

Whose Onus is it Anyway?

A report published in a leading vernacular daily this week has not only revived the chilling sensation down the spine but has also made us ponder if at all there is any one to look after matters concerning public health. If the *Sangbad* report is anything to go by, then there is none.

It informs with fearful clarity how the lone food laboratory of the capital has remained inoperative for seven months. Want of space has been attributed as the problem. We are amazed to know that despite having a sprawling office premises adorned with a fourteen floor edifice, the City Corporation authorities find it difficult to house the laboratory with all its valuable equipment, huddled on one of the floors collecting rust from prolonged disuse!

With the laboratory non-functioning, the food inspectors naturally do not have any job. What strikes one as a tale within the tale in its own right for sheer absurdity is the number of inspectors. For a city with a huge population like Dhaka there are reportedly only 22 food inspectors; eight are on job in the sense they are under some training programme. The rest 14 are just twiddling their fingers or as we are so wont to hear enjoying the status of *bekar*.

Where are we going? We munch mouthful of fried rice or *mudi* with blissful ignorance making light of suggestions they are spiced with fertilizers like urea for their whiteness. The same chemical is said to be responsible for the 'fair complexion' of sugar that taste so sweet for our taste buds as well as somnolent consciousness. It can be a legion. In fact, we are so many light years behind others in consciousness about what we consume everyday that dark possibilities like 'mad cow disease' and 'chicken virus' do not even have a chance to cast shadows on our mind.

What does the City Corporation do? Can it betray the tax paying citizens in the manner it is doing now over a serious issue like public health? For that matter what is the concerned ministry doing? May be, threat to their own precious health which the content of this report poses eminently, will wake them up to their long disused sense of responsibility.

Take the Bull by the Horn

Members of the BCS (Admn) Cadre Action Committee who saw the Prime Minister on Tuesday have expressed satisfaction over the outcome of their meeting with her. Similarly, an earlier meeting of the coordination council of other BCS cadres, *Prokrichi* for short, with the prime minister, had ended on a positive note. So, the warring sides should now make peace and put their shoulders to the nearly clogged wheels of the administration — thanks to their struggle for 'superiority' or 'parity' depending on which side of the coin you look at.

What are the net results of the meetings the BCS (Admn) cadre and the *Prokrichi* have had with the highest political authority in the country? The inter-cadre problems will be for the still amorphous Parliamentary Standing Committee on Establishment Ministry to deal with and recommend solutions to when it comes into existence. The Prime Minister has promised to constitute it during the current session of Jatiya Sangsad. But with the BNP still keeping out of parliament the standing committee cannot be a composite, broad-based body it should be.

That's why we placed emphasis on administrative or executive action in our previous editorial on the subject pending, of course, finalisation of the recommendations of the Public Administration Reform Commission. When the suggestions of PARC or the service reorganisation body are adopted we would need to legislate on them and that is exactly where the select committee and the standing committee of the Jatiya Sangsad will be involved.

We are at a loss to understand why the highly enlightened members of the republic's various cadres are pressing so hard for what are deemed to be short-term benefits when their durable gains are all embedded in the service reorganisation exercise which, we assure them, cannot be put off indefinitely. The government, for its part, mustn't be entrapped in another series of adhocism which might complicate matters for administrative reform.

Tell-tale Signs

Urban experience is not a state of bliss anywhere in the world. But Dhaka looks destined for a dubious distinction in its share of new evils.

One of the more frequently reported urban nuisance in the recent times has been this growing trend of free eating at restaurants by groups of youth. The other day a shop owner was badly mauled for asking such a group to foot the bill. Recently a canteen on the Dhaka University campus was known to have been smashed twice in a week reportedly by the cadres of the ruling party's student front because the owner refused to pay heed to their orders to be entertained *fau* (Bengali for things that you don't have to pay for).

There is now a growing propensity towards anarchy and lawlessness everywhere which strikes fear in the mind about the future of this city of ninety millions. While a section of the society is getting literally filthy rich at the cost of the land's laws and institutions, another is sprouting like the proverbial hydra-headed monster for whom robbing others for self-aggrandisement seems to be as authentic as anybody's birth right. It is the law abiding, relatively unadventurous peace loving people who seem to be worst affected appearing more like one caught between the devil and the deep sea.

