

Antibiotic Bane

DRUG administration has never been the forte of the country's public healthcare mechanism. Let alone contraband and substandard drugs, medicines, which are not supposed to be sold if not prescribed by a licenced practitioner, are available over the counter. Widespread ignorance is indeed a major factor behind such dangerous practices but the responsibility for the laxity ultimately falls on the central drug control authority. Now is perhaps not the right time to debate the issue especially when there are clear signs that a substantial section of the medical attention-seeking populace may have become unresponsive to conventional antibiotics due to indiscriminate use and substandard quality of drug prescribed. It is time for urgent corrective action, rather than wordy duels.

According to a report front-paged in this paper yesterday, nearly two-thirds of the patients seeking treatment for a wide array of ailments including pneumonia, meningitis, malaria, diarrhoeal diseases, tuberculosis, respiratory infections etc, no longer respond to 'first line' drugs. Even worse, the studies on which the report was based show that some forms of bacteria have even developed multi-drug resistance. The option these patients appear to be left with is to switch over to stronger and, needless to say, more expensive medicines. Majority of them being poor, it would in all likelihood mean leading a nightmarish life for the rest of their lives until death ends their predicament. Ominously still, some of the resistant diseases are contagious, posing thereby the threat of an imminent health emergency.

How do we get out of the mess a lenient drug administration has dragged us into? In our view, we need to take a multi-dimensional approach towards resolving the crisis. First, the central drug administration authority needs to stringently enforce the drug policy. We understand that the regulatory body has inspectors at its disposal who are supposed to keep a close vigil on production and supply of locally-manufactured medicines. Second, what kind of medicines is actually available over the counter should be strictly monitored. Often, medicine shops have been alleged to be selling drugs items without prescription. Third, the medical practitioners should volunteer to raise consciousness amongst their patients about the use and abuse of antibiotics. The Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) can play a pioneering role in this regard. Finally, and crucially, the health ministry must keep in constant touch with the private research organisations carrying out surveys and studies on the issue to update their appraisal of manufacture and supply sides. Together with these bodies, it needs to devise means and ways to extend enhanced medical attention to the patients who are afflicted with diseases resistant to conventional drugs.

Evict Them Now

A week has passed since the expiry of the ultimatum to Senakalyan Sangstha and another two hundred encroachers of the Buriganga river. It appears that none has taken cognizance of the BIWTA notice said to have been served on them to vacate the places occupied by them. The notice was also served through national press for public information and as an assurance that something was being done to save the Buriganga from the clutch of polluting activities.

The BIWTA has now hit a dead-end as it has been at a loss about what its next course of action should be. It seems to be even alleged in press reports that the file on the subject is now lying with the Director Port of BIWTA. But a ray of hope has been kindled by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Shipping Ministry which has decided to move forward in uprooting the encroachers by next month. We welcome the decision of the government to form an inter-ministerial committee comprising representatives from home, land and shipping ministries for removing the encroachers and illegal occupants of the river-at the earliest. The names of deputy commissioners of Dhaka and Narayanganj, through which this lifeline flows, have also been proposed to be taken on the committee to make it more effective and dynamic.

It must be remembered though that the encroachers are no amateurs and they possess enough powerful muscles to flex. Moreover, they are supported and abetted in their unlawful activities by a section of officials and employees of the organisations whose property they have encroached upon. Some of the patriotic elements have called the ultimatum an 'eye wash' and criticised the inaction in this regard. As a result the Senakalyan Sangstha has applied for lease of their encroached area to regularise the whole process. A clever ploy indeed. But the authorities must remain firm in their attitude and honest in their action to undo the illegal activities of the encroachers of the river in the greater interest of the people of this country.

This is a national issue. It is strongly related with the survival of the people living along the river and also the millions who earn their keeps from this river. Let it not be said that the government of Sheikh Hasina played any game in the name of saving the Buriganga.

