

Trade in Health Services Bangladesh Perspective

by Dr Khalilur Rahman

Government should not make profit at the cost of people's health. Government's policies and decisions in health sector should meet minimum health needs of the general people. Trade in health services should not ignore the vital issue of equity in access to health services by the poor

TRADE in services have gained ground with the entry into force of the WTO Agreements. Trade in health services is also a growing activity in global commercial transactions.

They are - Cross-border Trade, which involves specially telemedicine; Movement of Consumers, which involves both patients seeking treatment abroad and students receiving foreign training; Foreign Commercial Presence (establishment of super-specialty hospitals and other medical institutions), that involves both FDI and private sector supply of services; and Movement of Personnel, which means health personnel providing health care services abroad.

Every year Bangladesh has to spend a sizeable amount in foreign currency for specialised treatment of her nationals abroad. Under movement of consumers mode, a large portion of that amount is spent in India mainly because of competitive price and geographical proximity.

Last year on 24 November, the Government decided to allow FDI and Joint Venture Projects in health sector for development of medicare services in the country. It also decided to allow foreign specialist doctors

to be appointed in these hospitals in a "proportionate rate". In the backdrop of the Government's all out efforts to attract FDI in the country and in order for ensuring modern health care services to the population, the decision is fully in conformity with the Government's overall development policy. Government has had to take into its consideration, the cost-effectiveness of interventions in health sector and the need for making choices on priorities in a resource constraint reality.

While the private sector welcomed the decision, a section of doctors were making some clamour over this issue by expressing concerns on so-called leasing out the health sector to foreign companies. The main reason of their concerns, however, lies somewhere else and seems to be motivated by petty sectoral interests.

Possible Benefits of Trade in Health Services

The opening up of the health sector may be beneficial for the country in a number of ways. It would induce inflow of FDI, technology and modern medicare equipment resulting in better and modern medicare services, employment of health personnel; saving in foreign currency by discouraging patients to go abroad for treatment etc.

The foreign commercial presence is also likely to even earn foreign currency by treating patients from neighbouring

countries including from some neighbouring states of India.

With the development of infrastructure and the proposed Asian Highways, the possibility of coming foreign patients for treatment from neighbouring countries appears to be a reality. It would also discourage private practice by the Government specialist doctors and thereby, patients in the Government hospitals are likely to get more care and attention from them. It is expected to create a competitive health environment among foreign and domestic private hospitals and Government hospitals. The ultimate beneficiary of all this would be the general people.

Possible Implications of Trade and Role of the Government

Contrary to the economic benefits that trade in health services can bring, it may also loom large on the issue of equity in access to modern health services by the poor. It may also lead to the so-called brain drain.

With regard to the issue of equity, the Government needs to ensure that delivery of health care services in the super-specialty hospitals should not have adverse effects on the health coverage of the general people - and in particular, the poor. Government policy should not allow health services in foreign commercial presence to clash with national health policy objectives. Provisions should be made to ensure

equal access to services by the poor in these hospitals.

Government will need to devise adequate and appropriate regulatory framework to ensure that national health systems derive maximum benefit from trade in health services. Government should also ensure that any upgradation of health care services is equally extended to all patients and special provisions for the poor may also be made to enable them to avail of these modern and upgraded services.

Presently, a quite large number of health personnel are either unemployed or under-employed in the country. Their services abroad are unlikely to cause brain drain. On the contrary, the remittances to be sent by them, would be helpful for the Government to provide better health care services to the general people. Moreover, this so-called brain drain may be compensated by an inflow of foreign health personnel under the latest decision of the Government in this regard.

The benefits likely to be derived from trade in health services should be utilised for better health care services in the country. Government should not make profit at the cost of people's health. Government's policies and decisions in health sector should meet minimum health needs of the general people. Trade in health services should not ignore the vital issue of equity in access to health services by the poor.

Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that health needs of the poor are adequately taken care of. While allowing foreign commercial presence, Government should make necessary legislation to ensure a certain percentage of seats in these hospitals for the poor either free of charge or at a subsidised rate.

Only a few countries have made commitments in the health sector under GATS. Negotiations are to be held by the year 2000 in WTO to expand and widen scope of movement of personnel under GATS. The interest of Bangladesh in this matter is immense. More countries are expected to open up their health sectors under GATS. While taking active part in the forthcoming negotiations, Government should make sincere efforts in arranging for recognition of our medical degrees at all levels by potential countries. This is required for enabling our health care providers to be easily employed abroad.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Missions abroad should be advised to reinforce their efforts in exploring job opportunities for our health personnel and keep concerned authorities in Dhaka informed of the same accordingly.

The writer is Counsellor, Bangladesh Permanent Mission, Geneva. Views expressed in this article do not represent any Government's position.

Brutal Crimes Shake the Soul of Society

by Md Asadullah Khan

THE gruesome killing of Aslam Sardar (39), a footballer, turned contractor and joint secretary of the Brothers Union Club, in front of the club at Gopibag and at 3 pm in the day (April 11) by some six known terrorists in the area, as reported in the media, has again sent shock waves down the spine of the citizenry.

