

## Wayward diagnostic centres

### Case of monitoring, enforcement failure

We are dealing with double deviousness here. First, many private diagnostic centres in the city pay a hefty portion of their earning to doctors as 'commission' for referring patients to seek their services. Second, these private centres charge the service-seekers exorbitant fees to make up for the 'commission' paid to the doctors. And the reason boils down to one simple fact: the law, the Clinic Ordinance as it is called, does not clearly spell out what should be the maximum charge for an individual test. The government has, therefore, no control over the rates fixed by the diagnostic centres. As a result, charge for a particular medical examination, say lipid profile, varies exorbitantly from one centre to the other, although almost identical reagents, methods and equipment are used. So, if we expect an end to such a corrupt practice, the first step should come from the government in the shape of a process to amend and beef up the Clinic Ordinance, 1982.

True, for better service, people have to pay more, but the law must ensure that they are not paying more than is due.

As for the undesirable understanding between the doctors and the diagnostic centres to fleece the patients the remedy lies in the conscience of the medical practitioners. We cannot expect the law to decide where the doctors should refer their patients to for medical examinations. We can only remind the doctors of the Hippocratic oath that they had taken at the time of embarking on a career as noble as the medical profession. Should they want to compromise their patients' wellbeing for the lure of money, we don't suppose there is much that the law can do. Nevertheless, what is a realistic expectation in this regard is effective intervention from the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) and the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) to set the things right. These two governing bodies could make a difference by instituting a watchdog cell of sorts to be on vigil against such a malpractice.

## Take the storms seriously

### They leave wreckages

THE nor'westers have wreaked such damage on our life and property in the last two days that we better put the phenomenon on our list of national disaster management agenda. Aside from taking a toll of seven lives and injuring 80 persons, crops were lost, trees uprooted and power lines snapped, let alone the scarring of homesteads and educational institutions across several districts.

These storms have a way of lashing out at us without any notice. Like thunderbolts they come from nowhere with squally winds and devastating rains making a minced meat of our life in no time. The only forewarning that one could expect to get is through the scorching heat that lightens the atmospheric air to float away creating a void above the ground for a violent onrush of rain-fed winds into it. That should be the basis for the Met Office to warn us off for a state of preparedness to duck for safety or try to minimise some of the losses afield or at home. This year the paddies and mangoes being in abundance, there ought to be an extra bit of concern over tornadoes.

So casually is this storm taken that it hardly qualifies for relief efforts on a scale anywhere near that claimed by other disasters. This attitude should change beginning with the latest bout of nor'westers. Surely more storms are to come. We are alerting the authorities to it.

A word about the drainage and water logging problems the city experiences following a nor'wester. The WASA, DCC, or for that matter, the government must pay heed to the alarm bell set off for doing something about the drainage non-system or we resign ourselves to living in a cesspool.

## Standard devices for good polls need updating



S H IMAM

process to a close. So, we are basically looking at a slightly longer term scenario as far as the full execution of the verdict goes.

That way, the present government's stake in the forthcoming election increases. Conversely, the BNP and its alliance partners have no less of a stake in the polls. Out of power, they have felt persecuted and suffered a degree of negative publicity as well from a combination

lack of credence to the election results. Reports have appeared in newspapers to suggest that overtures are being made by prospective candidates for the city constituencies to the underworld dons, whether in jail or at large, in a bid to commission their services during the electioneering phase. With Dhaka setting the trend by way of the head rotting there, the limbs, meaning the outlying areas, cannot

be practical, its intrusion into the electoral circuits cannot be altogether stemmed. It is at the end point that attempts should be made to discourage it by making sure the candidates have kept within the stipulated expenditure ceiling during electioneering. This can be done by tallying their duly scrutinised pre-declared assets with the actuals of their expenditure whose upper limit though has to be set at a realistic

the challenges of the preceding governments' placement of 'loyalists in sensitive positions', caches of arms and musclemen's cadres in the underworld.

The problems remain the same but these have exacerbated in degrees over time. A skill may have been developed by vested quarters to outsmart standard anti-dotes applied by the previous caretaker governments to their situations,

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## JUST ANOTHER VIEW

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of factors which they would like to see made good through a better luck through the ballot.

