lost confidences, everybody will stand to gain: Patients will feel better about their treatment and will seek health services in the country; physicians will benefit from a larger pool of clients who are able to pay for services; the government will benefit as the foreign exchange drain is stemmed in this sector, allowing for its reallocation to other critical sectors.

Any benchmark study is useful in itself. But benchmarks

are most useful when they are compared to other data. This study, then, will be repeated. Its results will also be disseminated often and widely. Whether perceptions are improving or not is most certainly to those who are being perceived. An improving trend in the ratings would suggest that the numbers have been heeded. If no changes occur or if the ratings continue to decline, we predict dire consequences for the health of the nation and, consequently, the health of the economy.

It is possible, of course, that our data reflect a general social malaise. But even if that is true, physicians are duty bound to help cure that as well. They might do that by doing whatever is required to improve their image in the eyes of their patients.

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## Easy Solution

Problems of environmental degradation can be ironed out, literally! Christopher Nagel and his team at the Molten Metal Technology in Waltham, Massachusetts, along with Robert Bach, a chemist at the Wayne State University, have arrived at the conclusion that molten iron could do the trick of recycling everything from toxic industrial waste to beer

cans. These unwanted materials, which otherwise pollute the ecosystem, can then be sourced as reusable products with no toxic by-products. Molten iron at 750°C works by breaking them down into their component atoms. The iron then acts as a catalyst, combining the elements to produce useful gases, metal alloys and ceramics.

## Leading Light

**R**URAL households in India rely on lanterns for lighting. But the quality of a commonly used hurricane lantern is abysmal. It produces light equivalent to about one-tenth of that produced by a 60 watt (W) electric bulb. Another type of lantern in use — the Petromax — produces light equivalent to a 100 W electric bulb. However, it is bulky, difficult to ignite and requires frequent cleaning of the nozzle.

Now, the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute, Phal-

tan, Maharashtra, has developed an efficient lantern — the Noorie. This can run on kerosene, ethanol or diesel and has a self-cleaning nozzle. It is light, easy to ignite, and produces light equivalent to that of a 100 W electric light bulb. Besides, it uses about 40 per cent less kerosene as compared to the existing Petromax lanterns. The Noorie lanterns can even be used as cooking stoves by removing the top cover and placing an utensil over the chimney.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

# The High Barind Tract: Its Major Problems and Prospect in Agriculture

by Md Shafiqul Islam

**More researches are being carried out to find ways to minimise agricultural problems in the area and it may be expected that appropriate solution would come out from such efforts.**

**"B**ARIND" is a Persian word. It means elevated land or hills. Since the land is the most elevated in greater Rajshahi district it may be assumed that the name was derived for this reason. On the other hand, there is a belief in Indian mythology that Indra, God of the rains, gives order or Bar. Without the orders of Indra there would be no rain on this vast land having hard red soil. So, 'Bar' and 'Indra' were combined to give 'Barandra' (Barind) (Hussain et al., 1991). This High Barind tract is distinctive physiographic unit situated at the north-west of Bangladesh and is characterised by extreme climatic condition. In respect of agro-ecology and socio-economy, this part of the country has got some peculiarity which affects the farming systems of the area. This part of the country has been called Bangladesh's "green desert" (Brammer, 1985).

The elevation of the High Barind Tract above sea level ranges from 43m in the west and 12-15m in the east. The High Barind Tract is under agro-ecological zone 26 located between north latitudes of 24°25' to 25°10' and east longitudes of 88°10' to 89° and covers an area of 1600km<sup>2</sup> in Rajshahi, Nawabganj and Natogaon districts. The topography of this area is undulating dissected. According to the land use pattern, Single Trans-planted aman (T.Aman) rice predominates in this region (Raisuddin and Nur-E-Elahi, 1984; Brammer, 1985). On a much smaller scale, local Broad cast aus (B. Aus) rice is grown in Khairi-I, which is followed either by T. Aman (if B. Aus is sown and harvested early) or a chickpea (gram)+barley mixture in rabi season. Rabi cropping after T. Aman is rare and usually considerable when irrigation is available (Hamid and Hunt, 1987). Consequently, the cropping intensity is low (129%) in this region (BBS, 1987). But there is a bright prospect of agriculture in

this region subject to proper planning. The major problems and prospect of agriculture in this region is, therefore, discussed in this paper so that the Agricultural researchers, Department of Agricultural Extension and national and regional planners can take appropriate action for the development of agriculture in the High Barind Tract of Bangladesh.

