

## Prevent Arsenic Poisoning

Alarming revelations have been made by UNICEF about dangerous level of arsenic presence in 22 per cent shallow tubewell waters in the country. This confirms the earlier studies indicating the enormity of our arsenic problem. The study has been conducted on fifty thousand tubewells and three million samples obtained from the tubewell waters. The study has reconfirmed the widespread belief about the presence of this scourge in drinking water across a vast tract of land in the country. In such a situation desperate efforts have to be taken by the government, UNICEF, the NGOs to draw up short and long term plans to combat the effects of arsenic poisoning.

These problems were detected in neighbouring West Bengal quite some time back and when it was detected in Bangladesh the print media had immediately started a campaign to eradicate this nuisance and at the same time make the people aware of the dangers of arsenic poisoning.

If we believe in the old adage which says 'prevention is better than cure' then we must look for producing long term solutions to this problem. A number of measures has been suggested by experts to avoid drinking of arsenic contaminated water. Use of surface water is one of them. For this we need a huge number of tanks and ponds across the country. The waters of these tanks should be used only for drinking and cooking as is done in many districts of the country till today. Many derelict ponds have been re-excavated to encourage pisciculture and poultry simultaneously which is praiseworthy but for purely drinking purpose some of these may be reserved and if necessary new tanks should be excavated. Preservation of rain water is another alternative to ground water use and this can also be done with expert help. Filtration is perhaps the safest method to avoid arsenic hence it should be practised wherever possible.

UNICEF is spending a huge amount of money and is trying to raise funds further for this purpose. We welcome their efforts in combating the menace and their concern for making people aware of the dangers, but at the same time request them to be vigilant against any misspending of funds so laboriously procured for a life-saving mission. Arsenic poisoning has to be prevented effectively.

## EU in Turmoil

These are certainly not the proud moments in the 42-year history of the European Union. On Monday, came a 140-page report on top-level cronyism and financial irregularities in some offices of the EU executive. The next day, all 20 European Commissioners resigned, taking collective responsibility for failings of some of them. En masse resignation of the commissioners looks set to have a negative impact on the EU affairs and, more importantly, cast a shadow on its planned eastward expansion. The 15 EU leaders are scheduled to meet in Berlin soon to finalise talks about overhauling the budget that might pave the path for entry into the union of 12 newcomers, mostly ex-communist East European nations. Even worse, the report and the en masse resignation it triggered off confirmed the popular image of the EC as an organisation of some 15,000 underworked and overpaid Eurocrats. It is indeed a disaster.

The blow comes, in a way, as a blessing in disguise for the Union as a whole. The bitter experience would surely leave the members of the European Parliament wiser, aware of the functional loopholes at the EC. When the next batch of commissioners take over, lessons will be there for them and they will know what path not to tread. Under the constant vigil of the parliament members, they will certainly be up and about while discharging their responsibilities. They cannot simply have the luxury, like their predecessors, to let sloppiness sneak in. When the catharsis, if one may call it, ends, the EC will come out more efficient and wiser than ever before. Disgraced commissioners, despite the fact that inefficiency on their part led to this debacle, deserve some credit for showing the moral strength in owning responsibility. Their individual frailty has certainly been offset by their collective integrity to the ideal of a union — together we rise, together we fall.

## Exemplary, Indeed

Janab Ali is certainly a teacher to remember and emulate. A man endowed with a keen sense of responsibility, he has set a rare example by expelling his son Jakir Hossain from the ongoing Secondary School Certificate examinations at Durgapur High School Centre in Rajshahi. He found the boy adopting unfair means in the examination centre. But in a round-about way, the fact that the son wasn't growing up with the same values his father is imbued with has escaped the teacher's parental vigilance at home. The invigilator-father, however, cannot be censured for it, because what the examinee-son has committed is perhaps a rancorous problem of modern-day youth. Because raising children with right parental control is getting overly strenuous these days.

Incidents of copying are commonplace these days. But this prevailing proclivity towards unfair means rings alarm bells. Allegedly again, many guardians encourage it only for their juveniles to pass tests; student leaders promote the malpractice to earn cheap popularity; and many an institutions never care to eliminate this disquieting scourge for they want to attract as many students as they can.

But things are really going out of control. A nation cannot let this happen putting its education at stake. "Fairness" in the examinations is a "decree", and all candidates must buckle under this edict since there can be no compromise with felonies in exam-rooms. There's hardly any time to brood over the issue. The administration must take serious note of it and chew over a uniform solution before things get absolutely out of hand. Since it's a social malady, raising awareness can begin by striking at the family level, if not at the national level. And Janab Ali, the teacher, has set an example.

JOSEPH E Stiglitz — the Chief Economist and Senior Vice-president of the World Bank (WB) — recently appeared at a public lecture organized by the Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) in Dhaka. This distinguished economist of the world spoke on "Have Recent Crisis Affected the State-Market Debate?" and held his audience spell bound. Personally, I am fond of his illustrious writings especially on information economics and a fan of his illusive and impassive presentations. The last quality in him I observed — for the first time — when I attended the ABCDE conference in Washington last year. However, both at Washington and at Dhaka the theme of his address seems to thump the conventional wisdom of 'only government' or 'only market' based development. On both occasions, again, Mr Stiglitz appeared to harp on the nation that Government and Market are complements, not substitutes. The East Asian crisis brought into sharp focus the failures of both in the absence of a text-book type complementary roles of government and markets and thus signalled the necessity of a shift from a monopoly to a combined policy. It is now not a question of 'right' or 'left' but, possibly, a question of 'right' and 'left'.

