### Management of Public Resources

# Thoughts on a Framework for Effective Utilisation

by Gholam Kibria

Inter-enterprise and inter-agency debts arising from unpaid bills for goods and services supplied to each other

are a major public sector problem in Bangladesh, as in many other countries with large public sectors.

Typically, a state-owned enterprise (SOE) tries to finance the liquidity-gaps caused by arrears from its debtors

by postponing the payments of its own obligations to other SOEs, the government, private sector claimants and,

finally, the banking system. This leads to an extension of the web of mutual debts. . .

HE purpose of this writeup is to place a tentative framework for a discussion on the effective utilisation of resources in government and the public sector. "Resources", in this context, will include financial as well as real resources, both material and human, but exclude land and environmental resources in the public domain. To make it concrete and to keep within manageable limits, it will be structured around a few well-known and much-discussed problems in resource management, such (1) The wide social and pro-

fessional chasm between officers and staff in government departments and public sector corporations; (ii) The identification of

staff and trade unions with political parties and vice-versa. (iii) Absence of effective arrangements for the appropriate custodianship of physical assets and their proper mainte-

(iv) Large and chronic interenterprise and inter-agency debts, which have far-reaching consequences for the government and the economy.

(v) Absence of a smoothly operating system for the timely adjustment of the prices of marketable goods and services provided by the public sector. (vi) The absence of modern and high quality internal audit organisations in government

and the public sector. Social and professional gap between officers and staff: The personnel structure in government departments and the public sector corporations and enterprises is heavily hierarchical, with a wide social and professional chasm between officers and staff. This partly reflects a dichotomy between work at the grassroots and that at the upper levels of an organisation, which is a fact of life everywhere. But the whole trend of modern management has been towards simplifying the details of work at the grassroots, facilitating a better grasp of details by senior management inducing a better understanding of the rationale of decision-making at the higher levels among personnel at the junior levels. This two-way movement of mutual comprehension and respect has been sharply accelerated by the rapid growth of word processing and computerisation, opening up

new horizons for personnel at senior and junior levels alike, and improving the quality of decision making as well as grassroots implementation. In our country, however, the management environment and outlook have remained rooted in the past. In fact, the adverse consequences of the dichotomy just described have perhaps been aggravated by the growing volume of details at the bottom with increasing demand for public services, unchanged procedures for dealing with them and the growing sophistication of work at the decision-making level under the impact of international interaction and globalisation.

This growing gap between the

upper levels of management and their grassroots deprives the decision making process of insight into details and many well-meaning policy or management decisions get bogged down during implementation. This is a recognised problem and in several areas government initiatives have been taken to deal with various aspects of the problem. The Reforms in Budgeting and Expenditure Control (RIBEC) Project of the Ministry of Finance within the framework of the Public Sector Resource Management Adjustment programme is the most comprehensive of these initiatives However, this is primarily a process-oriented rather than human resource-oriented project. I believe what the government and public sector machinery as a whole now needs is a comprehensive strategy for modernisation which will include provision for upgrading the skills and attitudes of junior level staff so that they may be re-absorbed in the modernised set-up. Only a part of possible redundancies at the grassroots level caused by work simplification and data- and word-processing will be absorbed through erosion within a reasonable time span. The demand for higher skills created by the same process of modernisation should at least partly be met through the remedial education and retraining of existing relatively young grassroots personnel. If this is not done, we may be losing the utilisation of some useful existing experience and, besides, any modernisation process initiated at the top may be held hostage to organised resistance within

The identification of staffand trade-unions with political parties: The adverse consequences of the politicisation of staff and trade unions are too well-known to require detail narration. It handicaps the government in dealing with government staff and trade union problems on a completely objective basis and it also affects the ability of staff unions and collective bargaining agents to represent the interests of their members unhampered by party political loyalties. The solution, of course, lies in all political parties arriving at a consensus on distancing themselves from involvement in staff and trade unions. In our present circumstances, such a consensus is difficult to visualise but the subject could, and should, be

the system.

