

Health and Human Rights: An Inseparable Synergy

by Priya Prakash

For the health policy to become more than health care policy, corresponding statistical systems will be necessary to provide the informational foundations all concerned; e.g. an overall measure of health status (not only mortality) with reference to other indicators such as Gross Domestic Product or Consumer Price Index and other environmental factors such as levels of pollution and purity of water and foodstuff.

IF the right to life is the most basic of all human rights, it follows that the right to health and health care are fundamental rights because you are denied medicine, clean drinking water or adequate nourishment is just as much a violation of your right to life as it is to die from a death squad bullet. Yet the right to health and health care has not been given priority by the human rights activists.

Despite the rhetoric of the indivisibility of all human rights, there is emphasis in the rights movement on such violations as torture, extra judicial executions, disappearance, and political imprisonment. Only now a strong pressure from developing countries, importance of social and economic rights have been acknowledged as important. Reason is not very far to understand, since society considers that basic amenities for quality of life are taken in the developed countries for granted as part of civil life, whereas the developing countries are still as in their endeavour to provide basics like clean drinking water, clean wholesome, unadulterated food items, have only started taking faltering steps towards these objectives.

There are more health problems in our country due to pollution in the air, water and food that is generating an under-nourished, lethargic and depressed population. These invisible enemies of the countries would cause irreparable damage to a whole generation of people.

The health care, where available, is to be regulated as per the standards, and code of conduct prescribed by the medical ethics, under supervision of the Indian medical council. Deviations in services and unethical practices, negligence by doctors are now also attracting

action under the consumer forum. But at this stage without going in the question of extent of coverage under the countries health-care system, the effort in this paper is to see the symbiotic relationship between the availability of life-nourishing elements and basic minimum services as part of development programs undertaken by the government and human rights, so that for people receives conservation of life in its optimum and efficient energies.

There has been a strong conservatism in the health profession. A part of elite in their society doctors, do not desire to challenge established authority, as well as a naive assertion that health care be kept out of politics in other words preventive health care in the domain of sanitation and hygiene are kept out, divorced from medical domains as only administrative concerns.

Three concrete relationships that require investigation are first, the potential impact of health policies and programmes on human rights; second, the health impact of human rights violations; and third how protection and promotion of health is inextricably linked to the protection and promotion of human rights. In this enquiry by bringing together the health and human rights activists, communities would open the way for interdisciplinary discourse that will broaden our understanding and awareness of these linkages.

The three essential ingredients that are considered the

bare minimum requirements for minimum quality parameters for human life are housing, safe drinking water, and fuel for food, these also form integral part of development program for poverty elevation schemes in the country. The Rajiv Gandhi's technology mission for safe drinking water has done extensive work but still 45 per cent of the rural house holds are without access to drinking water. Coupled with the problem of sewage disposal and most homes lacking toilet facilities compound the health problem. Gastrointestinal infectious diseases are among the most common diseases spread especially among infants and children. Other diseases like scabies and skin infection are also common due to lack of personal hygiene. WHO designated "Decade of Clean Water Supply and Sanitation" which terminated in 1990 as had a major focus of the WHO program of "Health for all by the year 2000" and country should take full advantage of this to expand the coverage to facilitate specially the vulnerable sections of the society.

The largest number of absolute poor live in India. One of every three persons in the world lacking safe drinking water in an India. Every fourth person in the planet dying of water-borne or water-related diseases is an Indian. Question therefore arises whether the residents of the village lacking drinking water facility could take up the matter in a judicial forum on

their own behalf and on the general issue of denial of clean drinking water, as a fundamental human right?

The issue of environmental pollution, and impact on health of the communal has been facilitated in the IWT. The International Water Tribunal (IWT) is an independent forum for adjudicating water issues, initiated by 11 environmental organisations in the Netherlands and supported by approximately 90 European environmental organisations. This is funded by Dutch Government and non-governmental organisations and to some extent by the Green party in Germany and has been hearing petitions from several communities in Europe, Israel. The IWT jury is composed of independent panelists, assisted by a group of experts in the field of economics, international environmental law, biology, geology, public health, resources assessment and ecology. The cases listed by the IWT must be scientifically documented and presented in writing to the jury. The plaintiff and defendant are invited to argue their case before the tribunal. IWT judgments determine responsibility and make recommendations to responsible parties to end unacceptable practices.