Neither the social scientists nor the government think-tank seem to consider them as ominous signs for the days to come. We however do not share their smug complacency and feel unless the reins are held with certain ruthlessness now things might just go out of hand.

From Despair to Hope: A Bleak Journey for the Rural Poor

Implementation of a poverty-oriented rural development strategy involves the giving up of power and resources by those now in control of them.

POVERTY represents a way of life of majority of the developing world's population today. The crisis is concentrated in the countryside. Conventional methods of eliminating, or even alleviating, poverty have as yet been not only unsuccessful. The misery is there to see and that despite of long-standing formidable forces of individuals, institutions and programmes arranged against it.

No doubt, at all levels of society and in all walks of life individuals exist who have strived to bring the entire range of decent existence within reach of most of the poorest strata of society. However, one must be aware of the difficulties in attempting to translate such discrete contributions into a self-sustaining process. Designing a strategy and structuring activities that address the needs of the rural poor and are eventually owned by them present enormous difficulties.

The initial premise that I venture to submit is that the processes inherent in a poverty-oriented rural development strategy is to a great extent contrary to established political and bureaucratic instincts. Political and bureaucratic self-interest, even enlightened self-interest, dictate against the steps which such strategy and processes involve and dictate against them over time. A traditional underlying assumption, for example, has been that empowerment of the powerless requires the political commitment of the government and that commitment must be a continuing one. Yet, historically such miracle as has occurred has taken place in spite of the government. Indeed where the seeds for development of the rural poor and by them have been sown, the government, or in some cases a successor government, frequently seems to have stamped them out rather than nurtured them.

The reason is obvious. Implementation of a poverty-oriented rural development strategy involves the giving up of power and resources by those now in control of them. Implicit in the process is an awareness and organisation on the part of the poor which might well represent a danger to the establishment. The process also creates a threat to the conventional bureaucracy since its multisectoral nature and concomitant decentralisation contravene traditional ministerial lines of authority.

Political Issues

Poverty-oriented rural development involves redistribution of the transfer of resources and power. In less polite terms, it involves giving up something one has, may otherwise have had, or wants to have. On the other hand, the core of such a self-sustaining process must be increased production and productivity resulting in a 'trickle-up' phenomenon. The perception and the reality of how the increased output will be shared will largely determine how the middle and upper classes react to a proposed rural development effort.

Yet this 'how' is the dilemma of the large land-holder in a developing nation with sufficient land and other resources. Land and tenurial reforms could form the most important step towards alleviating the nation's poverty problem. But it is rare to find a landholder who is willing to give up his land and supports a government which does anything more than simply talk about reforms.

The conflict is even greater in some of the poorest countries which are land and resources poor and where the small farmer does not lie at the bottom of the heap. It is quite unnatural to expect the land-based small farmer to support a poverty group programme that goes further down the income scale when he considers himself and his family living on the margin. True, Mr McNamara's Nairobi speech in the early seventies switched the limelight of development discourse to the plight of the small farmers. However further progress will require shifting attention to those who have only marginal and in most cases no direct access to land-based resources.

The middle sized farmer does not live any better. This is also true of service holders in the cities who are absentee land owners in the countryside. This comparatively richer stratum, to the extent that it exists, rationalises its position on the premise that redistribution of its assets would only represent a drop in the bucket. Strongly subscribing to the 'trickle-down' theory, the rich and the not-so-rich argue that the incentives must be correct for them to be productive and, willing to make a commitment. In the third and the fourth world settings, as also in the second and first worlds, proponents of the 'trickle-down' theory are typically important cogs in the government machinery. Logically, it would be against their self-interest to support a poverty approach, unless they expected that such a policy would result in increased output sufficient that everyone, not only the poor, would gain. It is no wonder, therefore, when one finds governments calculating how little they can get away with in sharing, if any, of the economic resources and power.

A rather crucial and related issues is how the poor organise themselves to make the government 'deliver'. The question of how the poor might organise to gain an effective, rather than just a verbal commitment from the government

cannot be ignored. It involves some potentially subversive ramifications for the power holders and the establishment.