Overall, for both the political parties, therefore, a higher premium is put to defeat at the polls than at any time before, so that the contests will be proportionally that much fiercer.

Set against this background, the air seems rife with concerns voiced by various circles over the factors obtaining to fuel violence in the election with the attendant possibilities of a poor turn-out, impediment to the conduct of free and fair polls and

remain unaffected. One is taken aback by the fact that 100-700 pieces of small arms get trafficked into the country from across the borders with Myanmar and India. Anything between one lakh and one lakh fifty thousand users of small arms are breathing down our necks, so it has been estimated by a watchdog body.

The daily grind through the western-style desperado-type gunnery is acquiring a heightened new dimension with the elections closing in on us. We are stoking with fire.

With the black money alongside it is a dangerous brew in prospect. To

level in order that the demand for transparency can be exacting.

Basically, we are pinning our hopes for credible elections on three nuggets of proven efficacy and reliability: the Caretaker Government, the Election Commission and the President with the Army, all working as a system. After having successfully conducted two general elections they have virtually turned into institutions in their own right. Together they can fall back on the repository of experience and skill pooled from the effective set responses they had applied to

something the new one should be seized in good time to prove effective at the end of the day. While an exhaustive code of conduct is kept in readiness by the Election Commission for the political parties to put their seal of consensus on when the caretaker government will have taken over the reins. The EC needs to engage law enforcement officials in a series of dialogues to finalise the strategy for arms recovery as part of an orchestrated campaign to pre-empt elements who might try to subvert the electoral process.

## Complete nuclear lunacy?

IKRAM SEHGAL Writes from Karachi

Since May 5 an Indian strike force of 60000 plus is conducting Corps-level exercise code-named "Poorna Vijay" (Complete Victory) in the Bikaner sector of Rajasthan, the final assault on "enemy positions" is scheduled for Thursday May 10, 2001. Armour might in the form of T-72 tanks make up the center-piece of the manoeuvres, supported by mechanized infantry, self-propelled artillery and about a 100 combat and transport aircraft which will launch mock ground attacks. Even though not stated, heliborne assault forces are certainly making up an integral part of the deployment. The exercise "aims to evaluate concept and practice, battle procedures during defensive and offensive operations on the future battlefield, with a nuclear backdrop". The Indian Government further states that "the operation's aim is to enhance the army's operational preparations through the conduct of a number of tactical exercises with troops under simulated battle conditions. Drills and procedures to meet challenges of a nuclear, chemical or biological strike will also be practiced". Air Marshal (Retd) Kak, a noted defence analyst, opines that "the exercise also aims to prove India's nuclear deterrent is indeed credible and that our retaliation will be massive. Our doctrine is to escalate conflict beyond battlefields to strategic targets in case of nuclear war".

On 28-30 January 1999, a war game entitled "International Game 99, Crisis in South Asia" was conducted between India and Pakistan by the United States Naval War College. Participants came from South Pacific and Asia (Australia, China, India, Iran, Japan, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore), Europe (Finland, France, Russia, UK), Latin America (Peru) and North America (Canada and USA). After the opening scenario, India made a massive conventional attack on Kashmiri militants and across the Ceasefire Line (CFL) and the international border at their supporting bases in Pakistan. (Operation Resolute Sword). This followed a supposedly grave provocation by the militants, the shooting down near Srinagar of an Indian transport aircraft carrying India's Defence and Interior Ministers, as well as the Army Chief of Staff, by a ground-to-air missile fired by Kashmiri freedom fighters. Faced with massive incursion, Pakistan in retaliation supposedly launched "Operation Resolute Shield" and gained some Indian territory. After an initial setback, the Indians then war-gamed to have gained conventional superiority due

to their sheer numbers. Depicted as unable to withstand this, Pakistan uses tactical nuclear strikes to destroy three armoured columns of invading Indian forces in the desert as well as the rail-hub at Jodhpur. India sees this as a major crossing of the nuclear threshold, an "unwarranted" escalation by Pakistan. Pakistan says the strikes are only surgically directed against military targets. While the western nations and Russia, China and Japan struggle to contain the conflict from spreading into a full scale nuclear conflagration, even a possible World War 3, India launches a comprehensive nuclear strike on 12 of Pakistan's command and nuclear installation, mostly in and around the major cities, supposedly destroying most of the Pakistan Government as well as the Pakistan Armed Forces command and nuclear control mechanism, causing millions of casualties, mostly civilian. Survivors of the Pakistan Government say they are unable to control isolated commanders who are still in possession of nuclear weapons and as a matter of vengeance (an eye for an eye!) could retaliate at their will. The war game ended in a diplomatic stalemate, with Russia openly supporting India, China as usual defending Pakistan and the western nations playing neutral, giving lip-service only to the massive Indian nuclear attack on mainly civilian population.