With a surge of brutal crimes such as rape of minor girls, murder, extortion and robbery in broad day and with the law enforcers utterly unable to combat that, Dhaka city has in recent times plunged into a morass of chaos and anarchy. Some other cities in the world surely have higher homicide rates but Dhaka's reputation perhaps would soon dwarf theirs in absolute terms. The city was still absorbing the horrors of brutal killing of "Terror Liaquat" and Hazrat Ali when Aslam fell victim to one more dastardly killing. Among the Dhakaites, it reinforced the spreading conviction that deadly violence was mostly confined to crime-ridden comparatively obscure places may now lash out randomly at any one, at anytime and even at places like Motijheel commercial area, the heart of the metropolis considered relatively safe because of its location under the very nose of the law enforcers.

Aslam's killing, as reports reveal, had possibly no link with politics other than the fact that it might have been a sequel to a conflict with other officials in the sharing of the auction money of cattle market beside the club premise. No matter what actually prompted the premeditated attack, it is a chilling reminder, as The Daily Star leader described on April 12, of the city's livability - its roads, streets and market places are fast becoming the preserve of killers.

Dhakaites can put up with dirty roads, clogged drains, poor school, mosquito menace and frequent load shedding and a host of other ills that plague their everyday living, but how can they take so much of uncertainty, risks and insecurity? In recent times, the city seems so consumed with crimes that it is incapable of thinking about anything else.

The daunting task before its leaders is to prevent it from rotting to the core. Against the backdrop of menacing rise of crime-rate in Chittagang, the Home Minister Major (Retd) Rafiqul Islam's (BU) announcement of launching a combing operation against the terrorists in Chittagang with the aid of BDR and Army after April 18, a move though belated, was laudable. People only wonder why Dhaka should be excluded from such operation when its records are no better than Chittagang?

In fact, violent crimes - rape, arson, extortion, murder - have stalked the country in a way that no one could ever comprehend. And all these are taking place with such a disturbing frequency that no one is shocked any longer to hear about. And although it is hard

to believe and harder still to comprehend but it is true that some atrocious crimes are being committed by those who should be the most innocent - the young. And recent weeks have brought news of such brutal acts as the rape on minor girls just aged between 6 and 8, one after another in Dhaka and Chittagang cities. These crimes have awoken the society to the beast that has broken loose in some of the country's young people.

Report published in almost all the dailies on March 17 last about murderous assault on Hazrat Ali (25) and Masud (26), both terrorists, in the Demra area of the city indicates brutalisation of the society in a vicious way. Hazrat Ali's two hands were first chopped off from the wrist and then he was shot to death. Masud escaped death but with his hands chopped off. Not content with just shooting the adversaries, the gang members are now chopping off the victim's hand or dismembering the body in broad day light and indulging in such macabre crimes in presence of stupefied public and even law enforcers.

commission of such horrendous crimes. An almost total impunity with which the criminals can carry out their gruesome acts of violence has only emboldened them to go on with such monstrous crimes. For some reason or others, law enforcement agency seems quite helpless to meet the challenge of these evil forces that only creates a total despondency in the citizenry. Latest report says a list prepared by them of a number of so-called godfathers of the criminals is missing. Where the society should rest its hope? But why and how could all these be happening? The experts offer a raft of reasons, everything from physiological and psychological abnormalities to family and cultural decay. Some of the explanations, it is believed, now may contribute to at least many of the violences. Each young criminal has his own genes, his own family background and his own response to many forces in modern culture that encourage indiscriminate sex and violence. Experts suggest that too many families are broken, too many

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Elias Chokdar, an innocent picture card hawkker of Shewrapara area of the city incurred the wrath and displeasure of some hoodlums on his refusal to part with the picture cards completely free of cost. Infuriated, the gang members came back and chopped off his two hands from the wrist. Elias, a young and poor boy who came to this grand city with high hopes and ambition to educate himself and earn a living and got himself admitted into Class X of the open University became a liability for his destitute mother. True, more and more teenagers, acting individually or in gangs, are running amuck and marauding with no purpose in mind but to create havoc and hurt civilized norms of the society. The latest incident of chopping off the hands of Hazrat Ali and Masud resulted from gang rivalry while the incident related to Elias Chokdar reflects a sort of pranks that went so terribly wrong.

schools and communities are crumbling, too many drugs are available for the adolescents to acquire a sturdy sense of mercy or morality to guide their behaviour. Society had generally been able to control and channel aggressive impulses through its basic institutions - home, schools, mosques, temples and churches. But these moral pillars are now crumbling.

Children, experts say, normally learn to trust and develop attachments to people within the first four years of life. By then they have also acquired a sense of compassion and empathy for others. And they have begun to be taught the difference between right and wrong and that hurtful action have consequences. Shockingly, as our experiences now suggest, many youngsters fail to acquire those early curbs on conduct. Young boys who grow up with absent or uninvolved fathers suffer doubly in that they often fail to develop a healthy sense of masculinity.