In India, the environment lobby has been actively pursuing cases of water pollution and other environment related cases in the legal forum with considerable success, but the question of human right and linkage with health hazards has not been taken up. Such

countability into self regulating function of the medical profession; and 2) development by the local government of a system, so that expenditure caps of medical care are linked to health status of population. 3) availability of health-related information for preventive health care.

That is besides, beyond regulating the medical profession to ensure population health outcomes, it also requires focusing public policy makers on path of improving health that reaches beyond medical care. For the health policy to become more than health care policy, corresponding statistical systems will be necessary to provide the informational foundations to all concerned; e.g. an overall measure of health status (not only mortality) with reference to other indicators such as Gross Domestic Product or Consumer Price Index and other environmental factors such as levels of pollution purity of water and foodstuff. Leading to a basis for organised thinking. There are difficulties in assessing status of health on population at large rather than individuals, that are an abstract and difficult health concept, and often difficult to measure.

The multiple determinants of health do describe important issues involved in transformation to a population health perspective, but certain indices be worked out that may help in identifying the areas of acute deprivation and vulnerable communities that need special attention of the policy planners. With cooperation of medical practitioner, and social scientist an integral framework may be worked out for health as parameter for human right and right to life that is productive and viable.

The author is a former Secretary to Government of India.

countability into self regulating function of the medical profession; and 2) development by the local government of a system, so that expenditure caps of medical care are linked to health status of population. 3) availability of health-related information for preventive health care.

That is besides, beyond regulating the medical profession to ensure population health outcomes, it also requires focusing public policy makers on path of improving health that reaches beyond medical care. For the health policy to become more than health care policy, corresponding statistical systems will be necessary to provide the informational foundations to all concerned; e.g. an overall measure of health status (not only mortality) with reference to other indicators such as Gross Domestic Product or Consumer Price Index and other environmental factors such as levels of pollution purity of water and foodstuff. Leading to a basis for organised thinking. There are difficulties in assessing status of health on population at large rather than individuals, that are an abstract and difficult health concept, and often difficult to measure.

The multiple determinants of health do describe important issues involved in transformation to a population health perspective, but certain indices be worked out that may help in identifying the areas of acute deprivation and vulnerable communities that need special attention of the policy planners. With cooperation of medical practitioner, and social scientist an integral framework may be worked out for health as parameter for human right and right to life that is productive and viable.

The author is a former Secretary to Government of India.

Deculturizing Hartals

by Alif Zabr

HARTAL is a culture. A new culture is not easy to nurture and develop. It is a slow and evolutionary process, once it is mentally accepted (same for style, fashion). Hartal have many binding and auxiliary forces (which change the cultural environment for adaptability).

Any social change is a complex process, involving many factors, human and infrastructural. A culture has roots. To contain or remove an undesirable culture, the roots, every strand of it, have to be removed. Is it an easy and quick process?

A major political party has dramatically announced to renounce hartal as a political weapon and not call for hartals in the future — even while in the Opposition. It is a noble gesture. But mere declaration and continuous repetition will not dissuade hartals. There are several implications in this decision or proposal, which have to be examined and sorted out, for others to understand, accept, and follow.

To undertake this huge task of conversion to normal behaviour, of a habit deeply embedded in the society inside different professions, and trade bodies, the political leaders have to take the initiative. Political hartals is just one aspect of the whole spectrum, but politicians, have the power to provide the lead or innovation, which is later followed by other groups, according to the 'trickle-down' process observed in other fields also (technology, trends, fashion and style, dress, language, more).

The hartal virus from politics has infected other areas of the society. The anti-hartal campaign has many dimensions. The trade union strikes began sometimes after the start of the industrial revolution as the factory work forces in human resources provided tremendous concentration of power for manipulation, exploitation and bargaining.