It Better Not Happen Again

IT defies comprehension as to how a five-year-old girl could cause such an ire in a middle-aged couple's mind that it had to pock-mark the child's face by pressing burning cigarettes on it. At her age Nisha could neither have been a subject of torturous interrogation nor with all her helplessness was she trying to put up any resistance against the fire-eating dragons swooping down on her. But the bruises and lacerations on her body inflicted not just on the day she died but over a long period of time as some of the fading cut-marks on her corpse revealed bore a telling testimony to child repression no less repugnant than the offence of a paedophile. She being the daughter of a house-maid was the secondary recipient of the torture which makes it all the more gory.

Call it brutal, barbaric, medieval savagery or by any other condemnatory epithet to let off your emotions of shock and outrage but all that would hardly help stem the dehumanisation rot that has set in the society. One of the parents that tortured the child to death admitted to having bashed her and pressed lighted cigarettes on her tender body but added they could not foresee the consequences of what they were doing. This is where the lesson lies for the society. When we express outrage over some mind-boggling incidents what we tend to overlook perhaps is that lack of decent sensibilities at the top is percolating in a worse form down the middle and lower rungs of the society. Furthermore, there is a feeling that in a restive social atmosphere everything goes especially when crimes go unpunished.

While legal action is processed against the culprits not to add another case to the missing list of cases, we want the media, both electronic and print, to come forward and sensitise every household about the need to treat the domestic helpers with sympathy as a part and parcel of basic of human rights obligations.

COMMUNISM differs from socialism in methods. The first condones bullets while the second puts its sole faith in the ballot box. Still both have the same ideological content: to demolish the inequality between the haves and the have-nots and establish a welfare state.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) too differ in methods. The former takes the political route and the latter, religious. But both share the same ideology: the *Hindutva*.

The reason why the communists and the socialists on the one hand, and the BJP and the RSS on the other, are poles apart is the approach the two have towards solution to man's problems. One is imbued with economic ideas, the other religious. To the first, whether the poor are Hindus or Muslims matters little because to them their wellbeing is important. For the second, the Hindus come first.

The new BJP chief, Bangaru Laxman, appears to be a breath of fresh air in the suffocated party. But he should realise that he is going against the RSS philosophy when he says that he wants to reach Muslims and win them over. The RSS, to whose *parivar* (family) the BJP belongs, wants to establish the Hindu Rashtra in India. How do Muslims fit into this scheme of things?

When Bashiruddin Babu Khan resigned from the Chandrababu Naidu ministry in Andhra Pradesh over Telugu Desam's support to the BJP, he reflected the fears of an average

Muslim. He perceived subtle means of cultural assimilation which HRD Ministry under Murli Manohar Joshi is doing.

The entire tone and tenor of the RSS thinking is Hindu. It believes that everyone living in India is a Hindu, whatever his or her religion. The two other members of the *parivar*, the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, go many a step further. They want to Hindutise the country and harass non-Hindus, particularly the Muslims and the Christians, to make them feel a second-class citizens. The Shiv Sena, which is a part of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), is open in its anti-Muslim bias.

How can Laxman bring round these elements to accept the concept of pluralism? Their training is different, their attitude towards Muslims is different. He will soon realise, if he has not already done so, that the liberals in the BJP may be tolerated but not allowed to set the agenda. Deen Dayal Upadhyay said in Calicut in 1967 that 'Muslims are the flesh of our flesh and the blood of our blood.' They felt comfortable with him. He died in mysterious circumstances. His thoughts were seldom aired after his death.

Laxman himself seems confused. In fact, he has let the cat out of the bag by saying that the *Hindutva* agenda should be put on the backburner. In other words, the BJP should not try to implement at present the three issues raising a temple at Ayodhya, enforcing uniform civil code and abrogating Article 370

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Janata Party in 1979 when they were asked to sever links with the RSS. Even today the liberals in the BJP would lose if they ever joined issue with the RSS. Their number could not be more than 25 per cent. The rest is the RSS flock.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kulip Nayar writes from New Delhi

on the special status to Kashmir. Had he said that the BJP would drop these issues once and for all, he would have gone down well with the Muslims. But his plea is only not to press them at present.