This writeup is based on information gathered through various surveys, rapid rural appraisal participatory rural appraisal, intensive field investigation, research findings and field monitoring. Some secondary information is also used to provide a basis of evidence.

Identified major problems through this survey research along with their probable solutions are given below:

### Low & Erratic Rainfall

Onset and cessation of monsoon rainfall is more erratic in this region than elsewhere in the country. Here the mean annual rainfall ranges from 1285mm (± 311mm) at Godagari in the south and 1402mm (± 295mm) at Nithpur in the north (FAO, 1988), but it falls during the six months (May to October) growing season leaving the area extremely dry during the rest of the year. It is found that only four months (June to September) are wet (received more than 200mm rainfall). Moisture depletion starts from October and at the end of December no residual soil moisture remains available for any crop cultivation which continues up to the end of April (Idrishi et al., 1987). Uncertainty prevails during pre (April-May) and post (October-November) monsoon season which hampers growing aus and rabi crops (Brammer, 1985). Sometimes, T. Aman rice faces drought during flowering and grain filling stages.

For minimising this problem, On-Farm studies were conducted at Farming Systems

Research Site, Saroil, Barind Rajshahi, from 1988-1991 to determine the effect of harvesting rain water at mini ponds for supplemental irrigation in T. Aman and rabi crops that can be grown by using the water. Significant increase in grain yield (52%) was observed by applying one supplemental irrigation during reproductive phase in T. Aman over rainfed. For 1988 and 1989, yield increase in modern variety (MV) rice was 73 per cent and 62 per cent and in local variety (LV) rice was 44 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. For one supplemental irrigation of 6 cm in T. Aman rice, 6.4 per cent of the land area is needed to excavate a pond up to a depth of 3m. If water is not required for supplemental irrigation in T. Aman, rabi crops like wheat and potato can be grown in an area of 800 to 1300 m<sup>2</sup> by using the water of a pond size of 10x10x3m and these crops showed good economic performance. (Islam et al., 1995). Besides, the OFRD, BARI Barind station has developed three improved cropping patterns over farmers existing traditional patterns. All these patterns include green manuring, crop chinha for inclusion of organic matter as well as increasing moisture holding capacity of the soil. Among these three improved cropping patterns two include rainfed rabi crops for increasing cropping intensity in this area. Performance of all these three improved cropping patterns is excellent over existing traditional patterns. So the farmers of this area can follow these improved cropping patterns and can get much benefits under the existing situation. Like Neem, Shishu and Ipil-ipli showed very good performance in the home-steads. For proper utilisation of home-steads, fulfilment of family nutrition and for generating an

extra income for the farmers a vegetable production module including creeper as well as some vegetable patterns has been developed by the OFRD, BARI, Barind team. The creeper vegetables are sweet gourd, ash gourd, sponge gourd, bean, bitter melon, etc. (Kar et al., 1993).

### Sparse Natural Vegetation

Natural vegetation is sparsely scattered and rapidly declining in this area. There is an acute shortage of fuel and timber in the High Barind area. Low rainfall, high temperature during summer and poor soil are some of the ecological factors limiting the vegetation in this area. However, the huge gap between demands and supplies of fuel wood, timber and other forest products has resulted in over exploitation of forest resources both in state forest as well as in village forest of Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 1988). This situation is more serious in the High Barind area. As a consequence, the entire population in the area is badly affected. This situation compelled the farmers to burn, cutting and crop residues which could be otherwise used as organic manure in crop land.

Due to insufficient fallow land in this area it is very difficult to establish any pure stand forest. But it is found that there is a great possibility to grow different multipurpose tree species in the wide crop field bunds. Through various trial and experimentation it is found that Shishu (Dalbargia sisoo), Neem (Azadirachta indica), Babla (Acacia nilotica), Eucalyptus (Eucalyptus spp.) have great potential in the High Barind area (Kar et al., 1990). If the farmers of this area grow these tree species on their crop field bunds, they would be able

to produce fuel wood, timber, fodder and ecological balance will be maintained.