Another major complexity is that the process takes time and requires a dynamic and continuing approach rather than a static or a politically time-bound one. One must consider that when a certain percentage of the rural poor graduates from abject to tolerable poverty, they will fight the hardest to keep what they have and acquire more. On a country-specific basis this dynamics and continuity constitutes an enormous problem. The newly-created as well as the traditional political power-base are both threatened. It is, therefore, important to recognise that the poor of today are not a homogeneous mass and that they may well not be the poor of tomorrow.

The Bureaucratic Structure

Implementation of a poverty-oriented rural development policy and programme also threatened the authority of traditional and fragmented ministerial lines and their modes of operation. Poverty-oriented rural development, overtime, involves the entire spectrum of development activities, and thus most of the line ministries. True, a component of a project or programme can be designed which falls within the authority and responsibility of a sectoral ministry. However, such a component would require a coordinating mechanism with other components. To the extent that this coordinating mechanism intrudes upon individual ministries, it represents a threat to the established bureaucratic line of authority.

On the other hand, if a cross sectoral ministry/department is set up like the rural development ministry in many countries, it inevitably takes on some of the functions of another ministry. There is infringement, and thus conflict, with the established bureaucracy. A rural development ministry, for example, engaged in building feeder roads comes into conflict with the department of Roads and Highways, even if the department has eschewed feeder roads in the past. Or again, a rural development ministry which assists in organising water-user's groups to optimise available irrigation facilities quite often encounters the opposition of the water ministry.

The relatively extensive time horizon presents another bureaucratic problem even within individual ministries. Any new fangled initiative almost necessarily involves a diversion of resources rather than supplementary funds. Budgets are too tight to implement existing projects/programmes. Therefore, the apathetic or negative attitude of the entrenched bureaucracy to new or innovative initiatives is understandable. Political masters may come and go, but the facts and buzzwords, but the bureaucracy is forever.

Again, a development approach that aims at replicability involves typically a change in approach of the national professionals, technicians and bureaucrats. Few professionals will entertain a compromise in established standards or technology, no matter what the rationale or the cost. A first-rate professional in the developing world may resent having to live in a second-best world. He/she is hardly in a mood to be involved in perpetuation of what seems to be a second best existence.

Bureaucratic resistance is further heightened when two fundamental tenets of human development, namely decentralisation and popular participation, are introduced. As for bureaucratic decentralisation, there is the very simple inter-ministerial loss of power from the centre to the field. A more irreconcilable anathema to any bureaucracy is the concept of popular participation. Unfortunately, bureaucrats and technicians alike, have a contempt for the unskilled people. It is a rare professional who enjoys substantive discussions with laymen particularly when the laymen have a say in the decision-making process. Yet successful rural development must build on local systems and traditions and resurrect local knowledge to create common wisdom. Infact, one could argue that if implicit in the process of poverty oriented rural development is the accountability of both the political establishment and the bureaucracy to the people, then it would represent an unwelcome change for both.

Summing Up

This bleak picture of the complexities must be confronted squarely if the people of good will, both nationally and internationally, are willing to make a difference. Assisting and empowering the rural poor over time may imply mutation, not just evolution. Their lives must change from a position of hopelessness, hunger, disease and despair to a condition and position which gives them opportunity to strive for a decent life for themselves and their off springs. To effect such a change might generally be viewed by the existing power structures within nations to be a challenge to their authority and hold on resources. Further tenure of a government that would dare engage in such a venture could well be in doubt. No matter what, the poor must continue their own battle against poverty or otherwise trek relentlessly towards premature graves. It is in their organisation and social movements from below that our hope lies.

To the Editor...

Gandhi's religion and politics

Sir, In the situation of the present-day Bangladesh, the following writing of Radhakrishnan may give us some solace.

The greatest fact in the story of man on earth is not his material achievements, the empire he has built and broken, but the growth of his soul from age to age in its search for truth and goodness. Those who take part in the adventure of the soul secure an enduring place in the history of human culture. Time has discredited heroes as easily as it has forgotten everyone else; but the saints remain. The greatness of Gandhi is more in his holy living than his heroic struggles, in his insistence in creative power of the soul and its life-giving quality at a time when the destructive forces seem to be in the ascendant.