It is only a strategy, not a policy. Why should Muslims put their faith in only the tactics which are at best temporary in nature? Home Minister L K Advani, who is trying to project himself as a soft-liner, was more categorical when he said that it was not a party of 'this and that issue' but a national party.

If one were to look back, one would find that the very growth of the BJP was on the basis of Hindu chauvinism. The erstwhile Jana Sangh members walked out of the

The RSS has brought out a book entitled *RSS: A Vision in Action*. It talks only about the awakening of Hindus and the assertive role they should have in India. Surprisingly Subramanian Swamy, who exposed the RSS and the BJP after parting company with them, is projected as a hero in the book. The difference why George Fernandes was not because of RSS.

Whatever the importance of the RSS, the fact is that a person like Laxman has become the BJP chief. The credit goes to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and people of their thinking. Are they trying to retrieve the BJP and make it a secular force? Only time will tell. But the speeches made at the party's Nagpur session were strident. They indicate that the extremists were throwing down the gauntlet before the liberals. One can only hope that Vajpayee had returned to Delhi because of his health and not out of disgust.

The new BJP chief is only trying to be realistic when he says that even the BJP must have the Muslims on its side to win at the polls. The support of Muslim electorate is crucial. It constitutes nearly 12 per cent of votes and can tilt the balance in some roughly 200 out of 545 Lok Sabha seats. But Laxman's statements alone cannot impress the Muslims, who are suspect, even of the Congress, which has projected itself as a secular party and did very little for them. The Muslims will stay distant until the BJP changes its ethos of Hindutva, cuts off relations with the RSS and stands on its own. Is it willing to do so? Will the RSS allow that to happen? The record of the BJP is that of a supplicant before the RSS, the master. The latter always has its way. Once it issues a flat, there is no scope for elucidation, much less any discussion. This was apparent from the hurry with which the Vajpayee government rejected the autonomy bill, passed by the J and K legislature. The best option was to hold con-

sultations with Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah a course which is being adopted now. But when the bill was passed, the RSS ordered to the BJP-led government to reject it straightaway. The government obliged it and advanced the cabinet meeting by four days. The RSS is beginning to exert pressure in the field of economic reforms as well. Its *Swadeshi Jagran Manch* is launching an agitation in UP against government policies. The first phase starts with awareness, followed by a non-cooperation movement before unleashing aggression. Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha has already said that the small and medium size industrial units will be protected and the WTO cannot go ahead without India's support.

If the RSS is so opposed to the economic reforms, which have Vajpayee's full support, it will not relent on Muslims. In fact, it is suspicious of persons who have enjoyed secular credentials. Even the non-BJP members in the Vajpayee cabinet admit privately that the ministers of state attached to them are with the RSS background. They keep an eye on them. This is natural because the buck stops with RSS chief Sudarshan, not Vajpayee's. If Laxman wants to succeed, the BJP should either change the *Hindutva* philosophy or pull itself out of the Sangh *parivar* to be acceptable to Muslims.

Pluralism is the key to nation's unity. The RSS is harming the polity beyond repair.

Supplementary Report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission: Some Relevant Extracts

Ninth instalment

Maj Gen Rao Farman Ali gets a clean chit, although by his own admission, he was associated with the planning of the military action on the 25th of March, 1971, which in the eye of the commission itself was marked by 'excessive use of force.' To say that he did not belong to the 'inner military junta' nor did he carry any 'direct responsibility for military operations' could perhaps place him above blemish in regard to the military debacle and surrender, but these do not preclude his culpability for the intellectuals' murder or the genocide in general.

The effusive terms in which his conduct and performance in the then East Pakistan have been praised by the commission do not sound surprising to many who believe that Rao Farman Ali might have been close to Bhutto who, in fact, had been instrumental in setting up the Hamoodur Rahman Commission in the first place. Rao was to become Chairman of the Fauzi Foundation in Pakistan and then never looked back.

