

Maternal Deaths

The rate of death during labour in Bangladesh is one among the highest in the world. That it is 20 per cent of the yearly world tally of maternal deaths, at 4.5 per 1000 deliveries or 30,000 deaths annually should come as a shock to many. After all Bangladesh has a population which is only 2.5 per cent of the world figure.

In many important and basic aspects of life and living Bangladesh has made significant strides in the 27 years since independence. Literacy and education, for example. And even in life expectancy. Why is the nation faltering in the case of ante-natal death?

Basing their studies on the findings of ICDDR,B a World Bank mission has concluded in their report, "Improvement in maternal healthcare has been limited" and that "services requiring a functioning referral system for safe motherhood are seriously lacking." Why should this be so in a country having a network of medical centres all over it — something that many nations lack?

The first and most obvious answer to this is that the rural health complexes do not service their parish half as much as they were designed to. Corruption is, of course, reason number one for that. Number two is the fact that these complexes are staffed and run by very unwilling professionals. Working in the remote corners is synonymous to them with rotting. This in spite of there being no remote places in Bangladesh now, specially after the opening of the Bangabandhu Bridge.

Add to this the two reasons given by the ICDDR,B. The social resistance keeping the mother in labour away from the health centre where male professionals would attend her is something very hard to break and it is a matter of decades that it can be profitably denied. Manning these rural complexes exclusively with woman obstetricians would be a far easier way.

The absence of a functioning referral system is a crucial problem. There is something very near it but not really functioning enough to reach the right patient to the right professional before the right time is up. The government must apply itself in all sincerity to redress this dangerous failing in the rural healthcare system.

The mother-to-be must get competent professional help. And only then our shameful maternal death figures will come down to decent levels.

Community Policing

There are instances of people, specially in the rural areas, forming vigilante groups to keep powerful armed brigands at bay. But having people alongside the regular law enforcers to fight crimes has always been an emergency measure that stopped to exist after the crisis. It never received any attention as a permanent feature in the security arrangements for the civil society. But the way law and order in the country has gone down over the years, it has become imperative for the authorities to think up some alternative to give people's sagging sense of security a boost. We have been hearing about community policing as an option for quite some time. A seminar held in the city Saturday brought the subject under a sharper focus. We welcome the organisers for their efforts to drive home the point.

Indeed it is time we thought about community policing as a serious option for the sake of law and order. A vast majority of our population comprises unemployed youth. Community policing can be a great boon for the work-starved young men of the country to be involved in something constructive. But for community policing to arrive as a social feature, as one of the speakers in the seminar observed, government has to pave the way for it. There will have to be funding to train up the youths and equip them in a meaningful way. It calls for a lot of interministerial synchronisation. We urge the government to think about it seriously. It is neither possible nor feasible to raise the number of regular law enforcing agency members to a level where there would be enough men in uniform to ensure the security of the entire nation. With the aberration in police behaviour becoming a common phenomenon and police reform looking like the pie in the sky, community policing appears the only implementable idea under the circumstances. Law and order is essential for development. And at the moment what we are observing is its relentless deterioration.

Haq Remembered

We are saddened by the passing away of Pakistani economist Mahbub-ul-Haq who enjoyed a high degree of reputation in the UN development system and among development thinkers in the SAARC region. He was instrumental in bringing out the UNDP's Annual Human Development Report as a high water mark of his association with that UN body. Annually national governments sit up and take note of their global human development rankings introspecting on their budgetary allocations to social sectors vis-a-vis those to other areas. Some of the country reports latterly came to be influenced by UNDP's human resource enhancement paradigm. He introduced in 1990, a human development index based on life expectancy, literacy and the purchasing power of people to meet their basic needs, and since then emerged as something of an icon in the field. He firmly believed that the prime goal of development should be to increase the range of choice and opportunity for the people.

Mahbub-ul-Haq had endeared himself for his views on Bangladesh's development potential. He thought our real asset for national advancement lay in the homogeneity of our people which gave us a head-start among the neighbouring countries. He suggested that what we are badly needed for an economic breakthrough were vocational training institutes all over the country.