While the present Indian exercise closely resembles the desert war portion of the wargame model, a number of factors govern why India has opted for holding exercises in the desert during the extreme hot weather. During the Kargil crisis, to take pressure off its vulnerable strategic border road connecting Kashmir to Leh, and more importantly Siachen, India had three military options. These included (1) retaking the heights along the strategic Leh road, (2) to make a massive conventional ground attack (a) across the Ceasefire Line in Kashmir, (b) in the Punjab and/or (c) Rajasthan or (3) to do a naval blockade of Pakistan. The third option fizzled out because of (a) the bad

state of operational readiness of the Indian Navy, (b) the weather in the Indian Ocean not being conducive to "blockade operations" during the months May to July and (c) the capability of Pakistan Navy's submarines and the PAF's land-based aircraft to take heavy toll. A "quarantine" has no teeth (US-USSR missile crisis Cuba 1962) unless the enforcement is backed by firepower. As for the second option there was not much reward in attacking across the fixed defences in Kashmir (along the CFL) and in the plains of the Punjab. The other available option for them was to attack in strength in Rajasthan and threaten Pakistan's vital North-South Line of Communications (L of C) where Pakistan is most vulnerable i.e. Rahimyar Khan-Sadiqabad area. Here India was faced by three very significant problems, viz (1) were the troops acclimatized to fight a (very) hot weather campaign in the desert and the necessary logistics support to go with it? (2) Faced with such a loss would Pakistan forswear the use of tactical nuclear strikes? And (3) would the world accept a full-scale Indian invasion of Pakistan on the Kargil pretext? With a no-no to all questions, India went for the first option, drowning its tremendous losses in Kargil in a crescendo of media publicity, declaring military victory where the victory (and that was considerable) was really diplomatic. India always takes into consequence ground reality and in the backdrop of the developing scenario of the war game conducted by US Naval War College, the present manoeuvres were conceived to overcome India's weaknesses in the desert during May-June 1999 and is now being implemented. It assumes considerable strategic significance, not the least being a warning to Pakistan and China that India can (and is ready to) fight a conventional war even in nuclearised conditions.

While our present available forces in the area are well balanced to resist a massive Indian attack in Rajasthan, we must take to heart the lessons of 1971 in the desert, the most important being, viz (1) we need better air cover and (2) we

have no tactical depth. Obviously the Indian attack, if and when it comes, will be at a level of a Command i.e. two corps plus, as envisaged in the original "Brass Tacks" exercise conducted in Rajasthan in 1987 by Gen Sunderji, then Indian COAS, with his newly conceived RAPID Divisions. This had brought India and Pakistan perilously close to war, only Zia's cricket diplomacy defused the situation. In the desert and with little air cover, we cannot depend upon the "three to one"

theory for repulsing enemy offensives i.e. the enemy has to be at least three times stronger to overwhelm us. In the desert we need almost equal firepower and mobility, if not numerical strength to fight mobile battles. As such we need to strengthen our conventional armoured forces at Pano Aqil and Rahimyar Khan, seriously thinking of putting a Brigade plus each at Daharki-Ubaro and Sadiqabad. We cannot escalate to the tactical nuclear stage without giving a

## PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



### So much for child's rights!

Schooling is the last thing these young workers can afford. Hours before schools begin in the city and elsewhere, these youngsters get down to work. Every hour counts, no matter how hard or hazardous it may be, for they have to make a living. Unless the state intervenes, violation of child's rights would continue.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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### The least we can do

It is a fact that India is a regional super power with great ambitions, arrogance, and highly discriminative attitude towards its smaller neighbours. Bangladesh was never a concern for India due to our internal weakness and subservient attitude shown by the politicians. But, we tend to forget that Bangladesh is "THE MARKET" for Indian goods in this region amounting to billions of US Dollars.