League members of the National and Provincial Assemblies. Nevertheless, as a result of our detailed study of the written statement, submitted by the General and the lengthy cross-examination to which we subjected him during his appearance before us, as well as the evidences from other witnesses from East Pakistan, we have formed the view that Maj Gen Farman Ali merely functioned as an intelligent, well-intentioned and sincere staff Officer in the various appointments held by him, and at no stage could he be regarded as being a member of the inner military junta surrounding and supporting General Yahya Khan. We have also found that at no stage did he advise, or himself indulge in, actions opposed to public morality, sound political sense or humanitarian considerations. In this context, we have already commented at some length, in a previous Chapter of this Report, on the allegation made by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that General Farman Ali was wanting to 'paint the green of East Pakistan red', and have found that the entire incident has been deliberately distorted.

During the critical days of the

war this Officer had no direct responsibility for military operations, but he was, nevertheless, closely associated with the Governor of East Pakistan as well as the Commander Eastern Command. It was for this reason that he got involved in what has been called the 'Farman Ali incident'. As we have seen in the chapter dealing with the details of the surrender in East Pakistan, the message authenticated by Maj Gen Farman Ali for being dispatched to the United Nations on the 9th of December 1971 had been approved by the Governor of East Pakistan, who had obtained prior authority and clearance from the President of Pakistan, namely, General Yahya Khan, for the purpose of formulating proposals for a settlement and cessation of hostilities in East Pakistan. In these circumstances, the responsibility for its authorship and dispatch could not, therefore, be placed on this Officer. In fact, he had, at the time, demanded trial by court martial to clear his position. In view of the facts, as they have now emerged before the Commission, there is no need for any such enquiry or trial.

Maj Gen Farman Ali was present at Headquarters Eastern

Command, during the last phases of the events when Indian Officers came to meet Lt Gen Niazi for negotiating the details of the surrender. From the detailed accounts which have come before us of the behaviour and attitude of both these officers, we have no hesitation in recording the opinion that at all relevant times Maj Gen Farman Ali advised Lt Gen Niazi on correct lines, and if his advice had been accepted, some of the disgraceful episodes might have been avoided.

We have also examined the reason why the Indian Commander-in-Chief, General Nasrullah, addressed certain leaflets to General Farman Ali by describing him as Commander of the Pakistan Army. It appears that on the 8th or 9th December 1971, Lt Gen AAK Niazi had not been seen outside his command bunker, and there was a broadcast by the BBC that he had left East Pakistan and that General Farman Ali had taken over the command of the Pakistan Army. It was for this reason that the Indian Commander addressed General Farman Ali calling upon him to surrender. We are satisfied that at no time did General Farman Ali indulge in any com-

munication with the Indian Generals. The situation was in any case rectified when Lt Gen Niazi made a public appearance at Hotel Intercontinental, Dacca, before foreign correspondents.

An allegation was made before the Commission by Lt Gen Niazi that Maj Gen Farman Ali had sent out of East Pakistan a large sum of money, approximately Rs 60,000, through his nephew who was a Helicopter Pilot in the Army and left Dacca in the early hours of the 16th of December 1971. We reported Major General Farman Ali to seek his explanation regarding this allegation and some other matters. He has explained that a sum of Rs 60,000/- had been given by the President of Pakistan to the Governor of East Pakistan for expenditure at his discretion. After the Governor of East Pakistan resigned on or about the 14th December 1971, Maj Gen Farman Ali, as Advisor to the Governor, became responsible for this amount. He paid Rs 4000 to Islamia Press, Dacca, and this payment was within the knowledge of the Military Secretary to the Governor, who has also been repatriated to Pakistan. Out of the remaining amount of Rs

56,000/-, Maj Gen Farman Ali paid Rs 5000/- to Maj Gen Rahim Khan at the time of his evacuation from Dacca on the morning of the 16th of December 1971 to meet the expenses en route which may be required not only by Maj Gen Rahim Khan but also by the other persons who were being evacuated with him. It was stated Maj Gen Farman Ali had rendered the necessary account of the sum of Rs. 5000/- given to him.