Hartals can hardly be controlled or contained by mere pious announcements and thunderous rhetoric, and then hope for the best, because one person or one party or group is not involved. Today politics has become a very sensitive issue affecting all citizens, including those who are not political activists. The no-hartal call is naturally getting political mileage and publicity out of this resolution or propaganda (the real nature will be revealed later, involuntarily). This concept is at present in the proposal stage; hence it has to be treated as such.

First the co-workers have to be won over inside the organisation, at all the hierarchical stages; then the roots outside in the society have to be pulled out one by one (use an insecticide, pesticide, or antibiotic?) so that the hartal concept is 'neutralised' through proper motivational campaigns (it has similarity with the No Smoking campaign in which billions of dollars are involved globally).

This campaign will need the involvement of the 'hartal leaders' in the other sectors (trade and labour unions, associations, student bodies, etc) at the top-level decision-making, planning and decontamination programmes. Unilateral decision is impractical, and may not work. The idea is good, and as welcome it, How to implement it? Removing political hartal is not the end but the beginning of a cleansing process in entrenched mind-set of defaulting sectors.

Each person interviewed publicly will denounce hartal, regardless of political or apolitical affiliation. Such publicity is futile. To remove a undesirable habit, a substitution has to be provided, as in kicking the smoking habit (suck something).

One readily available substitute is hunger strike. It has many advantages, as it does not disrupt the work or activities of others. It is a sort of moral and physical sacrifice or suffering by the agitators. This tendency to resort to hunger strike is slowly appearing in our society. To defend one's principle, one must be willing to suffer and make sacrifices, without disturbing others in day-to-day life. Individual human rights in daily life cannot be tampered with for long otherwise the grumbles will build up.

Political hartal has taken deep root in the political psyche. The seed has been sown and nurtured by all parties, and the fallout has been severe. The hartal tree is now as big as an oak tree. How a simple single resolution from one party or organisation can make this tree vanish into thin air?

What is the *modus operandi*? Where is the detailed project paper, the different phases, the implementation, coordinating and monitoring? Who have been trained to do the deculturizing assignment? One has to go into the details before claiming success simply with an idea. The idea has to be sold to the hartal mongers and their attitude change voluntarily. It is long-term project, to be planned scientifically, to render the resident virus ineffective.

Technically — applying the energy principle to a system — how much energy is required to remove some evil force something from a system long embedded in the society? The additional energy required is proportional to the energy input injected earlier and thereafter stored potentially to generate hartals. Hartal is a mass movement containing huge potential and kinetic energies, which have to be dissipated properly (without short-circuiting, which invite retaliation). Sermons have low-energy content.

The mentality has to be re-oriented — not an easy task in an undisciplined society wallowing in poverty and illiteracy. The whole operation has to be planned properly (with consensus) because human and psychological issues are involved, in the order of lakhs of people engaged in hartal campaigns. Another vital question: what are the guarantee and the punishment if the no-hartal principle is revoked unilaterally at a future date due to 'circumstances beyond control', as the present opposition is claiming, and has threatened non-stop hartal, to teach their adversaries some lesson? When something becomes a weapon, how to carry out the de-armament process? The deterrent and checks and balances have to be identified, and activated to every one's satisfaction. Platitudes will not remove the bane or hartals.

Therefore the no-hartal concept has to be approached in a pragmatic manner and the detailed plans of the project have to be drawn up for implementation, by the proposers, and the public in general. A national consensus appears to be mandatory. First consensus, then talk about no-hartal.

The concept of 'freedom' is also illusory after two decades, as we could not handle the consequences in a practical manner. Time and again we have failed to separate reality from dream.

Is Truth the First Casualty?

Newsgathering organisations in the West are increasingly trying to train their correspondents to handle themselves in places where their lives may be in danger. A Gemini News Service correspondent reports on his experience of one such training programme, and on what difference it might make to coverage of the more troubled areas of the world.

Peter Moszynski writes from London

I had a bad feeling about this deserted road. One develops an instinct for these things and I was beginning to get nervous about the car behind, which had been following for some time. The next thing I knew another vehicle pulled out in front. My worst fears were about to be realised.

