The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Sunday, February 7, 1999 **Healthy Ambitions**

The health sector, despite being a crucial part of the overall development scenario, has long been neglected in government policy and expenditure plans. The major donor-supported population and health projects have been oriented more towards family planing than providing basic healthcare services to the people. A number of projects have been launched in recent years to address specific health needs, but while these have had major impact on survival prospects of women and children, the need for a holistic approach to communitylevel healthcare has remained unaddressed. This yawning void is now being sought to be filled through the Health and Population Sector Programme (HPSP), whose field-level implementation began on Friday in Jessore.

The HPSP, with a total budget of \$ 2.9 billion to be spent over a period of five years, is by far the most expensive programme ever undertaken in Bangladesh. It is also the most ambitious programme in the country's development history because it aims to cause fundamental changes in the way the health sector is run, the way community beneficiaries are viewed, and the way services are provided. The concept of providing all essential healthcare in a package, from one communitybased point is unique. This integration at the village level could revolutionise healthcare in Bangladesh, and lead to integration at all levels while creating simultaneous pressure for decentralisation.

The key to the success of the exercise, however, remains two unquantifiable factors: the level of community awareness of and participation in the services, and efficiency of the referral services at the thana and district levels. The current rate of use of health facilities by communities is very low, which is a reflection on the inefficiency of the services they provide. Strong communication to increase user confidence would, therefore, be vital. Delegation of functional authority to health facilities at district and thana levels is also needed to improve the quality of referral services. But most critical would be the cooperation between the health and family planning wings of the ministry of health and family welfare, without which fieldlevel integration would face serious administrative problems. Given the massive public investment involved in the programme and the critical need it aims to meet, it would be advisable for the government to ensure high degree of efficiency and accountability in the implementation of the HPSP.

School Textbook Chaos

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) is the authority to print and distribute school textbooks in good time for the academic session that coincides with the calendar year. They have listed publishing houses to bring out the books. But the distribution mechanism appears to be two-some: the bulk of the books are routed through the district education authorities and thana education officials for delivery at the school level while there are also listed local agents who sell primers printed on newsprint at a nominal price. Books printed on white print coming from the donors carry the label reading "For Free distribution."

The system looks broken down from the frontpage report in our daily yesterday that revealed a partial hijacking of the authority of the NCTB and the printing and distribution roles of the listed publishers and dealers, to put it mildy. Some publishing houses seem to have got into the act of printing primary school textbooks without authorisation. A bunch of dealers have also surfaced to sell such books illegally. The result is: books to be had for free or at nominal prices have been selling at blackmarket prices. Parents who should have got the textbooks from schools are going to the market to fetch them.

The basic reason behind this mess which has been annular in its recurrence, to be candid, seems to be the laggard printing of books. Although we are into the second week of February, 'printing is yet to be completed for the failure to supply paper as per requirement', according to the Press Owners' Association sources. The NCTB's claim is that text books have been duly supplied to all the districts. We would like the NCTB to enlighten the public on where we stand in terms of the textbook situation. Meanwhile the textbook board is urged stir up its listed publishers and agents to chasten the wayward elements within their associations who are giving them a raw deal.

One-stop Bill Payment

The Public Administration Reforms Commission (PARC) has recommended that there should be a one-stop utility payment system. This good news was published in an important Bangla newspaper Saturday.

So far customers of public utilities like telephone, gas, water and electricity have been made to pay these bills over bank counters on different dates putting them into difficult situations and accounting for wastage of time and money, the latter by way of transport cost. It has been a longstanding demand of consumers that the billing and payment systems are streamlined so that the utility organisations can collect optimum revenue and consumers save on time and money. In the absence of any integrated mode of payment people have to run to more than one branch of banks and wait in queue for long hours to pay the bills. Besides, they feel harassed off and on with arrear bills for the lack of coordination between the bank and the utility organisation concerned to take note of what had been already paid for. The PARC has recommended that all utility bills should be paid in one branch of a bank and suggested use of post offices also for this purpose.

