

## Medicare Imperative

An investigative report appearing on our front-page yesterday under the title "Little attention, poor diagnosis" served as an eye-opener to the tangle that doctor-patient relationship has taken lately. Specialists who run private chambers have been faulted for charging high fees, demanding repeated visits to be made, a series of medical examinations to be carried out and yet in the end handing "poor diagnosis" to patients.

Their sole look-out, some irate critics thought has been to 'see' as many patients as possible within the limited private practice time at their disposal so that very little effective consultation would be received by the client. While obviously this is deemed to be a denigration of a noble profession, in pure commonsense terms also this does not sit with the inflated medical bill the patient ends up paying after he or she has been through the mill.

That the patients have often grumbled over inadequate attention at the specialists' chambers and the quality of diagnosis and prognosis have been 'poor' are all known facts but what is obviously less known is how the doctors themselves are looking at these criticisms and what answers they have to such public misgivings.

We don't think an entirely one-sided view of the matter will take us anywhere. Surely there are doctors and specialists who have been doing yeoman's job and they have proved highly proficient in treating patients, providing them relief and even curing their ailments, either through medication or surgery. As it is, the doctor-patient ratio in Bangladesh is adverse, and when it comes to calculating the ratio between specialist and patient it is even worse. In that context, it appears patently untenable why so many people should chase so few specialists and crowd into the latter's chambers in what undoubtedly is a one demand-driven market for the specialists to cash in on. The craze for specialists can be curbed if a body of general physicians attend to a whole range of ailments and thus help most patients obviate the need for visiting specialists. Then there is the overall question of satisfactory medicare being available domestically at the government hospitals and private clinics, so that patient do not have to go overseas for treatment at the expense of valuable foreign exchange.

Our suggestion is that leading physicians of the country sit down with some eminent citizens to hammer out a plan of action to rid us of the persistent problem of medicare in the country.

## Right to Demonstration Violated

The way the Department of Social Services has so far gone about the task of rehabilitating nearly 300 sex-workers from Nimtali and Tanbazar in Narayanganj tends to only generate speculation over its ulterior motives, ranging from a naive attempt to impose a regimented lifestyle on the select few to a mean ploy to pander to the material interest of a local ruling party legislator. Friday's fiasco where armed goons, allegedly abetted by police, attacked "a procession of activists from 69 women and human rights organisations as they tried to proceed to Tanbazar brothel" certainly lends credence to the above train of thoughts. Whatever motive there may have been, the attack, beyond an iota of doubt, has been a violation of not only the processionists' rights but also an impingement of their rights to freedom of expression through demonstration. Role of the law enforcement agency, their indifference to the processionists' plight, appears to have been consonant with that of the assailants, decimating thereby the government's commitment to the rehabilitation issue, in particular and towards upholding the fundamental rights of the citizenry in general.

Throughout, from putting barricade on the passage of the procession, to hurling abuse on the demonstrators to firing blank shots and exploding crackers, to chasing them to the bus stand and on to the buses, the assailants appear to have followed a well-thought-out and, of course, well-executed plan to thwart the programme. It could have safely been regarded as a law and order situation had the police not played the role of a silent abettor. Even worse, the Superintendent of Police, Narayanganj has tried to equate the attack with "public wrath". Although he admitted to explosion of several crackers, he nonetheless maintained that "he did not find any terrorist at the place of the incident". On the whole, the incident may well give rise to suspicion of a nexus between the police and the perpetrators unless this is removed by a convincing clarification.

While condemning the untoward incident, we urge the home ministry to launch an investigation into the affair, not only to trace out the assailants but also to identify the reasons for the alleged police passivity.