Surrounded by masked gunmen, resistance seemed futile and I allowed myself to be dragged out of the car. Thrown on the ground, a gun to my head, I was blindfolded with a hessian hood, searched, then led into the woods. It appeared to be a classic kidnapping, or so — defenceless, disorientated and terrified — I hoped. But at least for the moment, still alive. Initially, my colleagues were still with me, but then we were separated.

Lying face down in the pouring rain, I tried to control my breathing. I knew the rules: don't struggle, but don't appear too compliant. I wondered if I should try to ease the hood off my head, but then I heard a shout, and a shot. Cooperate: don't make trouble. I knew what was going to happen next, as I was again manhandled and led off to a waiting truck. I was shivering, soaked to the skin, but finally free.

It was all just an exercise, I was in the English countryside, undergoing a training course for journalists visiting dangerous places: News Risk Assessment in Hostile Countries. It was only role play, but it demonstrated one of the first things you learn in the field: there's no mileage in heroics.

When confronted by men with guns, so what they say. They can get very unhappy if you don't, and that can really spoil your day.

Truth is the first casualty of war, and journalists are increasingly targets themselves. Many media companies now try to train staff to cope better in dangerous situations: war zones, civil unrest and other hostile environments. Training newsgatherers visiting high risk areas is a growth industry: most organisations now find it essential for insurance purposes.

After some years working in Africa I have been in a fair share of hostile places: wars, coups, civil disturbances, humanitarian emergencies, as well as encountering the regular difficulties posed by extreme climates and venomous critters.

So Britain's National Union of Journalists chose me to assess the training and to see how it matched up to the real thing.

The week-long residential course had formal classroom sessions, interspersed with hands-on training in the field, set-piece 'scenarios' like the kidnapping. It covered areas from battlefield first aid to post-traumatic stress disorder.

from vehicle security to minefields, ballistics and improvised explosives. The trainers, were former marine commandos with extensive experience of surviving in extreme conditions. The training was militaristic, involving weapons awareness, fields of fire, safe zones, dead ground, but included useful self-preservation techniques such as exiting vehicles caught in fire (since they attract fire) and the size of the backpack from antitank weapons (30 metres, in the case of the ex-Soviet RPG7).

The course also covered survival in extreme climates, civil disturbances and personal protective equipment. It demonstrated how easy it is for reporters and camera crews to be assembled combatants, and the striking similarity between a TV camera and an anti-tank missile.

But it's not always easy to tell who one's enemies really are. The first time I went to Uganda, I had just escaped an attack and a four-hour truck chase by remnants of Idi Amin's defeated army, and was much relieved to come upon a government checkpoint. The greeting I received slightly surprised me. The first soldier, calmly and ostentatiously, cocked his assault rifle, before pressing its muzzle to my nose. "And what have you got for me, muzungu?", he enquired menacingly.

Forewarned is forearmed and a colleague's had advised me to 'bring soap for the soldiers'. I had grave doubts about this strategy, so rather hesitantly, I announced, gently pushing the AK 47 out of my face. "For you, my friend, I have a piece of soap." I was greatly relieved, although still somewhat surprised, when the man left, quite happily, with his ill-gotten gains. These days I never go to such places without several spare cartons of cigarettes to win friends and influence people.

Such advice is certainly useful for journalists, and the course was an invaluable source of such information for beginners.

But it does beg the question of what such people are doing in complex situations, where they often find themselves out of their depth, reporting on issues beyond their comprehension. Newsgatherers not only have to survive in hostile areas, they also need to conduct responsible journalism in areas where the fog of war often sharply curtails the ability to build an accurate picture of events.

Recent technological advances have led to what some commentators have called a "supermarket of war video" where events are presented merely as spectacle.

Commercial pressures have led to a decrease in the number of regional bureaus and specialist reporters with detailed local knowledge. An increased reliance on 'firefighters' — generalist journalists often virtually parachuted into war zones — has greatly reduced many news organisations' analytical depth. Coupled with an increased demand for real time news coverage, this often results in a media stampede into the most recent hotspots.