It has also suggested that a Working Committee be formed with representative; from the utility organisations, the ministry concerned and the bill collecting organisation to look into various problems that might arise from time to time. The commission further suggested using identification code for each consumer and preparation of the statement of accounts on a daily basis for proper maintenance of records. Another laudable suggestion is the uniform date for billing every month so that the consumers can receive the bills in good time for payment. We strongly support the recommendations of the PARC and urge the government to introduce the proposed system in public interest as early as possible.

For a Brave New Subcontinent

In every way, they are so similar that the Pakistanis and Indians are the first ones to strike friendship when they are outside the subcontinent. And once they break the ice, they realise how prejudiced they were and how wrongly their minds had been polluted.

HAT people-to-people con-tact will some day blunt the edge of hostility between India and Pakistan was apparent. But I did not imagine that these sentiments would goad the two Prime Ministers to meet, and that too, so soon. Cynics and others, who poohpoohed such efforts, should be

eating dust. Nawaz Sharif has been fired with a desire to break the logjam and release from formalities of red-tape and protocol for some time now. I recall telling me during his earlier stint of prime ministership that bureaucrats and governments could not improve relations between the two countries and that people should take the initiative. Some groups took this up as a challenge and the result is that the two Prime Ministers are meeting.

In the past year alone, there have been more meetings at various levels than ever before. Had foreign offices on both sides been more liberal in issuing visas, the common people would have been crossing the border by the lakh. This would have been despite the harrowing experience at the police stations, where most visitors have to report. Even the humiliation and harassment they face while travelling by the Samjuta (agreement) Express between Delhi and Lahore would not have stopped them.

The estrangement between the two, however deep because of ignorance about each other.

cannot last long. They are from the same stock and share the same language and history. In every way, they are so similar that the Pakistanis and Indians are the first ones to strike friendship when they are outside the subcontinent. And once they break the ice, they realise how prejudiced they were and

how wrongly their minds had

been polluted. I have no doubt that one day the high walls that fear and distrust have raised on the borders will crumble and the peoples of the subcontinent, without giving up their separate identifies. will work together for the common good. This might usher in an era fruitful beyond their dreams. This is the faith, which I have cherished ever since I left my hometown, Sialkot, in Pakistan, 51 years ago. And this is the straw I have clung to in the sea of hatred and hostility that has engulfed the

It was brave of Nawaz Sharif to have invited Atal Behari Vajpayee through a press interview to take a trip to Pakistan in the inaugural bus service from Delhi to Lahore. I have used the word 'brave' because I can visualise the pressures he must have resisted to take the initiative. There was such a

stone wall in Pakistan that

subcontinent.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

nothing could bore through it till a solution to the core issue of Kashmir was found. Whatever efforts in other fields were considered peripheral. Such elements are visibly shaken. They will leave no stone unturned to sabotage the entire exercise. Their shops, which peddle hatred, face the threat of closure.

For Vajpayee, too, it is a bold response. His party, the BJP, is known for its hard line on Pakistan. Just as the Muslim League in Pakistan represented the majority of Muslims, the BJP led the majority of Hindus in India. The assumption is too simplistic and too facile. It is not true, either in Pakistan or in India. What is true is that most people in the two countries want friendship and desire to live in peace. This is the reality on which the two Prime Ministers should build the future relationship.

I have no doubt that both are conscious of the expectations

they have raised by what are probably the off-the-cuff remarks. Despite failures in the past - the Tashkent Declaration between Lal Bahadur Shastri and General Ayub Khan and the Shimla Agreement between Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto — the impression spread, perhaps a wishful thinking, is that something will come out of the bus diplomacy. People have focussed their attention on Vajpayee's travel to Lahore and Sharif's return journey to New Delhi. Going back to square one, the failure will not only be disappointing but also may be aggravating present uncertain situation with dangerous consequences since both now possess the

In fact, the two sides should begin with the bomb. It should be de-linked from Kashmir. The first requires an immediate understanding. The second will take time, although its solution is urgent. When I met Sharif, af-

ter the explosion of bomb by Pakistan, I was given to understand that Pakistan, like India. would also announce 'no first