kept constantly on the public Oversight of the custodianship of government's physical assets: The overwhelming emphasis in government financial management is on the control of money flows rather than the stock of physical assets. Public sector business organisations have reasonable inventories of their assets, but in hard core government, attention to physical assets and their maintenance is inadequate, to say the least. Awareness of the value and condition of physical assets among top management is often lacking. This makes for poor custody and maintenance of government assets, involving incalculable costs. To remedy this undesirable situation, government could consider allocating to the Ministry of Finance the responsibility for the oversight of the assets custodial functions of the ministries and departments. The following tasks could be envisioned for a new unit set up in the Ministry of Finance for this purpose:

i. To build up and maintain central records of the descrip-

tion and value of physical assets of the government above a certain value. (The responsibility for the day-to-day operation, maintenance and supervision of these assets will, of course, remain with the administrative authorities concerned and they will also maintain their own records of these as-

ii. To ascertain, through periodic reports and physical inspection, whether the administrative authorities are using or operating their assets with due care and maintaining them properly. Preventive maintenance of equipment should be encouraged and enforced.

iii. To help facilitate appropriate allocation at the time of the annual budget exercises, where resources allocated for operation and maintenance are seen to be inadequate.

The enormous database capacity of computers makes the central supervision of physical assets possible today. The new Labour government in Britain undertook the preparation of a database of government assets soon after it took office last May and the task has just been completed. A few weeks back, I heard in a BBC broadcast that the bulk of the information gathered would be put on the

Chronic inter-enterprise and inter-agency debts: Interenterprise and inter-agency debts arising from unpaid bills for goods and services supplied to each other are a major public sector problem in Bangladesh, as in many other countries with large public sectors. Typically, a state-owned enterprise (SOE) tries to finance the liquiditygaps caused by arrears from its debtors by postponing the payments of its own obligations to other SOEs, the government. private sector claimants and, finally, the banking system. This leads to an extension of the web of mutual debts outside the closed circle of SOEs and the

government (which is a member of this circle because of arrears in its payments to the public utilities). This extension of the web of debts to the private sector and the banking system makes the problem of inter-enterprise debts a general problem for the economy as a whole. It also casts a dark shadow over negotiations with foreign donor agencies/development partners

for new project loans. Inter-enterprise debts are, then, a major problem with major resource implications and a resolute programme aimed at their early liquidation, therefore, needs to be undertaken. The following general approach is suggested for such a programme:

(a) As the debts of each enterprise to the other enterprises are intimately connected with the debts of other entities (including the government) to it, the first step should be the construction of a matrix of mutual debts and claims. A multi-lateral solution rather than a series of bilateral settlements should be attempted.

(b) On the basis of this matrix, the enterprises should be divided into two groups - one of net debtors and the other of net creditors.

(c) For each net debtor entity, a repayment schedule of its net debt is to be worked out on the basis of a realistic assessment of its liquidity projection over a short or medium term timeframe. These payments should go into a central fund to be controlled by an Administrator of Enterprise Debts in the Ministry of Finance, who will distribute the amounts among its creditors on a suitable pro-rata basis after deducting from each instalment necessary amounts for the settlement of each creditor organisation's own debts.

(d) All the transactions should, of course, be reflected in the respective accounts on a gross basis.

(e) An essential pre-condition for the success of this strategy is that a comprehensive long-term financial restructuring programme will be undertaken on a case-by-case

Smooth adjustment of prices

of public sector goods and services: The disastrous economic distortions caused by any significant delays in price adjustments in the public sector are well known and well documented. They give wrong signals to the producers and consumers alike, they cause heavy losses to the manufacturing and trading organisations concerned, causing also liquidity gaps which have to be made by a combination of budgetary subsidy and un-repaid bank loans of an expansionary nature. Finally they give rise to serious difficulties in negotiations with development partners or the IMF for new loans or credits. The disruptive effects of singlestroke large adjustments reflecting accumulated arrears of reasonable adjustments due in the past are not explicitly recognised. These aggregate adjustments carried out by government or SOEs, to be socially tolerable and economically effective at all, must be matched by ever widening circles of innumerable mini-adjustments in the budgets of economic agents - households and business enterprises - scattered all over the country. These miniadjustments involve large shifts in the consumption and income patterns of economic agents. Their ability to make these difficult changes and shifts is determined by their level of consumption and resources at the start of the adjustment process, which in our economy tends to be low in most cases. In such a situation many of the households and other economic agents respond with street protests for a start and then gradually settle down to a wide variety of malpractice that decrease their individual ·bills but increase the collective cost to the whole society and the economy. These bad habits, of course, once entrenched in difficult times, prove incurable even in more prosperous times. Two conclusions seem to follow from the scenario sketched