This trend towards instant reporting (sometimes referred to as the "CNN factor") often precludes serious analysis and

verification. The New York-based Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, established in 1994 to assist the media to play a role in preventing mass violence, is attempting to redress the balance, commissioning research into journalism and conflict and producing a range of free booklets on the subject.

In its latest report, "Professionalism in War Reporting: A Correspondent's View", Tom Gjetten argues that impartial reporting goes beyond merely giving each side its say. He calls for more explanation and analysis and argues that the news media need to improve their coverage of war, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance.

The training I experienced might perhaps equip journalists to see a little way through the fog. It might even help them empathise with those who live their lives under these conditions.

But it could also encourage news organisations to concentrate even more on their 'firefighters'. And throughout, what is ignored is the fact the local journalists, with longer experience and clearer awareness of the situation on the ground, might provide the context which turns reporting of conflict into more than just another story of death and disaster into something that reflects the country, and the people concerned.

A Requiem for Vanishing Animal Breeds

by Indira Khurana

The fact that breeds — a selected group of animals of the same species, with distinctive inheritable traits — have adapted to local needs and conditions over thousands of years and in this period, genes for many fitness traits have been tested has been entirely missed.

INDIA is losing its wealth of genetic resources in domesticated animals. Native breeds, which are well-adapted to adverse climatic conditions and disease, are being lost due to misdirected crossbreeding with exotic stock, indiscriminate crossing between native stocks, and slaughter of animals for urban consumption and export.

Native to India are 26 breeds of cattle and eight breeds of buffalo; 42 breeds of sheep and 20 breeds of goat; eight breeds of camel and six breeds of horses; 17 breeds of domestic fowl, in addition to native pigs, mithun, and yak.

The country's world share of genetic wealth in sheep, goat and cattle is around 20 per cent, 33 per cent and 16.5 per cent, respectively and it has one-ninth of the germplasm of cattle breeds in the world.

The irony is that even as native animal breeds are on the verge of extinction in their home country, central American countries, southern states in the US, Mexico, Brazil, Mauritius, West Indies and Australia have cottoned on to their value, taken samples of their tissues and some of them have even patented them. And today these countries are selling germplasm from Indian breeds to India for a profit!

Crossbreeding programmes

are misfiring in India primarily because of an inherent misunderstanding of what constitutes a 'good breed', says P N Bhat, officer on special duty at the country's premier Indian Council of Agricultural Science (ICAR), New Delhi. As the adaptation of native breeds to Indian conditions comes with a cost: low productivity, it is assumed that introduction of genes from exotic breeds would raise productivity levels.

The fact that breeds — a selected group of animals of the same species, with distinctive inheritable traits — have adapted to local needs and conditions over thousands of years and in this period, genes for many fitness traits have been tested has been entirely missed.

The result: the semen (or germplasm) of 'elite' indigenous breeds like Hariana, Tharparkar, Gir, Sindhi and Sahiwal and exotic breeds like Jersey, Brown Swiss and Holstein used extensively for crossbreeding with native breeds has led less to the propagation of exotic breeds but more to the loss of many native breeds, some of whom are now truly endangered.

Contrary to all beliefs and expectations, these imported breeds have not really adapted to their new environment and their performance over generations has actually declined. The

import of exotic germplasm has also resulted in the import of cattle diseases, many of which are fatal.

It is not sheer coincidence that increased mortality due to foot-and-mouth disease has coincided with the import of foreign germplasm," says Nivskar, O S Tomer, director at the National Dairy Research Institute, Karnal.

On the other hand, the preservation of the genetic purity of the 26 well defined breeds of cattle in India, constituting around 18 per cent of the country's total cattle population, has also failed. Because of random crossbreeding, and breed substitution, 60-80 per cent of India's livestock falls in the non-descript category.

The native Zebu (*Bos indicus*), the Siri cattle of Sikkim, the local cattle of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (excellent for draught work at high altitudes), the cattle of Assam and Bengal (useful for agricultural operations on small holdings and terraces) and the Hariana breed (renowned in ru-

ral north India for its draught power and milk production, specially in its native tract in Haryana and adjoining areas of Rajasthan, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh), the Ongole cattle of Andhra Pradesh are facing the effects of genetic dilution, according to studies done by the National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR) at Karnal, Haryana.