There is no need for a military confrontation with India, just create awareness among the citizens not to buy anything Indian, and you would see the ripple effect. Indian media and politicians always suffer from selective amnesia while commenting on the bilateral issues regarding Bangladesh, and this is the right time to bring them back to earth.

We have the right to defend our territorial integrity, and be proud of our martyrs who gave their lives for our future. They are the real heroes we should pay respect; not to the India's attitude is totally unbelievable. What do they think of them-

elves? Just because they helped us during the great War of Liberation, does not mean they own our country! I would ask them to leave us alone. Thanks for all your help. But not any more! The whole world is with us.

Babu  
Buffalo, NY

### Milk products

In Bangladesh some famous milk producers are now marketing milk, flavoured milk, non-fat milk etc in plastic packets. These are in 1 litre and 1/2 litre packs, and very useful for small families. Unfortunately, none of these packets bear the date of manufacture and the date of expiry. Some shopkeepers keep these items for many days in stock and pass them on to the consumers. The unsuspecting consumers are obliged to buy these products. After taking the product home and boiling it the item goes bad and unfit for consumption. The shopkeepers do not accept any responsibility for selling such adul-

terated items.

It is necessary that all milk and milk products have date of manufacture and date of expiry printed on each packet. This will be very helpful for the consumers.

A Housewife  
Dhaka

### Mute not dumb

Would someone please explain what is meant by the heading "Court okays move to send the dumb girl to govt shelter"? The story, on the Internet edition of this daily began "Fate has eventually smiled on the seven-year-old dumb girl, who was a virtual prisoner for the last one year."

The girl is not dumb. The girl cannot speak. She is mute.

According to the story, the Narayanganj Magistrate's Court

safe custody at the Dhaka Central Jail.

The police picked up a girl who was about seven years old and who couldn't speak. It would seem to this reader that that itself would be useful information about her which the police could have used to make local queries about her identity. Especially in the year they held her. So because the girl was mute, could not speak, the police decided she was dumb and sent her to jail for a year.

The writer of this news also decided that because she was mute, she was dumb.

The girl is not dumb. It is the police and the reporter of this news who are dumb for insinuating that she was.

M. H. Haque  
Gulshan, Dhaka

### Weekly holiday

The Prime Minister is reported to have said that the weekly holiday will not be changed. Of course this vital policy cannot be changed at the fag end of the regime, awaiting a gen-

eral election. It also cannot be an election issue, because human nature is fond of seeking excuses for more free time. The current weekly holiday period is too long for a developing country in the third world. The next regime has to bring down the weekly holiday to one and a half days, in the national interest.

One way is to provide an incentive to work half a day before the full-day holiday. Besides, there is another area where corrections are needed. For example, in the garment industry, there is gross abuse of overtime applications in many factories. These irregular practices have to be brought out into the open by the relevant NGOs, for public scrutiny. The press can play an important role in exposing unhealthy working conditions.

Our systems loss is high, hence shorter working hours are unproductive. But before all these measures, the civil service reforms have to be carried out, because the old system of working is outmoded. The processing time in the offices have to be

reduced. This cannot be done without decentralisation.

**ACitizen**  
Dhaka

### Banknote: paper or polymer?

Your Business Report (April 1) "German co opts for selling new banknote paper to BB" is a good report in the public media domain to keep the readers informed about the implication of introduction of new technologies in developing countries; in this case, longer-lasting bank notes.

The comparative capital and investment return cost figures are interesting, and it is hoped the Bangladesh bank would carefully consider the long-term implications of the German proposal. These days there are always options available in the international market, therefore there is greater need to be more cautious about transparency in dealings and contracts.

One option is for the people to provide some feedback after using both types of banknote for sometime. Sometimes the marginal cost difference in the long-term becomes too unattractive, and this may not be visualised during the planning stage, specially in the LDCs, where the operating conditions are different, and frequently unpredictable.

**AZ**  
Dhaka

### Telephone expansion project

It is alarming to read the press report that Worldtel might be employing an Indian company, controlled 60 per cent by the government of India, to install projected 300,000 telephones in Bangladesh.

The GoB might like to clarify the position, to remove public misgiving. This is not the way to enhance Indo-Bangladesh amity.

**ABD**  
Dhaka