## Dead Meat on Sale

Impromptu meat shops are to be seen all over the city. Keeping in stride with the inflating numbers of consumers these shops have sprung up. The trend has caught on in such a manner that even so-called department stores and large 'general stores' selling stationery and grocery items have a meat outlet just at the exit point of these establishments. Obviously, the merchandise comes handy compared to the hassle of going to a market for the buy. There are others who have set up roadside shops to sell beef. According to a report in The Daily Star on Saturday most of these meat outlets do not conform to the Dhaka City Corporation regulations. The DCC on the other hand does not seem to be interested in enforcing them either. Going by the Meat Quality Control Law and 1983 City Corporation Ordinance, 'a butcher should slaughter animals in an authorised slaughter-house and take the meat to the market after a quality check seal from the DCC veterinary officials has been stamped on it'. Unfortunately, most of the meat sellers do not follow the rule and the quality of the meat can always be questioned. Many of these animals are slaughtered in filthy places and often a sheep or a deceased animal be passed off as genuine mutton or a dead cow or a buffalo sold as beef, much to the detriment of public health, especially that of the children. The DCC exercises no control over the proliferation of such sub-standard meatshops. As in the cases of conservancy and road maintenance so also in this, the DCC turns a blind eye to public health. The government should intervene.

## Living on Edge

*Had there been economic development in the state the Kashmiris' focus of attention would have been different. One has only to think of the days when they would look forward to the arrival of tourists. There was peace. Political struggle had a different meaning then.*

It is stating the obvious. Peace cannot be secured in Kashmir without the support of the people living there. The armed forces have defended the state four times against foreign aggression. The Kargil incursion was the last wild card that Pakistan played.

Having taken care of the military aspect, how we tackle the political side of the problem is the question. More specifically, how do we retrieve the Kashmiris who are generally sullen and distant? This is the political aspect which has not received proper attention, although several Indian army commanders have said that Kashmir is not a military problem.

True, Islamabad's proxy war in the shape of mercenaries, the ISI saboteurs and even the armed forces — Pakistan describes all this as 'its moral and diplomatic support' to the militants — has not allowed the state to settle down to normalcy for years. In the last one decade, the interference from across the border has been colossal. Still, frankly speaking, India has had no policy on Kashmir and it has committed mistake after mistake.

One can go back to the time when Sheikh Abdullah, then Kashmir's sole leader, was detained in 1952 because he wanted India to live up to its promise of autonomy. That meant transferring all powers to Srinagar except those relating to foreign affairs, defence and communications. Or to 1989,

when the state assembly elections were rigged to force the Kashmir youth infer that the ballot box would not bring them power, the bullet might.

Pakistan was only looking for an opportunity when the angry young Kashmiris would cross the border to get training and arms. That it smuggled in some of its own armed men to guide them was natural because it had waited for nearly four decades to build an uprising in the valley. In the militancy and the state's response that followed, a large number of Kashmiris and members of security forces lost their lives.

No doubt, these things come between the two whenever there is a suggestion that Srinagar and Delhi should have a dialogue. Also examples of violation of human rights are innumerable. More than that is the estrangement of Kashmiris and the rulers' lack of trust in them. The wind of fundamentalism blowing in the land of Sufis too is creating difficulties.

Yet, the Kashmiris need to be brought back to the mainstream. They too have realised by this time that the insurgency, which is practically over, does not provide a solution. The first militant, Yasin Malik, who raised his gun at a public meeting in the heart of Srinagar, has turned non-violent and vegetarian. Now he is a follower of Mahatma Gandhi. Another defiant leader, Shabir Shah, who spent two decades in jail, has come to believe that conciliation is the only way to end the Kashmiris' trials and tribulations.

Former Congress leader Mehbooba Mufti and her former Home Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, have blown a fuse by insisting on unconditional talks with the militants. They should know that the militants of yesterday are already part of one or the other political formation in the valley today. As for the separatists, they too seem to have realised that secession may not be the answer to all their questions. No separation movement in India has succeeded.

The demand of the Muftis is not so important as the autonomy promised to the state. When Jammu and Kashmir acceded to the Indian Union, Maharaja Hari Singh parted with only three subjects: foreign affairs, defence and communications. Article 370 in the constitution institutionalised the arrangement and gave the state a special status. This special status to Kashmir appears to have wide acceptance in the country. The BJP had to drop its

demand for deletion of Article 370 before getting support for forming the government at the Centre. Even the manifesto that the ruling National Democratic Alliance is presenting to the nation in the forthcoming election has raised no objection against Article 370. So it may be presumed that the BJP accepts Kashmir's special status in the Indian Union.

