

## 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 tumble 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 don't 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 slaughterhouse 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.*

**I**t 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,

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 misread to some extent the reason for people's sullenness 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 Kar Gil report is submitted?

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

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 defunct leader, Shahid 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 father, 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

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."

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## 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.*

**I**NSTEAD 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 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-dance 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 magnificient 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 in sacrificing their life and limb they took a 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 Kashmiri 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 recognise 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 the army.

## To the Editor...

### Complementary, not discriminatory

**S**ir, 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 the protection of the face and the throat in the outside weather/environment. Women are not designed to run 100m sprints or play football (as 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!**

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

**Mr Nain Wahara**, an NGO personnel brought up this subject with professional help from Asifan Chowdhury, a freelance journalist; Dr Gamruzzaman, Dr Shubrosh 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 '98. The media coverage, ever since, has been focusing on the subject off and on — thanks 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 Dipankar Chakraborti 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 spent 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 itself. There is no Bangla version to it or it is not acceptable to BTV?

At the same time, the government is not doing anything to control the arsenic pollution.

**Zaraazra**  
Dhaka-1207

### Road construction in the monsoon

**S**ir, The road running from Kairali 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 sand 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 Kaseem**  
24. Siddheswari

### Slum culture

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

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