Let us obviate singlestroke massive price adjustment by establishing an "arm's length" relationship between government and state-owned enterprises at least in the area of price setting, which should be entirely cost-and-market driven except in those rare cases where for reasons of declared public policy, government comes up with offers of explicit cash subsidies in the shape of lump-sum advance payments subject to quarterly adjustments. To make the public sector price setting process transparent and to provide safeguards against the reckless underwriting of poor management and uncontrolled costs in the public sector, an independent professional body may be set up to oversee the price setting process. Public utilities and other monopolies should be required to submit their price setting proposal with underlying data to that body which could then hold a public hearing of reasonable duration, say two weeks. For other stateowned enterprises, which compete in the market place, a statement published in the press explaining the underlying factors should be enough.

b) In cases of massive, really massive external price shocks, very large price adjustments may become inevitable which should be very very infrequent, hopefully the pace of adjustment may be determined in consultation with the government, keeping in view the shock-absorptive capacity of the economic agents.

Effective internal audit setups in the state enterprises and government departments: In recent years the Comptroller and Auditor General's independent external audit has made remarkable strides towards the induction of Comprehensive Audit, representing a combination of tradition of Compliance Audit and the new concepts of Performance and Value For Money (VFM) audit. The first highly readable re-

port of the present Public Accounts Committee led by its able and energetic Chairman and supported by profession-

ally qualified staff shows that the first and most important user of the Auditor General's reports will be able to give him all necessary support. But both the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee will be handicapped in their modernisation and improvement programmes unless a strong network of internal audit organisations is built up across the government and the public sector. The whole trend in government and private sector audit in recent years has been towards strengthening of internal audit. The growth and strengthening of the offices of the Inspectors General in the US Federal agencies and the role of internal audit in commercial business organisations in the UK and elsewhere in stimulating the growth of "Control Self Assessment" (CSA) illustrate this development. In order to improve the management of resources in government and state owned organisations and to simplify and facilitate the work of external audit, of both the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Chartered Accountants (in relation to the public sector), a policy-directed initiative for the creation of a network of internal aud it organisations in all the ma'or government ministries and departments and in the rajor public sector corporation s and state owned enterprises with the following features could be

i. These organisations should be manned with good professionally qualified staff. initially drawn from the Audit Department but later replaced by specialised person nel appropriately trained for t'ne purpose.

undertaken:

ii. The chiefs of the internal audit units regard'iess of their rank and pay scales, should be given direct access to the heads of the organisations concerned - ministries, departments, corporations and eriterprises.

iii. The internal audit units will not only carry out standard internal audit checks of financial operations, they must also work as pro-active advisors and consultants to management in constantly assessing and improving their internal control systems.

The author is former Finance Secretary and Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh.

## Sustainable Human Development

## Replenishing Losses of 1998 Flood and Alleviating Poverty

by Dr M Kabir and Dr Bazlul Haque Khandoker

HE purpose of this article is to address the capability of sustainable human development model to capture the impacts of the 1998 flood on the economy and consequently on the poverty situation. The model is being developed with experts from home and abroad. This is a technical assistance project funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to support the Planning Commission of Bangladesh in focusing considerations of sustainable human development in its plan. It recognizes the sustainable human

development as a multidimensional process, which focuses on life support, equity and efficiency via strategies to make economically, environmentally, and socially responsible decisions for the present and future generations in Bangladesh. Specifically, the project proposes to assist the Planning Commission with the institutional statistical and analytical underpinnings needed to incorporate a sustainable development strategy in its Five

tive Plans. The Fifth Five-year Plan of Bangladesh upholds the essence Sustainable Human of SHD. which is reflected in the national level objectives of the Plan and elements of plan strategies. The Plan envisages that poverty alleviation is the overriding objective of the Plan, while generation of productive employment, achievement of self-sufficiency, human resources development, development of infrastructure, curbing population growth.