The ball is, therefore, in the Kashmiri leaders' court. Some of them are unnecessarily trying to touch Srinagar, Delhi and Islamabad at the same time. This is not going to be possible unless the ruling Muslim League and some others in Pakistan give up the fiction that the accession of the Muslim-majority valley to Pakistan is "the unfinished agenda of partition." None in India will be willing to accept this thesis. And the way in which New Delhi's armed forces have fought to capture the Kargil heights should make it clear to all that India will go to any extent to defend the Line of Control (LOC).

The Kashmiri leaders, particularly the younger lot, have to face the realities. An opportunity has now come their way in the shape of the Lok Sabha election. If they are in the same house, they can demand from the nation what has been denied to them even after the 1952 Delhi Agreement, that is, their special status. They can insist on all precautions for a fair election. But they cannot afford to miss the opportunity.

Instead of harping on UN supervision, they should ask for human rights activists or some others in whom they have confidence in India to be poll observers in the state. By getting elected to parliament, the Kashmiri leaders will have an opportunity for disproving the government allegation that their support was primarily because of fear and fundamentalism "they have spread in the valley."

They should understand that because of the uncertain situation in Kashmir, New Delhi has denied the state the liberal economic assistance which it should get. Many packages have been announced in the past one decade. It was first Rajiv Gandhi who promised an allocation of Rs 2,000 crore. The successive Prime Ministers after him have been raising the figure, but never allocating even a fraction of it. Delhi has also mislead to some extent the reason for people's sulkiness there. Had there been economic development in the state the Kashmiris' focus of attention would have been different. One has only to think of the days when they would look forward to the arrival of tourists. There was peace. Political struggle had a different meaning then.

Today, people are sick of violence. The security forces and the terrorists from across the border have made them live on edge. Poor living conditions have deteriorated further. They want development, not politics, which the Farooq Abdullah government has been lately selling to them vigorously. A responsive, clean and purposeful administration in the state would have lessened their and Delhi's headaches.

The inquiry committee, which the government has instituted to go into the failures in Kargil, does not generate much optimism. The government should not have selected the members of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB). They will now be wearing two hats, one that of NSAB, which is an extension of government's defence preparations and the other of the committee to find out where the defence preparations failed and how. The two roles are contradictory.

One has a sneaking feeling that the report and its recommendations may have the same fate as the one submitted by the National Police Commission. It made some good recommendations but they were not implemented simply because the commission was appointed during the emergency. Who knows who will be in power when the Kargil report is submitted?

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

## To the Editor...

### Complementary, not discriminatory

Sir, The contributors are fighting it out over the male-female rights, a traditional field of debate for ages. Even foreigners have joined in the fray. Some basic points are missing. The supreme creator has created man and woman complementary to each other, usually denoted by the Yin Yang principle. A ball, if cut into half, cannot function as a ball; both the parts have to be joined together. Man and woman have to complement each other's effort to get the optimum result.

Both men and women have been embedded with certain physical, mental, biological characteristics which cannot be altered (of course, the human scientists will try genetic engineering to improve upon nature). It is absurd to point out why women cannot grow beard to claim equality with men — perhaps it has to do something with protection of the face and the throat in the outside weather/environment. Women are not designed to run 100m sprints or play football (hip designed for child-birth). The emotional depth and breadth for each are also different. Children need mother more than father, although the father should not be doing business outside 15 hours a day (as I find in some families in Dhaka).

To claim equality with men, why it is necessary to drive the mother, wife and housewife out of the house? She is the queen of the home, and husbands cannot claim that privilege and status.

The basic question is: are we humans trying to find fault with the design of the Maker? If not, then women should do jobs suitable for them, paid or unpaid. The economic issue is separate, and should be compatible with the background of the potential money earner — right job for the right sex, without neglecting the basic responsibilities demanded by nature and instinct.

A Husband  
Dhaka

### Wake up, DPHE!

Sir, The detection of arsenic contamination in ground water was unofficially discovered way back in 1973. The problem was known, both to the government and international agencies since 1990, and possibly some satchy work was done. The reason for covering up the facts DPHE and UN agencies still remains a mystery.

Mr Naim Wahara, an NGO personnel brought up this subject with professional help from Afshan Chowdhury, a freelance journalist; Dr Qamruzzaman, Dr Shibtosh Roy and others of DCH, and fought relentlessly to force the issue out in the open.