### Shortage of Fodder

Scarcity of fodder is the main factor limiting production in the High Barind Tract. During monsoon season near about 100 per cent crop land is covered by the wet land transplanted aman rice in this area (Shahidullah et al., 1983). This period, i.e., from July-November, there is a serious shortage of fodder. In Barind the farmers are not much attentive to their livestock feeds, farmers usually use dry rice straw as the main feed for cattle and buffalo, and for goat and sheep, grazing is the main source of feed. But during monsoon when the fields remain covered with T. Aman rice, the livestock remain confined which ultimately affects the animal health seriously.

For minimising this problem, a module for production of fodder as well as fuel has been developed for the High Barind Tract by the OFRD, Barind team. This module includes Gohama (Sorghum) as fodder and dhaincha for fuel and green manure seed.

### Low Organic Matter Content of Soil

The organic matter content of the High Barind soils is very low. It ranges from 0.8 to 1.2 cent (Musa et al., 1989). Due to low organic matter content, the soils become very much droughty and cracking is found during dry season which ultimately hampers the crop cultivation. Organic matter is the life of soils which increases the soil fertility as well as moisture holding capacity of the soil by improving the soil physical character. As the rainfall is low and ceases early in this area, so it is essential to increase mois-

ture holding capacity of the soil so that dry season crops can be established.

There is a good scope to increase soil fertility as well as moisture holding capacity of the soil by introducing green manuring crops before T. Aman rice. As green manuring crop dhaincha (Sesbania aculeata), African dhaincha (Sesbania rostrata) and sunhemp (Crotalaria juncialis) cultivation has a great potential in this area. Research was conducted on nitrogen fixing efficiency of dhaincha and sunhemp and their effect on the yield of T. Aman rice at the Farming Systems Research and Development Site (FSRDS) Saroil, and Multilocation Testing Site (MLTS), Nachole, Nawabganj in the years 1988-1990. It was observed from three years findings that dhaincha and sunhemp could produce 17-20 ton and 15-18 ton green biomass/ha at FSRDS and MLTS respectively (Islam and Kar, 1991) which increased the yield of MV T. Aman rice significantly. Green manure could reduce the nitrogenous fertilizer dose by 50 per cent in MV T. Aman rice cultivation and increase the soil moisture holding capacity which ultimately ensures rainfed rabi crops cultivation.

### Underutilised Homestead

About 77 per cent home-steads remained underutilised in the High Barind tract and about 20 per cent farms do not have their own home-steads even (Islam, 1988). It was found that there were few number of trees in the home-steads. Due to low, erratic and uncertain rainfall and low natural fertility of the soil, the vegetables cultivation practices in the home-steads are almost absent in this area. Per head per day vegetable consumption in our

country is only 25g while in the developed country it varies up to 300-500g (Rahman, 1988). In the High Barind area the vegetable consumption rate was far below than that of national average.

For improvement of home-steads several experiments were conducted by the OFRD team of Barind station. From those experiments results it was found that for home-steads of this area Guava, Jujube, Hogpalm, Tamarind, Lemon and Mango were the most suitable fruit tree species. Besides these, some multipurpose tree species

### Free Grazing of Cattle During Dry Season Hampers Rabi Crops Cultivation

Free grazing of cattle, goat and sheep during dry season is a threat to rainfed crop cultivation in this area. After harvesting the T. Aman rice most of the farmers keep their land fallow. But a few farmers have been cultivating rainfed rabi crops after harvesting short duration T. Aman rice. Since most of the land remain fallow, the farmers of this area graze animals freely in the field during this period. So it is very difficult to protect limited area of rabi crops in the field.

This problem can be minimised by cultivating rabi crops in blocks. If group of farmers can take decision combinedly to grow MV short duration rice in a contiguous block, they can grow rainfed rabi crops as well. If they can increase cropping intensity by following improved cropping patterns, the free grazing problem will be ultimately minimised. But the trade-off between grazing and rabi crop cultivation needs careful evaluation.