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try. This is something over which we have no control. Poverty is our constant companion, but the aesthetic sense in us about the rural people is much deeper and stronger more than that of the westerners. It is our pride that has been reflected in our literature and culture.

Nature's cruelty to humanity in Bangladesh shows the courage, vision and fertility of the common people with which they struggle hard to survive against many man-made problems without fear. It is most unfortunate that voluntary organisations or agencies operating in the countries like ours only desire more publicity than deeds.

It seems to me that the number of the selfless and the self-sacrificing people is on the wane.

Abu Ashraf Noor
Uttara, Dhaka

In praise of monarchy

Sir, who says the British Monarch has lost its popularity?

A recent AP despatch from Suva, capital of Fiji, quoting the Fiji Prime Minister reported that Fiji will restore Queen Elizabeth II as its constitutional monarch. Prime Min-

ister Sitiveni Rabuka — who led two coups in 1987 against an Indian-dominated government while addressing Fiji's return to the Commonwealth said that the Queen's restoration as the monarch of Fiji reflect the wishes of the Fijian people.

Good luck for the Fijians and long live the British Monarch as a benevolence monarchy.

M Zahidul Haque
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Law and crime

Sir, The lawyers to a large extent (or usually) deals with the criminals. They either defend or prosecute the criminals. And they are the ones who really know whether their clients are guilty or not. But if the lawyers come to rescue the criminals, then criminals will be encouraged.

By doing so, aren't they keeping crimes alive in our society?

I request all the lawyers not to help the criminals in any way.

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Saddam Hussein: An Enigmatic Leader with a Cat's Life

It is an axiomatic truth that all, friends and foes alike, nurture a deep and terrible sense of fear out of him.

At any point of time in history, there exist some persons who become objects of great controversy so much so that a deep veil of mystery surrounds their life, work and sense of purpose. Iraq's President Saddam Hussain figures prominently among the few such persons that subsist in contemporary history.

The person, who has been severely condemned time and again for what were termed as quixotic adventures, gargantuan misdeeds and colossal national wastes, is variously described as a misguided genius, a mistaken fool and even, to the extent of, a devil incarnate. To some others, he is regarded as a veritable leader whose policies and actions stemmed from a deep sense of patriotism and were designed solely to restore the past glory of his land and people. Both these postulates hold good, albeit partially.

The first of the great misadventures he embarked upon was a war, in 1981, with the neighbouring Iran, with whom the internecine feud has been perpetually ranging from time immemorial. During the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution in Iran with the consequent weakness of economic strength and disarray of military prowess of Iran, Saddam Hussein, who is known to his people as 'Jaish', made the first



Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

terrible blunder. He invaded the south-western part of Iran and hoped to wrest Kermanshah away from an off-guard and ill-prepared enemy. The Iraqis, even amidst chaos and confusion, regrouped and gradually put up a bold resistance. The result was a prolonged war for eight years in which neither really won but both sustained heavy losses in men, material and resources.

The other act of misadventure of the great Jaish was his attempt to seize Kuwait by force, on the pretext of an ancient disputed territorial claim. He actually did so this time by a successful blitzkrieg in a few hours in August 1990. The 30 odd nations that amassed an armada of forces under the auspices of the United Nations not only repelled the aggression successfully but pushed the enemy back almost to the doorsteps of their capital city, Baghdad. The reason why the enemy was not totally vanquished or destroyed, which the allied forces were capable of doing, was a matter of strategic considerations, mainly of the western combat powers. A defeated and disgraced Sunni ruler in Baghdad would have led the majority Shias in the south to rise in rebellion and truncated the country in half. They would have joined hands with Shia Iran. A stronger Islamic Fundamentalist regime in Iran was farthest from the choice and plan of the West. The regime in Baghdad would serve real 'victors' interests best by keeping itself alive, though impotent, to act as a counterpoise to the rising strength from across the borders in the East.

The economic as well as other bans and restrictions imposed by the United Nations, mainly at the prodding of the United States, on Iraq could not deter the Iraqi leader from its daring defiance of UN resolutions, including

composition and activities of the UN team of inspectors of prohibited weapons. The expulsion of American members and refusal of entry to the latest team are the glowing examples of such bravado. The price for paying all these is heavy and is being paid by the people of the country through their nose. Economic deprivation of the people has reached the highest peak. Essential foodstuffs and medicine also have been scarce. The limited food for oil deal and the mercy of some friendly nations remain the prime source of hope and subsistence for the people.