Today, we require to hold a (delayed) two-day conference (27 February '99) on arsenic mitigation to create awareness

amongst the world scientists and leaders. Although, nothing new came out, other than what was discussed already in the first International Arsenic Conference held on 8th Feb' 1998. The media coverage, ever since, has been focusing on the subject off and on — thanks goes to UNICEF patronage. Today, it seems, we waited for Christian Amanpour to tell us, that Bangladesh is in the grip of arsenic pollution, which may result in three million deaths (one of every 10 persons affected) from ultimate cancer of the internal organs; today we waited for UNICEF Chief from New York to tell us that Bangladesh is not USA where individual bottled water can be distributed.

If we are capable of fighting the arsenic issue against all odds and bringing it to light (thanks to Dr Dipanker Chakrabarti for the timely help), are we not able of setting our priorities right? Why are there no proposals for setting up proper research laboratory to measure arsenic poison contained in the patients' hair, nail skin, and urine, which is the most positive of all test?

We are still, after two years, waiting to see (during prime time) spots, fillers and documentaries on arsenic contamination BTV to inform and educate general public. The time between World Cup Cricket '99 innings was an ideal opportunity to fill the empty space, but the commercial houses did not

buy. Millions of dollars are already been spend on arsenic mitigation project without any proper media communication strategy in focus. A documentary film made on arsenic poisoning in Bangladesh in 1998 was shown abroad except in the country of origin! Is there is no Bangla version to it or is it not acceptable to BTV?

It's time we set our priorities right, or the sufferings from this deluge DPHE will know no bounds. DPHE, pull up your socks and act seriously with responsibility, before you and your family members are victims of arsenic poisoning too. Please, don't wait for foreign media or UNICEF to tell you, "you are dying to slow poisoning."

Zarazra  
Dhaka-1207

### Peripatetic decisions?

Sir, Lately, whenever Sheikh Hasina goes abroad, some policy decisions tend to misfire. One was the Rajuk plot allotment for construction of residential houses, which she had to cancel on her return.

Now it is the eviction of the Tanbazar girls. The attempt to liberalise this type of democracy failed to generate the right response in this active world of darkness and glittering evenings.

The third trip abroad would be monitored with interest (for radioactive fall-outs).

A Z  
Dhaka

### Road construction in the monsoon

Sir, The road running from Kakrail point to Moghbazar crossing has been taken up for development very recently. But unfortunately this has coincided with the monsoon. The rain water has washed down tons of sands spread over the bitumen sprayed on the roads and have undoubtedly clogged the underground drains.

We fail to understand the reason of undertaking such costly development work during the monsoon.

This calls for a change in the financial year, so that development works cannot be undertaken during rainy season, thereby causing enormous wastage of public money.

M A Kasem  
24, Siddheswari

### Slum culture

Sir, Dhaka city having different legends in the past has now turned into a city of slum.

## Beware the Ostrich

*The most important factor before any nation or subordinate institutions thereof is credibility and this must be restored as a priority for the future of the nation. We have to come to terms with reality.*

INSTEAD of benefitting from our mistakes, we have mastered the art of covering up our follies, the perpetrators thereof escape retribution and survive to make even greater mistakes to the detriment of the nation. What we cannot conveniently hide under the guise of patriotic duty we camouflage beneath the cover of national unity or the need to maintain cohesion/cooperation between government and its subsidiary institutions by refraining from casting aspersions in the national interest. This invariably involves the fabrication of blatant lies, a more polite term is the creation of misinformation. Saving the chair of an incumbent is more important than finding out why a Shaheed became a Shaheed, whether the ultimate sacrifice served some purpose. Bugles and trumpets are only a temporary salve for the national psyche, the pain of ultimate loss is that much greater.

Discretion, in this case, is the better part of accountability. For maintaining the facade of national unity, those who blunder must survive. The greater the blunder the greater the need for secrecy, thereby the greater the chances for survival. Our media is a hostage to the fact that its controllers give only lip-service to the obvious, they have no stomach to face the truth. In private gatherings they express their candid opinion but then proceed to step-around their views in print, sometimes for the sake of maintaining a facade in the name of a national responsibility but mostly out of fear of the "agencies". There is no satisfaction for us in the knowledge that we could have faced military disaster to go along with the diplomatic and media debacle if our die-hard opponent was not such a blunderer militarily. A Pandora's Box of rumours threatens our survival as a nation, it can only be contained by accountability.