### Absentee Landlords

Existing social and cultural pattern also acts as a crucial problem in the area. Because, most of the lands in the High Barind area are owned by the absentee land-lords and those

are cultivated by the poor tenant farmers. These tenants are not able to use different inputs adequately specially chemical fertilizers in cultivating crops. Ultimately the yield of crops is not satisfactory. Most of the tenants (80%) cultivate 'barga' (rented in land) under 50-50 crop sharing arrangement; with full input costs (Islam et al., 1990). This sharing arrangement is against the tenant farmers and ultimately they become loser. Besides, the tenants have been facing numerous problems like uncertainty of agreement period, supremacy of the landlords, lack of credit and inadequate technical knowledge. It is necessary to take initiative by the concerned Govt. authority to retain the rights of tenant farmers by organising them and implementing proper rules and regulation. Further, the government can make arrangement for supplying of some expensive agricultural inputs like good quality improved seeds, fertilizers, etc. to the poor tenant farmers at a subsidised price from a convenient source.

### Conclusion

The writeup discussed seven major/fundamental problems related to agriculture in the High Barind Tract of Bangladesh. It is not to say that there are no other problems besides the discussed ones. Rather, it intends to advocate that the unidentified other problems are not as much serious as those identified. Probable solutions of these problems are, however, discussed with support of research findings. There might be some other to minimise these problems. Researchers have been conducting more research to minimise the agricultural problems in this area and it can be expected that more appropriate solution would come out from their efforts.

The writer is Deputy Director of Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), Comilla.

## 'No alternative to technical edn for economic development'

Political adviser to the Prime Minister Dr S A Malek yesterday said the government has given special emphasis on technical education and vocational training for the development of human resources to meet the challenge of the 21st century, reports BSS.

"There is no alternative to technical education for the economic development of the country," Dr Malek said while addressing a discussion on "Human Resources Development" as the chief guest in the city yesterday afternoon.

He said after the assassination of father of the national Bahadur Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the economic development of the country had come to a halt for the last 21 years. The present government has taken major plans for human resources development, he

added.

The discussion, organised by the Bangladesh Polytechnic Teachers' Association (BPTA), was addressed by Director General of Technical Education Abdur Raliq, general secretary of the Institute of Diploma Engineers AKMA Hamid and BPTA general secretary Shamsur Rahman. BPTA president Sakawat Hossain Mollah presided over the function.

The speakers said at present the higher secondary and secondary school certificates are of no help for employment in the country. Large-scale technical and vocational education and training should be the strategy for the development of human resource, they opined.

They hailed the decision of the government for establishing 13 more polytechnic institutes in the country.



Ananda Shankar Roy, a famous Indian author is being presented with a book "Muktijuddha Hridaye Mam" by Muhammad Musa (pen-name Musa Sadik) the author and ex-war correspondent of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra at a function, held recently at Jadavpur University, India. Muhammad Musa attended the function on liberation war of Bangladesh as a special guest.

## Betar to broadcast Sehri programme

Bangladesh Betar will broadcast the 'Sehri' programme during the holy month of Ramadan beginning the first day, reports UNB.

The programme will be broadcast daily at 4:15 am from all centres simultaneously. Bangladesh Betar will also broadcast the 'Hifzul Quran' programme daily at 5 pm during the first 10 days of Ramadan and 5:17 pm from 11th till the end of the month, said a PID handout.

## Woman found dead

By Staff Correspondent

A 40-year-old woman was found dead inside bathroom of a house at Kamrangirchar under Lalbagh thana in the city Saturday afternoon.

Police said the dead was identified as Rehana Begum, wife of Fazal Hawladar. Lalbagh police could not confirm whether it was a suicide or a murder.

Rehana's daughter and son found her dead lying in the bathroom of Rehana's brother's house at Rasulpur at about 4:30 pm. The body bore injury marks made by sharp weapons at her throat.

A small knife was recovered beside the body.

Police said Rehana Begum left her husband's residence following a feud with him about four months ago and started living at her brother's house at Rasulpur.

However, none was arrested in connection with the incident till yesterday police said adding they interrogated a number of persons to ascertain the reality.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

## Jamaat meet today

Jamaat-e-Islami will hold a meeting at Paltan crossing in the city at 4 pm today, reports UNB.

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