Stiglitz started his deliberations with some lessons about the events that followed some fifty years after the last World War and the 'crumbling of colonialism' swirled the world. According to him, three per cent lessons from the pages of history. First, that development is possible and is evidenced by the enviable success stories of some of the East Asian countries: life spans spanning from 50 to 70 years, eight to ten-fold increase in incomes per capita and, among others, poverty rates dwindled from 60 per cent in 1975 to 20 per cent in 1995. Second, history tells us that development is possible but not inevitable. The absence of inevitability induces a host of countries in the world who have witnessed not just stagnation but a cut in incomes. And finally, the crisis in East Asia drives home the lesson that success can be fragile — to appear sour!

As we all know, the discourse on development saw several swings in opinions over the last few decades. The immediate aftermath of World War II witnessed the predominance of a strong State role and an imposed state planning. This view was perhaps partly due to the seeming success of the Soviet Union in soaring from a backward, feudal state to super-power status in three decades and partly due to the failure of much of the rest of the Third World to progress. Markets had seemingly failed and there was a natural search for an alterna-

# 'Right or Left' vs 'Right and Left'

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The success stories staged by the Soviet Union, opines Stiglitz, was 'chemical' as could be evidenced by the fact that those who tried the central paradigm met even with less success than had the USSR. The reasons are not far to seek: ill-suited hierarchical structure of the planning framework severely constrained the move towards new technologies, elites of socialism replaced elites of capitalism, nation-

tion, privatization and macro-stability. Heavy doses of structural adjustment programmes accompanied the inflows of aids from donors. But soon the market-driven strategy of development began to see a rough sea that allegedly tended to rock the boat on which developing countries banked on to cross the sea. The free market strategy not only fundamentally ignored market failures, which are often rife in less developed countries but, even more impor-

of the East Asian Miracle hypothesis. One of the key lessons from the 'miracle' is how the State and market partnered each other in the process of transforming their nations. What the crisis does show, however, is that there are certain areas where East Asian governments went too far and others where they did not go far enough". Further he goes to say that, "small countries are like small boats on a rough sea. Even with well-steered, sturdy boat, they are eventually likely to be hit broad side by a big wave. Knowing this, they should have a good set of safety vests and they should take great care when venturing into dangerous shoals. The less developed countries had not yet fully mastered the technique of steering nor were all the holes in the boat fully plugged".

The third way advocated by Stiglitz is being said to eschew the palliatives of oversimplified ideologies and is rather based on pragmatic economic principles — that holds out the greatest promise and hence warrants serious persuasion. "The state should have more than a minimalist role but less than an all-encompassing role — a role in which government focuses on areas of relative strength ... there is no single formula, no single recipe but the analysis of this paper should have made clear that what is required is balance."

In fact, the 'third way' is not new either. Many economists of the LDCs have long been in favour of left and right rather than 'left or right' positions. But when the thrilling thesis comes from an economist like Stiglitz and a position like that of WB vice-president, it matters and means much more. We can only hope that the WB holds on to this view for a pretty long time. 'Right' and 'Left' should be preferable to 'Right' or 'Left'.

alised enterprises posited as pockets of earning rents for the workers and managers who thrived behind protective walls. The predictably strong reaction led people's perceptions hover around free markets, viewing government as villain of peace. The magic of the market with WB as the Magician I supposed reigned supreme in the thoughts and actions of the governments and the donors. In consequence, the planks of pursued policies were: liberaliza-

tantly, under-emphasized the institutional infrastructure that market economy requires — an infrastructure that only government can provide. We now see, for instance, that privatization without the appropriate institutional infrastructure led to incentives for asset stripping rather than wealth creation in several transition economies.

Stiglitz appears to argue that the crisis in East Asia should not be referred to as a rejection

## Hartal, High Court's Suo Moto Rule and Government's Deposition

by Dr Khandakar Qudrat-I Elahi

Unfortunately though expected, both AL and BNP have challenged HC's rule by arguing that "hartal is a democratic right". This unequivocally unanimous position taken by both the ruling and the opposition parties on the country's most difficult political problem — that she is grappling with since 1991 — seems to send a message, which is perhaps well known to the nation: Our politicians believe in "the right of the strongest" principle and they are united to uphold this principle in their vested interests.

### Background of the Rule

On 15 February 1999, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court issued a suo moto rule on country's two principal political parties and the government to show cause as to why activities in favour and against hartal should not be declared a cognizable offence and the criminal courts and police should not be directed to take action accordingly and to pass such other or further order or orders as this court deems fit proper". In issuing the rule, the Court invoked its jurisdiction under Section 561-A of the Criminal Procedure Code 1898, which empowers and authorizes the High Court Division "to make such orders as may be necessary to give effect to any order under this Code, or to prevent abuse of the process of any Court or otherwise to secure ends of justice". Known too as inherent power of the High Court Division, according to the jurists, this law invests the High Court Division "with widest jurisdiction to pass orders to secure ends of justice and for that purpose to entertain application not contemplated by the Code."

In serving the notice, the Court referred to the anti- and pro-hartal activities reported in the 10th to 12th February issues of a Bangla newspaper. But, to understand the background of the rule, the recent political situation in the country needs to be dug down a bit deeper. On 15 November 1998, the Prime Minister made a "no-hartal" proposal, saying that AL would not call hartal even if it returns to the opposition, and asked BNP for not calling hartal now. PM's call was rejected with a threat of non-stop hartal. This perhaps encouraged PM to mobilize public to protest hartal. PM's such call as "Make your area hartal free" often made headline in the dailies. The opposition parties, on their part, joined together and announced a 4-point demands in early January with the purpose of destabilizing the government. The political situation in the country eventually evolved into a condition of confrontation between the government and the opposition political parties. The honourable judges of the High Court might have taken note of this confrontational political development in the country and issued the rule

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