Yearly and Longterm Perspec-

provision of social amenities. base, protection of environment, closing gender gap and establishment of better social justice through a more equitable distribution of income are the

national objectives of the Plan. The model when completed will be a friendly user and one can simulate to assess the intervention effects on the various sectors of economy including education, health, nutrition and food security. In the present article we made an attempt to see the impacts of flood on the economy. The data for this purpose were mainly derived from the secondary sources such as print media, Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh and the World Food Programme Statistics on crop damages by district. As reported in a section of press the honourable Planning Minister tried to provide comprehensive information on the losses due to flood although such statistics have its own limitation. Despite constraints in the data requirements the capability of the model has been demonstrated to the Planning Minister and other policy makers of the Planning Commission very recently. The UNDP resident representative was also present in the presentation. Dr P D Sharma, Chief Technical Advisor of the SHD project began his presentation giving an over view of the SHD model. He said that the model is user friendly and can address many aspects including various sectors of the economy. The modeling team raised a number of questions relating flood to understand and answer them through application of the

strengthening of technological

model. The questions are: What are likely losses of capital stock and its distribution by major sector?

 What are the possibilities of mobilizing resources both from internal and external sources to rehabilitate the capital stock at least to the preflood level? · What would be the desired

time frame for implementing rehabilitation needs? · What would be the impact

of the level of investment and foreign aid requirements during the rehabilitation phase? What would be the consequences on poverty situation in

rural and urban areas? The macro economic module, population module and poverty modules of Sustainable Human Development modeling system have been used to answer the questions raised regarding loss of flood. The model generated a number of simulations to capture loss of flood and estimated capital loss of around US\$2355 million at 1998-99 prices which is about 6 per cent of GDP. The model also generated sector wise capital loss. Given the loss of capital stock due to devastating flood, the immediate objective of the government is to undertake rehabilitation programme to reconstruct capital stock to preflood level. This would help create enabling condition to restore normal economic activities. The sooner government can do the better for the econ-

omy. The effects of delay in re-

covering economy to pre-flood

level are also studied so that

policy makers may consider macro variables, the model also mechanism to link the populaalternative options to overcome the problem. Three simulations were generated under four assumptions. These are

· Scenario one assumes rehabilitation need is considered to be completed within three years and it also assumes availability of foreign aid. The scenario also assumes that economy will be functioning fully within one year of the flood. This scenario we titled as

optimistic or best case scenario. Scenario two assumes rehabilitation need is considered to be completed within three years of the flood. It also assumes availability of half of foreign aid of the total requirement. This scenario we titled worst case scenario.

 Scenario three is the base scenario or pre-flood scenario. To understand the simulation results this would be compared. Time Frame Rehabilitation

of Capital Stock and Investment of GDP Ratio: On the basis of above assumptions, model estimates suggest that due to flood the loss of capital stock is about US\$2.355 compared to the 1998 pre-flood scenario. If the foreign aid is available in time then under optimistic situation capital stock may be fully rehabilitated by 2000. On the other hand under pessimistic scenario it may take four years time to gain the preflood economic situation Maintenance of GDP ratio is one of the important determinant economic situations. The FFYP aims to achieve 7 per cent growth rate. Along with other

estimated the movements in investment-GDP ratio under different scenarios. If capital stock is fully rehabilitated and if required foreign aid is available, then under the optimistic scenario, investment-GDP ratio will be almost equal to the level observed under the pre-flood scenario. This is mainly due to the full financing from external resources. Under the pessimistic scenario the invest-

ment-GDP ratio is considerably lower than the pre-flood level If this situation persists it would take four years to regain back economy to pre-flood period. The fall in investment is perhaps due to decline in domestic savings as a result of falling income. Reallocation of investible funds for rehabilitation needs and the time frame to achieve the rehabilitation of capital stock has implication for the growth of economy. The above results indicate that under the optimistic scenario the decline in real GDP growth would be around 1 to 2 per cent. However, with the replacement of capital stock the of rate growth of GDP may reach the pre-flood level. The simulation results may help the Planning