These youngsters are dead inside" says psychologist Johnston. "For them to feel alive and important, they engage in terrible types of sadistic activity". Most often signals of violence surface early but frequently go ignored and denied. The youngster who bullies school mates, tortures pets or goes on an arson spree is sending up warning flares. Children abandoned physically or emotionally by their parents look elsewhere for companionship. So says Parvez, (not the real name) a drug addict and a violent kid who lives in the Mirpur area of the city: I never had anyone to

talk to. My father was gone. I had no one to turn to when I was in trouble, except my companions. They became my family."

In many instances, the violence is fueled by easy access to guns, alcohol and drugs, particularly crack. Crack-addiction can have several deadly effects. It can get users sexually aroused. When they do not find a willing partner, Williams, a senior research scholar in the US, asserts, they may be tempted to rape.

These teenagers often get their values from their peers. In such a situation, what is worse is the alluring life style of a few who have become legends in the locality through grabbing wealth by extortion, murderous assault and kidnapping of so affluent people in the society. So Mantu (fictitious name) so long hanging around a tea shop corner in the Mohammadpur area got involved in such brutal criminal activities through peer pressure. What attracted other young men was his life style: fancy clothes, a brand new car, mobile phone in hand and the fear he generated. "They take him to be an icon and want to emulate him", Najib (not the real name) living near Mohammadpur area took to crime when the money his father was giving him was not enough to match his life style. He is involved in several murder cases but is currently out on bail since there were no witnesses to the crime. Social scientists and experts in juvenile delinquency feel the new surge in crime comes, in many cases, because of the lack of options for these youngsters.

Throughout the country people are calling for stronger laws and harsher punishments. These bad guys are getting away with murder and rape. They are not afraid, have no respect for anything like law and society and seniority. Other than punishing the delinquents, people have offered a more radical idea that is being worked out in California: parents can be held responsible for criminal activity of their offsprings. Precisely speaking, parents in the country should take a long, hard look in the mirror. The values of to-day's youth are merely magnified reflections of the values of their elders. We have to ask ourselves the intriguing question: why do some teenagers in the same environment get into trouble and others do not? We can't end up only watching a woman or a businessman either dead or in a coma, hearing the noises of the city and wondering what might come next. Much more fundamental changes in the society in the form of increasing facilities for education, opening up recreational opportunities for the youngsters, giving more parental care, creating job opportunities and stepping up battles against drugs and poverty are needed to make any dent in the teenage crime problem. And, of course, an effective deterrence by the law enforcers. But can we expect that to really happen?

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Garfield comic strip by Jim Davis. Panels show characters talking about a fishing trip and a woman talking about a man.

NZ envoy meets Hasina. High Commissioner of New Zealand based in New Delhi Adrin Georges Simcock called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Ganohabon yesterday, reports UNB. During the meeting the New Zealand envoy expressed optimism about the progress of Bangladesh economy. Simcock hoped that the businessmen of New Zealand would utilise the investment opportunities now prevailing in Bangladesh.

RSF protests arrest of newsmen in Bangladesh. Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), a Paris-based independent organisation for defending press freedom worldwide, has protested the arrest of three journalists in Bangladesh recently, says a press release. In a letter to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday, RSF said that the organisation was "worried about the increasing hindrances to press freedom imposed by Bangladesh authorities."

Metropolitan Final results of Cadet College Admission Test

Table with multiple columns showing student names and their scores in various subjects like Bengali, English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies.

DESA Local Re-Tender Notice. নিয়মিত বিদ্যুৎ বিল পরিশোধ করুন সফলভাবে বিদ্যুৎ ব্যবহার হ্রাস করুন. Dhaka Electric Supply Authority invites bids for different electrical materials against the following tender for the Emergency Maintenance & Rehabilitation Project Phase-2 for Sub-transmission and Distribution System.

British Council celebrates World Book Day. Children enjoyed a rare occasion as the British Council (BC) organised a series of day-long programmes to celebrate the World Book Day as elsewhere across the world yesterday. Around one hundred children from some non-formal primary schools run by four leading NGOs and at least 150 from reputed English medium schools took part in various events including story-telling, recitation, drawing and quiz competitions. Meanwhile, the BC has organised a story-telling competition and quiz contest for members of its Young Learners Centre on the occasion. The winners of the story-telling competition are 4-6 years - Rafiq Faisal (1st), Uzma Muazzem (2nd) and Faiza Rahman (3rd); 7-9 yrs - Sameen Naser (1st), Shavina Z Anam (2nd) and Farah Nasreen Choudhury (3rd); 10-14 yrs - Nuveira Rahman (1st), Maliha Bassam (2nd) and Sanjana (3rd). The quiz contest winners are 4-6 yrs - Faiza Rahman (1st), Adnan Ghazi (2nd) and Rafiq Faisal (3rd); 7-9 yrs - Suprit Sarkar (1st), Nawazana Rahman (2nd) and Andisha Rahman (3rd); 10-14 yrs - Aameena Kawsar (1st), Samira Aziz (2nd) and Ayesha Islam (3rd), according to a BC press release.

Notice of Tender Military Engineer Services. Notice No 600/15/11/1997-98/E-6. Applications are invited by AHQ E-in-C's Branch, Works Dte, Dhaka Cantonment for issue of tender documents for the following works.