Indeed, the two sides have to bury the hatchet on Kashmir. The Shimla agreement has laid down that the two sides will find a final solution. Kashmir is important because it has been dinned into the people of Pakistan over the years that a settlement on it was a pre-requisite to the friendship with India. Therefore, it is no use talking on what to talk on Kashmir, an exercise which the officials on both sides have been going over earlier and now again. The two or three rounds the secretaries on both sides have held so far indicate that they suffer from a mindset. The distance can be judged from one fact: India suggested the use of word, 'friendly,' in the joint press release after the talks on Kashmir last time. Pakistan substituted it with the word. 'frankly'. Maybe, no-officials could be associated with the

If the bus diplomacy is not to go the way that General Zia-ul-Hag's cricket diplomacy did, it is incumbent on the two Prime Ministers to produce some result. They need not begin with Kashmir. But they can at least

settle the dispute over the Siachin glacier. A settlement on it was reached some years ago and the secretaries of the two countries had initialed it. Rajiv Gandhi denounced it when he saw the details in the press before his then foreign secretary, S K Singh could tell

him. Political leaders and bureaucrats on both sides have only helped to widen the gulf because they find that the more rigid the line they take against the country across the border, the higher they go in public esteem and some prejudiced intellectuals. Foreign powers have also contributed towards keeping the two nations apart. Through various levels of deals on arms and economic assistance, they have stoked the fires of enmity. Either to preserve their "areas of interests" or to maintain what they consider the "balance of power" in the region, they have been following policies aimed at keeping the peoples of the subcontinent divided.

There is no doubt that the subcontinent can find its own destiny according to its own genius if left alone and if the peoples are allowed to look within, not without. With time, they may forget their quarrels. As Mohammed Ali Jinnah. founder of Pakistan, once said: "Some nations have killed millions of each other's and yet an enemy of today is a friend of tomorrow. That is history.

Both Vajpayee and Sharif may well make the history.

On the Bus towards Better Understanding

The tone and tenor of the Indo-Pak relationhip is well known. It is needless to say that despite all the assertions for making efforts to normalise the belligerent ties, it is clear the prevalent animosity will be very difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate.

MATTERS ##

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

of their existence.

appeared a prelude to actual

war. Forunately, it stopped

right there on every occcasion.

As such, it is normal that India

and Pakistan often talk in a

tone that sounds dangerous

even though in effect these are

no way nearer to that. It is evi-

dent from the fact that there

has been no war between them

for more than a quarter of a

time when their relations has

hit the lowest in recent times. A

series of nuclear explosions in

the early part of May by India

and immediate Pakistani ri-

poste were viewed as a serious

threat to peace and stability of

the region. Both countries now

The bus service comes at a

AROUND US IIIIIII

NDIAN Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee plans to be Lon the first to Pakistan when the much talked about New Delhi-Lahore bus service formally begins. In a reciprocal gesture, his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif has expressed his desire to accompany him back to the Indian capital on the same bus. No date has so far been set for the launching of the cross-border service although successful test runs were made last month from both countries.

Formal introduction of the service may be delayed further but it appears that New Delhi and Islamabad have made up their mind on the issue and it is only a matter of time before the it finally takes off. Much delay is unlikely. All the bottlenecks have been removed, but accommodation of the two leaders' desire may take some time.

The tone and tenor of the Indo-Pak relationhip is well known. It is needless to say that despite all the assertions for making efforts to normalise the belligerent ties, it is clear the prevalent animosity will be very difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate. The problems began when the two nations were created out of the British-India in 1947 and hostility towards each other has been the hallmark of more than fifty years

possess the nuclear weapons which they said they would not They have fought wars and bickered endlessly over the hesitate to use it if needs arise. Kashmir issue. There have been Although both assured they exchanges of provocative would not be the first to resort statements between leaders of to nuclear weaponry, the highy both cuntries, at times from the pugnacious and provocative highest level. Sometimes so inremarks from high-ups in both tense was the war of words, to a countries triggered off fears layman in Indo-Pak affairs, it

that a disaster was in the pffing. But fortunately, both demonstrated restraint at one stage and the ambience improved after meetings between the prime ministers of the two countries in the sidelines of international conferences. It is also understood that those comments came out of domestic compulsions of both the governments.