Ministry to consider the strategy for recovery of economy. Impacts of Flood on Rural and Urban Poverty: It is obvious that the devastating flood of 1998 would have impact on rural-urban poverty situation. To what extent there would be rise in poverty due to flood has also been estimated. The macro eco-

nomic model has the built-in

tion to capture the poverty situation. The SHD model also estimated the proportion of the poor under both optimistic and pessimistic situations of the economy. For example, loss of capital stock, reallocation of funds for replacement purposes instead of formation of capital, decline in GDP growth may have implication on the poverty situation in Bangladesh. The model estimates suggest that under the optimistic scenario that is if capital stock is restored to preflood level and if foreign aid is available as per requirement the incidences on both rural and urban poverty will be small compared to pre-flood situation. For example, in the 1998 pre-flood period the percentage of poor in the rural areas was about 42. Under the optimistic economic recovery by the terminal year of the FFYP the percentage of poor would be about 45 which is 3 percentage points higher than the 1998 pre-flood level. However, special intervention programmes such as availability micro credit may reduce the poverty level quickly. The impacts on both rural and urban poverty are significantly higher under the pessimistic scenario compared to the pre-flood situation. For instance, under this scenario the percentage of rural poor would increase to about 50 percent by the terminal year of the FFYP. This is possibly due to considerable income loss be-

cause of flood. Similarly, the proportion of

urban poor would also increase 2 percentage points under optimistic economic situation between 1998 pre-flood period and the terminal year of the FFYP. while under pessimistic economic situation the percentage of poor would be higher by 4 percentage points between 1998 and the terminal year of the FFYP. An important determinant of poverty is changing employment situation due to changes in economic activity. As a result of change in the poverty situation between pre and post flood periods, the numbers of employees by gender and location will also vary. Although there will be change in the number of working population by gender and location the population size will not remain invariant within this short period.

What are the implications of these model findings? As mentioned earlier, the model is developed in such a way that is has the capability to address the sudden shock of the economy and can monitor the direction of the economy with the help of the model simulation results. The model is also capable of addressing the intervention influence such as the effect of nutrition on under-five mortality rate. The information on flood is integrated with general macroeconomic model to create a real situation of the economy and to provide alternative strategies to deal with the impact of flood. It provides an assessment to the policymakers to prioritise sectors to bring back the economy to preflood level. Thus the SHD model can be used to address various issues such as population, education, population, education, health and sectoral economic performance. One of the important objectives of the SHD model is the institutionalization so that it can sustain and be used continuously to monithe Planning Commission. The purpose is to monitor the targets and goals so that appropriate action may be taken in time to achieve desired objectives. Our experiences over the last one and half years suggest that this objective would be extremely difficult to materialize. It is also highly unlikely this objective could be met. One important reason is the trainees

tor FFYP targets and goals.

It has been envisaged it

should be institutionalized at

are transferred to other ministries/divisions without realizing the importance of keeping the trainees in the division concerned to use the model. The second important point is the incentive to these skilled persons. Since they would be technically skilful they require job incentives. The third important point to our opinion is the conflict between divisions and bureaucracy of the policy-makers. In order to avoid this we have some suggestions. The question is what would be the best place for transfer of the model so that the model can be utilized fully. In our opinion Prime Minister's Secretariat may be an important option for this. Since Prime Minister has to oversee the progress of the economy and one of her major aim is alleviation of poverty it can be transferred to the Prime Minister's Secretariat for her monitoring particularly in the areas of primary education, health, population, migration and poverty situation. We as modeling team see little prospect of its full utilization once it is transferred to the Planning Commis-

The writers Dr. Kabir and Dr. Khandoker belong to Department of Statistic, Jahangirnagar University and Department of Economics, Dhaka University, respectively.

### View from Abroad

#### Bangladesh — a Happy Land? by Bruce Holder

recent survey commissioned by the think tank Demos and published (early last month) in The Sunday Times placed Bangladesh at the top of the list of nations with the happiest people alive.

Its purpose was to inform us that money is not everything. Having just returned from Bangladesh, my feeling is that the issues are somewhat more complex.

I was one of a party of English barristers giving unpaid assistance to the British Council to run a law week; it focused on delivering human rights through the more efficient administration of justice and the fulfilment of the high - but unachieved - aims of their con-

stitution. The response from the senior and most influential lawyers there was impressive, but they have a more realistic assessment of their unhappy people, and a real authority to

speak. We were reminded that in the Indian sub-continent alone half the population do not have

any toilet or washing facilities. Millions do not have one meal a day or even the most basic roof over their heads. A staggering 80 per cent live

on less than \$2 a day. Imagine severely limited life expectancy, the routine abuse of children's rights, and a place where women have to struggle for their rights. Imagine the untold poverty of a population of 120 million in a country that can barely support 25 million, and is dependent on aid for its

very survival. What you see in Bangladesh is a testament to the triumph of the human spirit against adversity. Such dignity should not, however, be confused with happiness as we understand it.