Our condolences to the members of his bereaved family.

THE democracies, it is claimed, seldom fought among themselves; neither would they in future. During both the great wars the western democracies were pitted against a variety of dictatorships. In his 1994 State of the Union address President Bill Clinton asserted that no two democracies had ever gone to war with each other thus explaining why promoting democracy abroad was a pillar of his foreign policy. The idea of promoting democratization for peace has become an axiom also for many scholars who have been involving the spread of democratic space for heading off war the world over. Not only the democracy shuns conflicts it is also a great unifier that binds the nations and people to promote a common goal of civilisational progress of the human kind.

It was such lofty ideals that came to be the foundation of an edifice re-erected in the Atlantic after the Second World War. The transatlantic community comprised of the nations in North America and Western Europe — the most advanced of the democracies — also included nations newly baptized to the creeds of democracy. After centuries of bloodshed they all wanted to put a halt to war and build up for democracy a sanctuary where it would be nourished, matured and perfected and then taken to an exalted height of its accomplishments. The dream cherished was also a dream realised. Over last fifty years the western democracies developed for themselves a unique regime of peace, progress and unprecedented prosperity.

In modern times, this is the longest period that they did not fight among themselves, neither had there been an aberration taking them off their democratic track, this unique phenomenon has often been attributed to a unifying Soviet threat but no less contribution has been made by the traditions of democracy for this historic

The Cracks in Transatlantic Fraternity

On security matters the gap between Washington and Paris is still wider, France's ambition to forge a genuine European foreign and security policy, clashes with the United States' inclination to be in an absolute leadership role. Also on the expansion plan of NATO the US monopoly on security is well ensured.

achievements. An impregnable solidarity of the community based on the ideals and principles of democracy could indeed avert war among themselves and enable them to face military challenges from outside the community. Now there are invisible fissures in the monolith of that solidarity. Given the shared objectives of the members of the European Community and an unshakable military strength of the United States, although there exists no threat of intra Community War in foreseeable future the cracks now appearing in its unity may eventually develop into a gaping hole eroding much of the community's earlier credibility.

In a bizarre developments in their relationship the great democracies of the world — the United States and France — have been clashing with each other in recent years. Both have, however, been the cradle of the democratic ideas about the rights of the men. In fact, France echoed during its revolution ten years later the message of American Declaration of Independence in 1779 when it declared the Rights of Man in its famous cry of Liberty, Egalite and Fraternite. The statue of liberty gifted by France to the people of America symbolises the communion of thoughts of the two people. In reciprocity the Americans make Paris their most favourite rendezvous outside America and are intensely fond of singing French language. Yet both the countries are colluding with each other in all conceivable fields. But why?

True, the demise of the cold war and disappearance of Soviet threat have made the indispensability of intra community amity, friendship and understanding somewhat redundant but it has also introduced new dynamics in the rela-

tionships between and among the nations. If the end of the cold war has brought in its wake also an end to the ideological conflicts a nationalist resurgence has inexorably accompanied the transition. The national prides are reinforced when a nation with its glorious past is subjected to the forces of new dynamics trivialising its stature. France is a case in point. Hurt in its national pride for being dictated by the sole super-power in the matters of international affairs France seems to be turning nationalist that borders almost on the point of being xenophobic. The

The French opposition to exclusive American way has come in the open whether it is in the realm of international diplomacies where France maintains a distaste for America's oft-proclaimed sole super-power status or on matters of culture where the French tend to denounce a growing American 'cultural imperialism'. Lately Franco-American friction has manifested itself most visibly in the Persian Gulf area where France's interests — in Iran and Iraq — seem to clash with America's perceived security.