Two countries later held several rounds of talks and for the first time composite talks covering practically all kinds of issues concerning them ranging from tensions in the Siachen glacier in the Himalayans to trade. The trend is continuing and the bus service is part of the whole exercise.

India and Pakistan are used to different kinds of diplomatic moves to ease their tense relationship. Late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi once sent a bunch of litchis to late Pakistan President Ziaul Huq when the New Delhi-Islamabad ties were in a bad shape and the Pakistan president reciprocated the gesture by sending delicious Anwar Ratol mangoes to Mrs. Gandhi. Such gestures do have an impact.

The much-talked bus service between New Delhi and Lahore may not change much but it certainly reflects sobering mentality of the fierce foes. The willingness of the two heads of the government to travel in the bus to the other country may not be liked by the hawks or those believe in jingoism but certainly it holds promise for qualitatively changing the atmosphere of the bilateral ties to some degrees. The service is meant for the common people of the two countries and as such two prime ministers are embarking on something notable that is expectedly to be welcomed generally.

The bus diplomacy may not bring anything substantial for India and Pakistan in normalising the ties but this is a wel come development towards improvement of the ties between the hostile neighbours of South Asia.

Economic and Ecological Poverty

"The Poverty of Amartya Sen (DS, Feb 1) as depicted professionally by Anil Agarwal, the international envi-

ronmentalists, is bold and transparent. Now he has added one more dimension to the filling Sen matrix, namely, the 'ecological poverty' factor, a needed modern grafting from the world of the environmentalists. The latter have been marking their mark lately with accelerated progress on the com-

plexities of the environmental sciences. The environmentalists are also in the dock for not having the foresight to warn this civilisation immediately after the World War II. Knowledge is released in time capsules, when the time is ripe There is also a time for evil to retreat. Joy and sorrow are part of the yin and yang of life. So hindsight had been work-

ing in both the disciplines of economics and ecological imbalances due to the industrialisation and technological advancements. The moral lesson is that there is nothing free in life, and compensation in some form has to be extracted individually or collectively.

The outer space has also collected a lot of man-made garbage as space-flight orbits increased each successive decade. There are electromagnetic fields around the Earth for specific natural and mystical purposes (The Van Allen belts and other phenomenon. the timing of man's landing on

the moon, and considerable classified data and information). The effects and implications of these vibrations (all matter and energy are ultimately vibrations of one kind or another, including the gravitational waves about which information is not released readily to the public for two basic reasons: security, and the unfathomable character of the research)

This Sen-Agarwal analysis, and subsequent synthesis, have to be taken up in good cheer. It is good to note that the current civilisation, so long ruled and dominated by the rich of the West, is now being mentally prepared to bow to respond to Nature's no-option arbitration, regardless of capitalistic manoeuvers for survival in its old imperialistic garb and glory, through arms and the dollar (the Euro has now been introduced for some intended purpose, the outcome of which is yet unpredictable). Nature's primeval cycles cannot be contained by human ingenuity or impunity, as confirmed by the rise and fall of civilisations (Angkor, Maya, Aztecs, Chaldean, Balbylonian, Chinese, indian); and the appear ance and disappearance of continents (Atlantis, Lemuria). The Greenhouse Effect is am amber signal (if not red) for mankind to set its house in order, and pay the VAT(!) for its financial and technological, indiscretions and misapplications, increas-

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Avoiding hartals

Sir, It was a welcome initiative on the part of the Daily Star to organise a public debate in collaboration with the Centre for Alternative of Dhaka University on 'Public protest -Search for alternatives.

I attended the lively debate and participated in it. I, however, have to say that the coverage of the dialogue in the DS was sketchy, and the main thrust of the discussion did not clearly come out in the report.