One does wonder why and how this great survivor survived so long in the face of so heavy odds. If his policies and actions caused so much of distress, humiliation and deprivation to the people, why not people took up arms against him and toppled him? This question has baffled many, rather most, people. Even most knowledgeable of all, the arch enemy Iran, could not make an objective assessment. A senior Minister confided to me while I was assigned in Tehran that he would give Saddam Hussain between six and nine months to last in power. Several years have elapsed since then. Saddam Hussein has become stronger than ever before.

A logical explanation, perhaps, is the ability of this shrewd, determined and cruel leader to play all facets of emotions of the people in his favour. People can be variously described as those who love him, hate him and/or fear him. Some people do love him, no doubt, for his heroic deeds, being able to withstand, though briefly, the onslaughts of formidable and numerically superior foes, and ostensibly for his oft-repeated patriotic pronouncements. Many more people hate him for having brought untold misery, severe distress and economic hardships to them as well as to others.

But it is an axiomatic truth that all, friends and foes alike, nurture a deep and terrible sense of fear out of him. The reported execution of General Baath dictator has remained unchanged. From the very inception of taking over power two decades ago Saddam Hussain has been ruling the nation with a clinched iron fist. A significant number of his erstwhile close partisans, relatives and friends, besides innumerable dissidents, have been simply eliminated. The fortunate ones got exiled.

The state was and is still running as a police state. The only parallel that can be drawn is in North Korea, where a similar statecraft is in vogue. There have been numerous disclosed and undisclosed coup attempts which have so far been foiled. He survived all the nine lives of a cat and one wonders how many more he will survive in future. But it goes beyond doubt that the person of Saddam Hussain has been and will remain a mystery, to be adored or to be hated by people. But, none can afford to remain indifferent to this enigmatic person.

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Gen Shafiullah Tells Court

Continued from yesterday, page 2

The witness said after going back to the cantonment, he found that Zia had already taken over the charge and was addressing the officers as the Chief of Army Staff before the charge had been handed over to him.

Shafiullah said Zia even went to Bangabandhu and said that he (Shafiullah) will not be able to control the officers and requested him to give the charge of the army chief.

The PW-45 described the reasons of dismissal of some officers from the army and some of the incidents before and after the killing of Bangabandhu that included raising of Rakkhi Bahini. Those incidents led to commotion in the army as vested quarters misinterpreted those, he said.

About raising of the Rakkhi Bahini, Gen Shafiullah said with the deterioration of law and order situation after the independence and failure of police to recover illegal arms, army was called out to do the job.

As this job was hampering the training of the newly built army, Gen Shafiullah said, he met Bangabandhu and requested him to give the responsibility to others and with that aim the Rakkhi Bahini was raised.

Some quarters reacted over raising of the Rakkhi Bahini and started venting that it had been created as an alternative to the army, he said.

Besides, when the army was engaged in recovering illegal arms, a few unruly and undisciplined situation happened in which some army officers were involved, he added.

He said Major Dalim, who was engaged in the job at Kasba area in Comilla, beat up two to three members of Chhatra League to take revenge of student-life rivalry.

Major Dalim along with some army officers attacked the house of Gazi Golam Mostafa over a quarrel he picked up with Mostafa's son in a wedding party in 1973. Major Dalim was relieved from the army for his undisciplined behaviour, he said.

Major Noor, who was PS to Deputy Chief of Army Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman, the witness said, was dismissed from the service for his anti-government statements protesting the dismissal of Major Dalim.

Some vested quarters made a negative propaganda on the issues and that also helped in building commotion in the army, he said.

The power to arrest vested in Rakkhi Bahini by a law enacted by the government also created a confusion following negative propaganda by certain quarters, he said, adding that it also created dissatisfaction in the army.

Shafiullah said the forced retirement of Col Taher and Lt Col Ziauddin from the service

was on disciplinary ground. He said Taher had been relieved of his office, Taher said, 'Sir, you are in this post for quite a long time, now relinquish it to Ziaur Rahman.'