In post second world war era

The grandeur of the national past is resurrected in France today as the end of the Cold War has indeed multiplied the country's predicaments. The post cold war dynamics of global politics favour more the more powerful nations and benefit less the less powerful countries. As a result America's power has gone up manifold and France's shrunken. In the age of globalisation what matters is size which has reinforced the centrality of the United States in the world but penalised in more than one way a middle sized country like France. France's special strength lies in its superior culture which has however melted away in the face of a 'universal culture' which ironically looks more American. Burdened by the weight of old traditions or images from the past France now tends to retreat into its protective cocoon.

French frustrations are exacerbated by a mixture of benign neglect, sheer indifference and mild irritation with which Washington considers Paris' initiatives. The French know that their secret dream — to build a Europe that will challenge United States — is not equally shared by her continental partner, particularly a pragmatic and cautious Britain and a historically guilt-conscious Germany. Moreover, in spite of France's grudge and disdain an immutable pillar of US leadership cannot be challenged even by the combined strength of the community — let alone the question of France alone challenging it with her differences with America over the Middle East. Nevertheless the differences continue to persist.

On security matters the gap between Washington and Paris is still wider. France's ambition

to forge a genuine European foreign and security policy, clashes with the United States' inclination to be in an absolute leadership role. Also on the expansion plan of NATO the US monopoly on security is well ensured. Because the expansion of the alliance without any corresponding widening of European Union helps America to preclude any specifically European initiatives in the security field.

However, exploiting its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council France can present itself as an alternative voice to the nations of the Third World. In the Middle East, for example, the deadlock in the peace process has given a new legitimacy to Europe and in particular France's role as an honest broker between the Arabs and Israelis. France which is not a prisoner of domestic politics does have clout in the issue and also intends to play a more active role — both political and economic — in the Middle East. Also on African continent France has both experience and presence. France is per capita the largest donor of foreign aid in the continent after Japan. Few things can happen in Africa without granting a role for France.

Although France can never make a dent in America's influence in Europe or elsewhere in the world she has been consciously making an effort to propel the world towards a multipolarity and the nations in her side of the Atlantic to forge a United Europe. In her calculation, only with the achievement of those goals it may be possible someday to challenge the United States politically and diplomatically, if not in a military confrontation. For France there are some silverlining with new Russia reasserting her global role and China emerging as a credible countervailing force vis-a-vis America. In such events, the transatlantic solidarity cannot remain quite the same in future.



by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

ultranationalism — a phenomenon peculiar to dictatorial systems — can also find expression in democratic societies when the democratic norms and spirits are flouted in their relationship and only the real politik comes to guide its course.

When a nation like United States treats itself to be an indispensable superpower and struts about arrogantly both with its allies and others expecting that they all would simply comply, it sometimes backfires. On the other side, even a medium power nation like France can be fed on its national pride — that of its great culture, imperial past, the regalia of its monarchies, its revolution and so on — to bring her up to a point of defiance. And that is what has been happening between them.

France's conservative nationalist aspirations were first fuelled when in the fog end of the war France, being vanquished and occupied country, was maneuvered out of great power concert. The free French government of De Gaulle was however able to catapult France back to her prewar status but became circumspect about the motives of the allied powers. Ever since she clashed not only with America but also with her European allies on the question of security and myriad other issues. Her penchant for an independent foreign and security policy for herself was evident when she left NATO's military wing at the height of East-West confrontation and charted a spanking new course for the country even by coming to a measure of understanding with former Soviet Union.

Five Minutes to Midnight

Mian Nawaz Sharif is seen to be guided by events and persons rather than giving the perception of being fully in control. More important than any amount of micro-measures is the perception of strong leadership and focused decision-making.

THE Punjab CM, Mr Shahbaz Sharif, and the Federal Finance Minister, Senator Sartaj Aziz, air-dashed to Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia last week in a desperate effort to get funds so as to keep the country from defaulting. The Nawaz Sharif regime inherited US \$ 300 million only in foreign exchange reserves in early 1997 but had raised them to US\$ 1.3 billion in about 18 months, the imposition of emergency on May 28 and the deep freeze of all foreign currency accounts changed all that. In the face of sanctions a temporary measure could have been overlooked by the investing public but when it became apparent that the Government was dead serious in wanting to Rupeeify the deposited US dollars at the official rate, the public confidence rapidly eroded. Since then a rather erratic course has been followed with disastrous consequences.