The finest institution in this land, the bedrock of our existence, is now directly under attack because an initiative was not fully thought out as to possible consequences. More than a hundred officers and men of this magnificent army have paid a terrible price in blood for this negligence. On the other hand, though belated we have begun to recognise the sacrifice and valour of the Northern Light Infantry (NLI). This was a must, no single unit of our army has inflicted such damage on men, morale and equipment on the Indians in their history as the NLI has done, a handful holding at bay for weeks a force at least sixty to seventy times their strength. They deserve battle honours collectively and recognition of their valour individually. Though sacrificing their life and limb they took tremendous toll of the enemy in many times their own dead and wounded, because of mishandling the Indians have turned their military disaster on the ground into a victory in the media. Given limited information we were led to believe that a tactical situation had been turned to strategic advantage. While this was certainly a fact, what was a fact on the ground became a strategic blunder because of the bumbling of amateurs in PR, who having no knowledge of international norms, functioned at best only as "loose cannons".

The Kashmir cause will be put back many years unless we institute immediate "damage control" measures. The tragedy is that because of the intense cover-up we are not prepared to recognise this hard fact of life. While we recognize that military issues cannot be made public, what we desperately need is limited transparency in order to effect some accountability. The government must immediately constitute a committee of enquiry composed of former Army chiefs whose deliberations and findings may be kept secret in the national interest and the interest of the Army. On their confidential findings and recommendations action must be taken against the individual or individuals who have brought us to this sorry pass. To preserve the sanctity of the Army and confidentiality both, the Committee must be composed of three soldiers of

equivalent rank as the COAS. The immediate three past COAS, Gens Aslam Beg, Abdul Waheed and Jahangir Karamat (Gen Asif Nawaz having passed away) are current enough professionally to form the Committee. Since Gen Aslam Beg is in politics, one could include Gen K M Arif in his place.

Among the questions this Committee can enquire are viz (1) What were the immediate and long-term compulsions for invoking the Kar Gil plan? (2) Was explicit permission obtained from the PM and/or the government? (3) If explicit permission was obtained, was a full briefing of the likely Indian military reaction given to the PM? (4) If explicit permission was not given by the PM and/or the government, who was the senior most person under whose authority this operation was undertaken? (5) What briefing was given, if any, to the Foreign Office and the Information Ministry to counter possible Indian diplomatic moves and propaganda? (6) Given that a possible war was likely, how well and when were the Corps Commanders and Principal Staff Officers in GHQ informed? (7) Why were the core supervisors of several infantry divisions and one armoured division comprising 33000 men not withdrawn from WAPDA in the face of a near-war situation? (8) Why was the performance of ISPR erratic throughout this crisis? and (9) Why were conflicting statements given by the ISPR in the face of the Government stance?

There are other confidential questions of military significance that the Committee of Enquiry may address.

The cost to the nation has been very high. The government has faced a severe setback, the event undercutting the PM's image as a man of peace. Coming right on the heels of the "bus diplomacy" it short-changed the PM's credibility as a negotiator. One may criticise many aspects of Mian Nawaz Sharif's rule but to pull someone else's chestnuts out of the fire for the sake of the country, the PM ate humble pie in Washington, even to the peril of his reputation and political career. The COAS is generally recognised as a good professional soldier having excellent command, staff and instructional experience. As a man of honour he must accept responsibility if it is ascertained that his actions caused the nation grievous harm. In all fairness only after a fair enquiry the government should decide his culpability or otherwise. Whether the Government keeps him or not or whether he chooses himself to resign is another matter, a matter of not only honour but of character that recognises the wasted valour of our brave young men who gave the ultimate sacrifice on the heights of Kar Gil. While working in complete seclusion for the sake of confidentiality the Committee must complete its deliberations within a day or maximum a week and report its findings to the PM, recommending necessary action against individual/s as necessary. We must bring accountability into the system and apportion blame where it is due. In the absence of transparency which one reluctantly realises is a compulsion, the necessity of a confidential enquiry becomes vital to the question of maintaining credibility. Let us not do a witch-hunt, if the Army's hierarchy has been blameless, there is cause for celebration, a collective sigh of relief. This will help clear the air about attributed wrongdoing by any individual. The barrage of media misinformation and the depths of diplomatic isolation can only be contained by cleaning up our own stables thoroughly so that a mechanism exists in the future to avoid such disasters. Proposals like National Security Council (NSC) and Council for Defence and National Security (CDNS) do not matter if the present system works. The most important factor before any nation or subordinate institutions thereof is credibility and this must be restored as a priority for the future of the nation. We have to come to terms with reality, we cannot afford to bury our face ostrich-like in the sands of delusion.