It may be recalled that though participants did speak against hartal, and this is perhaps something no one would not do under normal circumstances, some speakers made it very clear that the only way of avoiding hartal in our culture would be to ensure that compelling circumstances are not present and effective alternatives are available. As a matter of fact, the dialogue was not on hartal, but on search of alternatives.

I very emphatically mentioned that rejection of hartal would be meaningless and onesided unless it was accompanied with and conditional on non-politicisation of administration and the opposition's equitable sharing of the government media and Parliament time with the Ruling party. Regrettably, my statement was not covered at all. There were also other discussants who spoke in the same vein. There was a participant who himself had participated in the Janatar Mancha and now regretted its occurrence. He thought that this set a very bad precedence for the politicisation process. One of the key-note speakers criticised the Speaker's decision or absence of it in the floor-crossing of two BNP members and pointed out how these partisan actions ruin the image of the Parliament and adversely affect the democratic process. It was held that the politicisation process has shattered people's confidence in the government machinery and the emergent need was to re-establish it.

The participants, you may recall, decried all hartals from the early nineties when an elected democratic government came into office and generally held the view that with the political legacy that we have, providing viable alternatives to hartal was a sine-qua-non for preventing it. And many alternatives were suggested. It was the suggested alternatives we were looking for as that was the purpose of holding the dialogue. And that was what should have been focused on.

Even the brilliant summing-up by the DS editor Mahfuz Anam was not adequately covered in the report.

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Hartal and environment

Sir. It has been observed that opposition parties are calling frequent hartals on this or that plea. I have also observed that general public is not interested in hartal as it creates problems for all and traders and labour-

ers are most affected. The politicians of our country are affluent people having enough resources to sustain on. It may be that for fresh air and to keep the environment clean the opposition leaders are calling for frequent hartals. If so, I would like to request them to call hartals for three a week and two weekend holidays so that government employees can go home and stay with their families for a longer period. In the process they can keep their families at village homes thus decreasing the pressure of both population and pollution in urban centres. In this way 'go back to village' theme will also hold

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Man with the shotgun

Sir, The photograph on the front page of January 27, 1999 issue of The Daily Star showed a man, suspected to be a worker of Haji Selim, an Awami League MP from city's Lalbagh area, charging towards a pro-hartal procession of BNP on Topkhana Road after snatching a shotgun from an on-duty policeman during the hartal on January 26, 1999. I just started at it with disbelief - stunned that this sort of incidents could happen!

It clearly revealed the position of the opposition political parties under the present regime. When Awami League was in opposition and observed hartal for almost two years we never heard of this sort of incidents.

It is really uncanny how the AL manages to get the upper hand in every situation. In the regime of the past governments when Awami League called hartal they did not even hesitate to strip senior citizens if they were found to be going to the office, and now the ruling party activists pull the sarees of the female members of the opposition if they take part in prohartal processions.

These actions are deplorable, and the government must act wisely.

Nur Jahan Chittagong

Secy in 1971 and (posthumously) Addl Secy in 1999?

Sir, While suffering a sate of shock at the sad demise of a comrade-in-arms of 1971, I was somewhat amused by the obituary news on page 2 of 30th January issue of your daily, titled "Ex-addl secy Samad dead". Honestly I was a little confused, though momentarily, as to who this Ex-addl secy Samad was. Because, Samad I knew was a full-fledged Secretary to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, in charge of Ministry of Defence during our glorious war of liberation in 1971 and I could not come round to reconcile to his posthumously becoming an

Addl Secy in 1999. I met Abdus Samad for the first time at his official residence of Deputy Commissioner, Faridpur sometimes in April 1969, a few weeks after I had been freed from military custody on 22nd February 1969 along with my other revolutionary friends and my leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. All of us were detained in military custody and prosecuted in the historic Agartala Case during the period from late 1967 to early 1969. During my meeting with Abdus Samad, I found him to be a patriot and a man of pleasant personality.