Pakistan's economy is based primarily on parallel flows, the formal sector needs a consistent flow of inward remittances even at the best of times. The imposition of sanctions has created both physical and psychological blocks making it the worst of times. The stoppage of inward flow is also matched with exorbitant outflows in the informal sector making not only our economic situation critical, but making dependence on IMF and World Bank instalments of life-saving importance for this country.

This support has a sovereign price to it, for nations with any pride this becomes a difficult proposition. The only option available is to restore the confidence of those who had deposited money in Pakistan. Knowing that we do not have enough US dollars to pay the depositors we have to bite the bullet and go the radical route. A clear-cut policy pronouncement

is necessary, anyone wanting to take out foreign exchange accounts should be allowed to do so in Pakistani Rupees at the prevailing kurb market rate. Today the depositor feels he or she has been shortchanged/looted by the Government of Pakistan (GOP) and only a policy that will allow him (or her) to take out all his/her money and change it on the same day from the money lenders so as not to lose in the exchange will suffice to overcome this perception. Instead of inflicting punishment by giving depositors just below the kurb rate for all we invited with open arms to open foreign currency accounts pre-May 28. Does the PM know that a very large group of depositors are salaried class and housewives who were investing in savings in US Dollars as a hedge against inflation? Why not encourage them to keep doing so?

If the person keeps the foreign exchange funds in his/her account as was the balance prevailing on May 28, as an incremental to that balance he/she should get an incentive of 5% mark-up in Rupees in addition to the normal mark-up prevailing. For a housewife or salaried person having an average of US\$ 10000 deposit, this would mean an additional Rs. 2500-3000 every month. Expatriate Pakistani bank accounts must be unfrozen and allowed free transactions. They could have invested abroad but they brought their money here, should we give them the feeling we are looting them? Those opening new bank accounts abroad in any Pakistani commercial bank abroad should get

a parallel bank account in any Pakistani commercial bank of their choice and location in Pakistan with the proviso that the person is able to draw against his/her account in US dollars either within the country or abroad, that will be a powerful guarantee of protection of his/her hard earned money. We need money in our External Accounts to support Letters of Credit, this will give us the necessary funds.

Persons earning blue collar/white collar wages and opening such account should be given a 'Wage Earners Card' based on his/her employers' cer-

traded can only be used to pay customs duties, excise duties, and sales taxes.

Coming to the most important aspect of the economy, we must de-monetize the higher bank notes from the Rs 100 note upwards i.e. leaving only Rs 50 as legal tender. We should encourage all transactions through banks, why should we support those who keep their money secretly at home or in secret hideaways, let them move their money around in wheelbarrows of Rs 50 notes. If we don't act now, all Pakistanis will have to use wheelbarrows to take money to buy a loaf of

Voucher Scheme and allowing trade in it, giving some incentive to the importer/manufacturer in respect of a mechanism to reduce duties by purchasing these Bonus Vouchers at less than the market rate. FIFTH and last, by de-monetizing we will take money away from smugglers, black-marketeers, hoarders, militant groups, etc. all those who benefit from keeping money out of the banking system. This may eliminate as much as Rs 300 billion from the system, thereby drastically bringing down inflation and even the rate of exchange. The State Bank estimates we may have to pay out between Rs 50-70 billion for the exchange relief scheme, with de-monetisation we will have a healthy surplus left over.

This is a direct incentive-oriented approach to attract our expatriates to send money through the official system. The net effect of a positive pragmatic policy will be to bring the difference between the official and kurb rate to a minimum, not more than 8-9%. The unofficial system devalues the Rupee anyway without commensurate benefits to the country, why not make it official to our benefit? Once we have a credible system with built-in transparent guarantees in place, an appeal to patriotism will see Pakistanis abroad in ghouls and grave-diggers, senior executives of the Private Banking Divisions from many of the international banks have descended upon Pakistan, roaming around with their briefcases, encouraging the affluent to put their money in External Accounts as a potential escape route. And people are be-

ing tempted, that is one reason for the high kurb rate. Every US Dollar sent abroad means less money in investment within Pakistan, in time we will be de-nuded. We must appeal to our people not to fall prey to their temptations, let us give them some incentives to do so. Instead of saving themselves let us together save this country.