### Do we have any patent law?

Sir, I have been living in the Dhanmondi area for last fifteen years, watching how this once-posh residential neighbourhood ceded place to commercial intruders. If one enters through Road No. 2 and goes down the Satmasjid Road, one will notice how long a strip of commercial district has already developed in the neighborhood, not to speak of many offices, clinics and shops which sprinkle the inner sections of the Dhanmondi area.

But another thing has happened, which, I believe, must have been noticed by many like me. Ever since the Dhanmondi branch of Standard Chartered Bank was opened on Road No. 2 near BDR Gate in 1998, there has been numerous signages cropping up in the Dhanmondi area, which look like the imitations of Standard Chartered Bank signages, especially its blue and green colours, the band device and the 24-hour round sign. Anyone who knows the area well must admit that such a surge of signages didn't exist in the Dhanmondi area before the opening of Standard Chartered branch, Ambala Sweets, Medinova, Lab Aid, Ibne Sinha and many other companies have imitated Standard Chartered designs and colours. The same trend will be seen in the Green Road area also where the fascia signage of a Thai food restaurant looks like a direct lift off of Standard Chartered's fascia signage in front of Dhanmondi branch.

While one must admit that the Standard Chartered colours are perhaps the brightest and most attractive amongst the lot, I have a genuine concern whether it is justified to imitate the brand articles of a company and dilute the brand identity. Most companies invest a great deal of money and labour in developing their brand identities and its imitation cannot be ethically right. I own a company myself and I wouldn't appreciate if anyone try to usurp my business, goodwill or profile.

A Responsible Citizen

Dhaka

According to an editorial published in an English daily, during the last few years percentage of slum people in the capital city has gone up to about 25 per cent from 12 per cent. Their number is increasing day by day with large scale exodus of rural people. There is no one to challenge them for living here and there particularly by the sides of roads and railway tracks. They are not to explain about their anti-environmental acts, like polluting of water bodies in and around the city by throwing human wastages and so on. These slums are also the safe havens of miscreants, drugs, crimes and all kinds of anti-social activities.

DCC's lenient attitude towards plying of unauthorised rickshaws and issuance of thousands new licences have aggravated the situation as it is one of the easiest means of livelihood in the city. Indiscriminate digging of the roads throughout the year generate huge demand of day labourers. Street hawkers who occupy footpaths and road-sides can easily earn their livelihood by selling various kinds of goods. Thus the slum people have lot of means for earning their livelihood.

Lately slum population have started to take a very active role in the national politics. Now different political parties use them for organising public meetings, picketing, hartal, road blocking, damaging of vehicles and public properties etc. That is why some of the prominent slum areas of the city are

named after different political parties. Inhabitants of some slum areas have been also enlisted as voters too. All the slum areas are under the control of the moneylenders and mastaans who enjoy the support both from political parties as well as law enforcing agencies. So in no way the slum dwellers are less powerful but a political force of the national politics.

Therefore it is very difficult to eradicate them once they settle in the slum areas having political umbrellas. Very often various programmes are set to evict them but such moves are not implemented due to political reasons. Unless there is a national consensus on this issue, it would remain impossible always.

M A Jilil  
372/B, Khilgaon, Dhaka

### Dangerous

Sir, I have noticed around Dhaka city that sometimes people leave their dogs inside their car while walking in a park or shopping. I don't think they realise how dangerous this can be. I've lost a dog to overheating once. It happens quite suddenly and surprisingly. Closed vehicles sometimes get extremely hot even with windows left open a bit. So, I request them to avoid this practice.

Anwar Khan  
Dhaka