Anyone who is concerned with human rights should ask what they can do to raise the awareness and the levels of expectation of a people which has little voice to speak on the international stage.

The Bangladeshi constitution enshrines many of the aims of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, whose 50th anniversary has just been celebrated.

But there was too little evidence of those rights being played out in terms of achievable government policy on child labour, on the inhuman treatment of prisoners in custody, on imprisonment without trial, on subverting the rights of women to property, or on directing aid to the places it really

should go. The Bangladeshi Law Minister, Abdul Matin Khasru MP. was clearly well motivated, but oppressed by the enormity of the task he faced.

And one of the country's most distinguished former judges Justice Naimuddin Ahmed, now a Law Commissioner, spoke openly of the steps taken to tackle the failings of the justice system.

But the apparent inability of the judges to exercise the power they undoubtedly had to influence their society for the good was noticeable, as was the lack of funds to achieve it.

A report by the human rights organisation Transparency International on

Bangladesh recently found that 90 per cent of those surveyed thought their systems were corrupt. But those we met were undoubtedly not, and were vocal and sincere in their concern for the country. I expressed the view that, until those truly responsible for bad practices were seen to be effectively prosecuted and punished, no change was possible in society as a whole.

It was refreshing to see that corruption could at least be openly acknowledged by students and lawyers alike. Indeed, we heard from a local newspaper editor who was given sufficient freedom to talk about it.

While the broadcast media remains under some government control, the print media does not, though this may be a mere reflection of the fact that so few in the country can read or write. Access to justice is a mean-

ingless label in Bangladesh too.

and it is likely to remain the

case that the poor that are de-

nied justice despite plenty of

rhetoric to the contrary.

While traditional forms of alternative dispute resolution known as shalish - are as old as time itself in Bangladeshi village communities, the courts have shown themselves unable to deliver justice to any but an elite few.

The fact is that most people do not even have the basics. They have limited access to education, no proper housing, no state support. Each year thousands die in flood and of disease. What happy people are

Justice Naimuddin Ahmed, who met our own Lord Chancellor earlier this year in London, reminded us that 'the beautifully crafted international rights instruments have no meaning or significance to these deprived millions...to the eight-year old girl standing on the highway with her two year old brother in her lap, her face representing the starving millions around the globe'.

Such stark language prompted our small group of English barristers — Patrick Curran QC, David Hislop, Kim Stafford-Smith and myself — to

ask what, if anything, our efforts had achieved. But Sital Dhillon, who also trained as a barrister in the UK but is now the British Council's Governance and Law adviser for South Asia, had no doubt of the value of what we had been do-

The many human rights workers, lawyers and teachers that attended had much experience to share, and they had no doubt about the value of their

work. And when we met a group of young Bangladeshi lawyers who had attended the law week we had no doubts either.

They were to split up at the end of the week to travel to their own communities throughout the country to use what they had learnt that week in a practical setting — at a one-to-one level in the villages. This was where it really mattered.

rule of law in society means. and how it would shape their future. They were certainly making a start. The writer is a practising

They were learning what the

barrister at 6 Kings Bench Walk, Temple.

### Community Radio Station

Nepal, which is ranked 154th on a scale ranking 175 countries in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and purchasing power. has set an example for South Asia by having its first non- official, community-run radio station -- despite official restrictions. Called 'Radio Sagarmatha' (meaning the forehead of the ocean), the Nepali name for Mount Everest, the radio station plans to focus on infotainment and edutainment. It was set up with the help

donated by the United Nations Cultural. Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO). The Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ), which spearheaded the move to set up the radio station, plans to develop the

of equipment worth US\$ 60,000

Kathmandu station as a training and resource centre. Among the other media organisations supporting the initiative are the Nepal Press Institute, Himal Association and Worldview

#### Occupational Hazards

four Indian metropolises of Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai boast special occupational disease centres in their ESIS hospitals, but the level of services provided is questionable. According to Dr V. Murlidhar of the Occupational Health and Safety Centre (OHSC) in Mumbai, in a report published in a recent issue of the Asian Labour Update.

the unit is not only grossly understaffed and lacking in support structures; it has no specialised equipment like audiometers.

The centre caters to the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa. Moreover, the doctors working in the hospital are usually new recruits on a threemonth contract, most of whom are biding their time for private practice. - WFS/News Network