In supersession of everything else, Mian Nawaz Sharif has to concentrate on the economy, with Karachi a part of this exercise and following a close second in critical attention. The PM is a sincere, well-meaning patriotic Pakistani who is simultaneously an incurable optimist. As any captain of an aircraft in trouble knows, to keep height and control he must shed excess baggage, some of his advisors must go if he is to survive. Mian Nawaz Sharif is seen to be guided by events and persons rather than giving the perception of being fully in control. More important than any amount of micro-measures is the perception of strong leadership and focused decision-making.

There is no room for vacillation in the facade of credibility and strength, leadership has to be decisive and based on correct assumptions. Decisions have to be option-oriented, to be able to compensate for consequences. It is macro-measure time, it is five minutes to midnight. Mian Nawaz Sharif is capable of providing the quality of leadership required by the country but unfortunately he has had his chances and there is no more time left. Those of us who want he should remain at the helm of affairs should all exert him, he must now deliver or it is 'Titanic' time (without the music to go). While some of us may go down with him out of sheer loyalty, in the ultimate analysis the country is always far more important than any individual.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

What do we hope to achieve with our exchange relief package? FIRST, the depositors who had money in accounts pre May 28 would get the float Pakistan Rupee rate and thus would not feel looted, rather because of enhanced mark-up would become somewhat of a privileged lot thus restoring their confidence, they may not even withdraw the money. SECOND, we are restoring the confidence in the credibility of Pakistan's sovereign guarantees by imposing a self-restraint on future exports to 'nationalise' foreign exchange. THIRD, a legal alternative to the Hundi System can be developed by being pragmatic in policy and implementation. FOURTH, we give a boost to our exports without effecting our imports but by having a Bonus

Scheme and allowing trade in it, giving some incentive to the importer/manufacturer in respect of a mechanism to reduce duties by purchasing these Bonus Vouchers at less than the market rate. FIFTH and last, by de-monetizing we will take money away from smugglers, black-marketeers, hoarders, militant groups, etc. all those who benefit from keeping money out of the banking system.

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To the Editor...

BJMB — gateway to north Bangladesh

Sir, Immediately after the partition of India, the people of northern part of Bangladesh felt themselves isolated from the provincial capital Dhaka which was not well connected by road. The people of this part of Bangladesh used to go to Calcutta frequently using railway and river route. The hassle and hazards at the Railway ferry ghats at Bahadurabad and Fulchhari created quite a dismay. It took about 16 to 24 hours to reach Dhaka and there was no pucca road connection with the capital. The people demanded construction of a bridge at Bahadurabad for easy communication. The demand was raised at the provincial assembly. Meanwhile Dhaka was connected by pucca road.

After liberation of Bangladesh there were seven ferries on this route: Two at Baghabari, one at Nagarbari, two at Taraghat, one at Naryahat and one at Mirpur-Amibazar. The journey was very much time consuming and hazardous. Hundreds of letters demanding construction of a bridge were written in the national dailies. The citizens of Bangladesh took part in the construction work by giving surcharge to raise fund. Some of the people expressed reluctance to pay surcharge. Some of the economists argued to press more ferries into service at the

Aricha-Nagarbari ghat instead of going for big investment. But by the grace of God, the people of Bangladesh in collaboration with foreign agencies could build a bridge like the BJMB. Let us maintain the prestigious bridge.

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Nothing to do with secularism

Sir, A long march in Turkey against the government to allow the Muslim girls to wear scarf (so that they can cover their head as per the requirement in Islam) in the universities and in the offices has ended. Turkish secular government (and I must say quite undemocratic in nature) banned wearing scarf by the female citizens in the name of secularism. We know even in England (the mother of democracy), such practice is not considered as an expression of secularism. Also USA, Indonesia, Australia, Malaysia, India, Canada etc feel like UK. And wearing scarf to cover someone's head is not unlawful, not anti-human, not harming of others.