B K Joshi, principal scientist at NBAGR, believes that this trend can be reversed if attention is paid to selection of superior dams and bulls for crossing, increasing the number of pure-bred females available for perpetuation of the breed and keeping adequate semen of superior bulls.

Alarmingly, India's buffalo breeds — Murrah and Nili-Ravi in Haryana and Punjab, Jafarabadi, the Bhadawari breed of Uttar Pradesh, Surti and Mehsana in Gujarat, the Nagpuri in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, the Bhadawari and the Toda breeds raised in the Nilgiri hills and the wild Asiatic buffalo in the

Kaziranga reserve forest in Assam and other northeastern hill states — are also heading towards extinction.

Possessing the best buffalo germplasm in the world, the decline is bound to hit India economically.

Another disturbing trend is increase in number of high-yielding buffaloes sent to slaughter houses for export of beef. Rather than keep a buffalo whose yield declines over time, affluent farmers find this a more viable proposition.

Smaller hooved animals like goats and sheep also stand threatened by indiscriminate crossbreeding and lack of attention. The native breeds of Jammu and Kashmir, the Garole, the micro sheep of the Sunderbans in West Bengal (who can stand in six inches of water without getting the foot rot), the Nilgiri sheep of Tamil Nadu, Muzaffarnagari sheep native to western Uttar Pradesh, the Malpura, Chokla and Jaisalmer in Rajasthan, the Munjal from Haryana, the Changthangi and Tibetan from

the higher Himalayan ranges, and the Bompala from Sikkim are declining in numbers.

The fate of the poultry is not better. The Kadaknath, a delicious table bird supposed to contain more protein than any other chicken in the world has completely disappeared.

Strategies need to be worked out and implemented immediately if India is to benefit from conservation. Setting up specialised breeding farms, preferably in the native tract, maintaining a balance between genetic variability and purity, creating awareness among farmers and giving them assistance in the form of know-how and funds should be uppermost on the agenda.

Since many breeds are endangered and resources limited, some sensible criteria will have to be adopted for conservation. The first step is to make an inventory and decide on priorities. As breed societies are practically non-existent in India, it is necessary to establish the number of livestock and poultry breeds available, their de-

mography and geographical distribution before setting about to conserve them.

According to NBAGR this will take 10 years, by which time India may have lost many breeds. But it is vital that it be done all the same. Storing germplasm in genebanks, developing transgenic forms and identification of rare genes for propagation and commercialisation should also be attempted.

Scientists at the NBAGR stress on the need for government policy planning to cover all aspects of biodiversity. "If we can have an Act for forest protection and wildlife protection, why not have an Act on protection of domestic animal genetic resources?" they ask.

Sadly, the Convention of Biological Diversity, while clearly accepting each country's sovereignty over its genetic resources, has yet to come up with solutions on implementation and verifications of the origins.

"Implementation, or the 'do-how', is certainly going to be a problem," predicts M S Swaminathan, chairperson of the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai. How are developing countries going to prove that a particular physical trait is the result of a gene that is specific to their country? — a particularly major problem for India, which has little documentation of genes peculiar to

India breeds.

Also, there has hardly been any concerted effort in increasing the awareness about the importance of Indian farm animals. Of the total power required for agricultural operations, only 12 per cent comes from tractors, the rest comes from animals, which are a renewable source of energy. Unfortunately, it has never occurred to the administrative and political leadership to put in greater effort to harness this power.

The interests of the people and national interests are not at variance. But unless people are involved and policy changes worked out, little is going to be achieved. While other countries are making sustainable use of animal resources and reaping benefits from patenting genes of breeds they claim to be from their own stock, India will lose out if it cannot manage its own domestic animal genetic resources.

What is the point of signing the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)? The fact of its animal genetic resources may soon go the way of basmati rice and neem, whose products, patented by developed countries, have brought in huge profits for transnationals.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