After deducting payments made to the Islamia Press, Dacca, and to Maj Gen Rahim Khan an amount of Rs 51,000/- was left with Maj Gen Farman Ali which he physically handed over to his nephew Major Ali Jawaher at the time of his departure from Dacca on the 16th of December 1971. Since his arrival in Pakistan, Maj Gen Farman Ali has deposited Rs 46,000/- in the Government Treasury and handed over the treasury receipt to Brig Qazi Director Pay and Accounts, GHQ.

He has claimed the remaining amount of Rs 5000/- on account of house rent allowance sanctioned by the Government of East Pakistan for the residence of his wife and family in West Pakistan.

He has stated the sanctioned allowance was Rs 1400/-PM and the period involved was twelve months, so that he could claim Rs 15000/- but he has claimed only Rs 5000/-.

We are satisfied with the explanation rendered by Maj Gen Farman Ali, as the facts stated by him are easily verifiable and we do not think that he would have made incorrect statements in this behalf before the Commission.

For the foregoing reasons we are of the view that the performance and conduct of Maj Gen Farman Ali during the entire period of his service in East Pakistan does not call for any adverse comment.

The tenth instalment appears tomorrow. Inadvertently today's instalment was mentioned as the last one in yesterday's issue which we regret very much.

OPINION

Save the River, Save Them

Munira Khan

Recently I participated in a rally and a boat procession arranged by some organisations whose objective is to protect Bangladesh, specially Dhaka city, from pollution and its other hazards. The boat procession, a unique event as such was supposed to create awareness amongst the people of Dhaka against pollution of river water, and to motivate them to resist illegal possession of riverside area and encroachment on the Buriganga's foreshore. The idea of the boat procession inspired me to participate with some of my friends and associates. Twenty-five boats full with volunteers from different organisations holding banners and placards and raising full-throated slogans made an impact on the people present and watching by the side of the river. However, I felt the absence of spontaneous participation of the people living in those areas who are the direct victims of the encroachment, illegal possession and pollution.

Surely the organisers deserve appreciation for holding such a meaningful programme necessary to create awareness for protecting the environment from pollution and saving the rivers around Dhaka city. Although the sound and fume of the mechanical boats all along disturbed me I enjoyed the journey from the Buriganga Bridge, Shampur to Kamrangirchar even under the scorching sun along with other volunteers and some leaders of the civil society and the local community. The glaring neon signs throughout the Qudrat-e-Khuda Road is a threat to our overloaded electricity supply system. We have allowed shopping plazas to grow almost like mushrooms and due to that the movement of traffic has almost come to a full stop. We have lost all sense of our city priorities. Are we going to make Dhaka the number one shambolic city in the world?

Judiciary vs Sheikh Hasina Sir, for the last couple of days, I was going through some of the articles published in The Daily Star and other newspapers on the remark made by PM about the Transparency of our judiciary. Regarding this issue, one thing is being repeated again and again, and that is our judiciary should be kept above controversy. And why is that? The answer is for the sake of democracy. We know that democracy is for the people but what if the people's rights are violated through the loopholes of judiciary? The answer to this query should be very simple we need to modify our judiciary to make it more acceptable to the people.

It is surprising that our newscasters (female ones) put on heavy makeup, which look very artificial. It should be remembered that they are not participating in any fashion parade. And for male ones, I would suggest full-shirt and ties are enough to read the news in summer; sun is not essential. It makes us feel hotter on hot humid summer days. They look funny (allen?) because most of our people clad casually. I would request these casters to go through the foreign channels and take some tips on how to come in front of the camera, e.g. BBC, CNN, Zee News, etc.

We are also bored of watching the same faces over and over again. Some newscasters are for the last two decades or so (sorry to say without improving). I would also request the authorities concerned to hunt for new talents.

Debjit Roy (Nipu) Ex. President Bangladesh Student Union Oklahoma State University, USA

A Frustrated Citizen Dhaka

Ghastly billboards Sir, We have come to a stage where we have plastered the whole city of Dhaka with billboards, hoarding, neon signs etc. The small little green island at Batai Mor has vanished. The glaring neon signs throughout the Qudrat-e-Khuda Road is a threat to our overloaded electricity supply system. We have