Therefore the Turkey government and their generals should not impose anything in the name of secularism which is actually oppression and an

anti-humanistic approach. I hope the Turkish government would respect their people's ideals, religion and the way of life which is not unjustified.

Nilmonilota
Dhaka

Requisitioning or legalised hijacking?

Sir, On 14th evening after getting down at a friend's house I sent the microbus to collect nine and neighbour's children from a school function. Only when I reached home around 9 O'clock did I realise the trauma unfolding in our building with frantic parents finally reunited late at night with their tearful wards under the frowning eyes and rebuke of the school authorities who were forced to stay on till all the children were collected.

What happened could only happen in a country where the 'law' is lawless, 'the responsible', without accountability and the 'protectors', the perpetrators of all possible means to make life of ordinary citizens as uncomfortable as possible. The reader will have guessed it by now. The microbus was 'legally' hijacked en route. Only the authorities call it 'requisitioned' and that too two days before an innocuous and meaningless half-day hartal. For years now all govern-

ment functionaries have given assurances that vehicles of private companies and citizens will not be touched. Even the Home Minister himself had so assured the Chambers and businessmen recently. When this fact was brought to the attention of the requisitioning officer concerned, he laughed aloud in our faces. What price the Minister's credibility now?

I am now using public transport, whatever is available, to make my way to and from office usually in pouring rain. While inhaling the deadly doses of noxious gases over 30 kms, morning and evening, I pray that the Almighty will bestow his Divine Mercy on those who so cruelly torture us senior citizens — and the sooner the better! For obvious reasons I would prefer to remain anonymous. I would not want the 'Eagle Force' descending on me at dead of night.

Disgusted

Pathological labs

Sir, Let me begin with a joke — "Once a patient was prescribed to bring in his urine sample for tests. The bottle was in the toilet and accidentally the lady of the house, his wife, mistook the bottle as a new gadget for urinating within. She filled the bottle and left it where it was. The man after seeing the filled bottle thought that some

how he had managed to do what he was told. He took the bottle in his pocket and rode his bicycle to meet his doctor. The compounder tested the urine sample 3 times because he was getting extraordinary result. He was thus forced to see the doctor for his observations. The doctor tested the sample and came up with the same result. He then called in the patient and declared that the man was pregnant and carrying a baby. After hearing the diagnosis the man became so scared that instead of riding the bike he walked all the way simply because he simply couldn't hurt the baby sleeping within his womb."

Though this happens to be a joke, and I have made many a people laugh until their tummy hurt, yet this happens to be a reality within the unregistered pathological labs in our capital. The DS (2nd July, 98) carried a wonderful article on this subject. The writer made extremely concise observation upon licenced labs and labs, clearing methods, billing system as well as lobbying between doctors and labs. Each and every single observation made was to harass the patients to their limits. But as the writer correctly pointed out, no law enforcing agencies or inspectors are legally bound to take actions.

No wonder pathological labs are being hatched like mushrooms throughout the city. In-

stead of throwing files and charts, maybe the politicians ought to amend the bill and take drastic and stern action against the culprit labs. Or if that proves too difficult then maybe we should import some "Pathological tests made easy" books or self-test lab kits so that we can do our own check ups before handing over our precious sample and risking the chance of being hijacked.

Shagor
Dhaka

Hygienic city

Sir, We are living in a polluted environment. Car owners use rotten fuel in their vehicles. To a large extent some use hydroelectric horns which are the most disturbing elements. Factories especially Garments factories are not growing properly. They put the waste, rejected portion here and there which is another cause to pollute our environment. Dust and rubbish are not cleaned in time by the payed workers. Cleaners work in the morning when it is time to go to the school, office or working places. If they (cleaners) clean those in late night, then it will help to build a hygienic city.

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