Lt Col Ziauddin, commander of 46 Brigade, was given retirement for writing an anti-government political article published in the weekly Holiday, he said, adding Bangabandhu asked for dismissing Ziauddin as he refused to withdraw the article.

Gen Shafiullah added that these two incidents had also created dissatisfaction in the army.

Turning to the formation of army in post-independence Bangladesh, the former Army Chief said he did not get any 'readymade army' and tried to build up an institutional army. The army, he said, was run on ad hoc basis till 1975.

He said he had suggested that the army be developed on the basis of divisional concept instead of brigade concept.

According to him, he failed to build up intelligence organisations of the army as he did not get the approval for any structure to build up the army.

Gen Shafiullah said when his second term for the post of Army Chief was approved by the government, Bangabandhu one day told him that he had asked Zia to resign.

The witness quoted Bangabandhu as saying that Zia had repeatedly told him that he (Zia) would be able to give better service and requested Bangabandhu to remove Shafiullah. In reply, the witness said, Bangabandhu told Zia, 'You better resign.'

He said Bangladesh Army at that time was divided into five inflated brigades and one of them was in Dhaka, which was known as 46 Brigade and Col Shafaat Jamil was its commander.

Under the 46 Brigade, there were four infantry battalions and one artillery regiment and Major Khondaker Abdur Rashid was the commander of 2 Field Artillery Regiment.

There was only one tank regiment in the army at that time and that was under the Army HQ being supervised by the CGS, Major Syed Farooq Rahman was the second-in-command of the regiment, he added.

The witness said he passed a busy day on August 14 in disposing of two charred bodies of Indian soldiers, killed in a helicopter crash at Feni, and engaging the engineering corp to swap explosives from Dhaka University, where Bangabandhu had a scheduled programme on August 15 morning.

He said on August 14 night, he went to bed at about 2 to 2:30 am after finishing his job and woke up early in the morning when Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) Lt Col Salaudin came to him and asked whether he gave permission to armour

and artillery to go to the town. Shafiullah said the DMI informed him that artillery and armour regiments were moving towards the radio station, Ganabhaban and Bangabandhu's residence at Road 32.

The witness said he then directed the DMI to go to 46 Brigade Commander Shafaat Jamil and pass the order to resist those with his infantry troops.

He said he then tried to phone Bangabandhu, but failed to contact. Then he rang up Col Shafaat Jamil, and Air and Naval chiefs. He also asked deputy chief of army Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman and CGS Brig Khaled Mosharraf by phone to rush to his house.

At one stage, Shafiullah said, he reached Bangabandhu on the line and Bangabandhu informed him of the attack and killing of Sheikh Kamal and asked him to send troops.

'I am doing something. Can you come out of the house,' the witness claimed to have told Bangabandhu over telephone.

Shafiullah said after the arrival of Gen Zia and Brig Khaled Mosharraf within 15 to 20 minutes, he informed them of the whole incident and directed Khaled to go to 46 Brigade and help Shafaat Jamil.

But, Zia repeatedly told me not to send Khaled Mosharraf. 'He (Khaled) is going to spoil,' Zia said.

Finding no other way, the witness said, he went to Army HQ after sending Khaled to 46 Brigade. Zia followed him to his office, he added.

From the office, the PW-45 said, he contacted the outside formation commanders over phone and talked to them.

The former Army Chief said he first came to know about the killing of Bangabandhu over radio which was brought to him by his ADC at about 7 am.

At one stage, the witness said, Gen Zia, who was sitting in front of him, told him not to allow Khaled Mosharraf to go out anymore and asked him to prepare operation order as Indian army might get in on this pretext.

He said he had told Zia that he would 'look into the matter.' By the time, Khaled came back and as he started describing the situation at the 46 Brigade, the witness said, he heard sound of chaos from outside. At that time, he said, Gen Zia, Military Secretary Col A S M Nasim and CGS Khaled Mosharraf were present at his room.

Gen Shafiullah said then suddenly, Dalim along with some armed soldiers forcibly entered his office and targeted their arms on him.

Although Dalim was a dismissed officer, the witness said, he entered the room wearing army uniform, keeping some buttons of his shirt open.

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To be concluded tomorrow