Next time I met Abdus Samad was towards the end of 1971 at Mujibnagar where I had come from Sector 2 for joining Bangladesh Forces HQ (BDF HQ). Having deserted his position as Deputy Commissioner, Sylhet, Samad had joined Mujibnagar Government to become Secretary, Ministry of Defence.

I met him next time in Dhaka Central Jail in 1982 where both of us landed up as detenus following the imposition of Martial Law in March 1982. We had lot of funs together including games of contract bridge in Cell No 26 of Dhaka Central Jail.

Later. I met him several times in his Sea Resources Ltd office at Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. During the last several years I did not see much of him but I never thought or heard, not even from his brother-inlaw Abdur Rouf Chowdhury who is also a friend of mine, that he had been suffering from the fatal illness.

Col (Retd) Shawkat Ali, MP (A correct version was published next day, Jan 31 under the heading "Qulkhwani..."

Boycott the politicians socially!

Sir, I agree in principle with the letter of Dr M Rafiqui Islam (DS Feb 2) for a mass, peaceful, silent, non-assembly, and orderly open social movement to boycott the politicians socially, as matter of protest, as they have not only failed to solve the country's problems and run it normally for so many decades, especially during the decade of the 1990s, but also cannot settle

disputes within themselves (the political parties). The standard of the infighting is detestable.

Some voluntary organisations may print and sell for one Taka arm badges or logos, which will sell in millions. This non-profit venture may donate the surplus funds col lected for poverty alleviation schemes, under proper supervision, in which no politician may be allowed to take part.

The politicians may not be invited to any private or family function (into any drawing room) for a limited period during the first phase of the campaign. The second phase may be tougher, but peaceful, without any coercion or intimidation.

If the politicians can do it, we the citizens can do it better! Watch if I am arrested or tortured! The PM has assured freedom of the press, and the freedom to criticize the politicians and the vile politics of cursed Bangladesh. Long live Bangladesh, and down with the bad politicians.

A Zabr Dhaka

A doctor for who?

Sir, An incident on 28th

January evening, made ask the above question. While acrossing the road near Eye Hospital at Farmgate, Dhaka, an elderly gentleman met with an accident. A speedy rickshaw with a passenger (uniformed serviceman) hit the gentleman. The rickshaw did not give warning bell nor it had any light. A bone was fractured above the right ankle as revealed in the X-ray. The uniformed serviceman helped the gentleman to get up and go home by a baby taxi.

The patient with some of his relatives came to the Emergency Section of a reputed mid-city hospital. He was again X-rayed promptly and the result made him to get admission into the hospital. The doctor came and examined the patient who was suffering from intense pain. However the doctor nonchalantly uttered that 'tomorrow is Friday and next day is Saturday, weekly holidays. days of their personal income. So the patient's treatment can-

not be undertaken until Sunday next i. e. 31 January 1999. Instead of caring for suffer-

ing the gap of man's inhuman-

ity to man.

ing patients the doctors look for ways and means to augment their income. It is really inhuman. Holiday cannot be an excuse for leaving emergency patients unteated. Some nurses and junior doctor showed their sympathy to the patient. But the authority didn't show any concern for the patient.

Later the patient had to take release from the hospital which took about 2 hours was taken to a clinic where he got immediate treatment (plaster) which took half an hour.

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Fie upon opportunists!

Sir, As far as I know, no such heroic figure in the political arena shows the kind of instability and immorality as shown by our political leaders. Many of our leaders have no ideals at all. They change their slogans whenever they find some lucrative chance in some other parties. Politics is supposed to be the king of all principles that helps the people to put forward their rights and demands to the law makers and the govern-

ment who lead the country. In our country there are innumerable number of political parties, the leaders of which often forget even the main view of their respective parties. As they have no respect or likings for a certain party, it appears to them very easy to leave it and join another one. They don't believe in the background or specific regulations of the party they belong to.

In fact they are like the vagabond bees collecting honey from flower to flower. What does it teach us? Our leaders are irresponsible, opportunist, viewless and unpatriotic.

My ardent request to these fortune seekers is, please be settled down first and then pay attention to politics.

Arun Kumar Biswas Dhaka University