

New health plan

Old mistakes shouldn't be repeated

WE hope it is not an either-or proposition, but a not-only-but-also one, to put it succinctly. The proposed five-year health, nutrition and population (HNP) programme, we hope, will be an extension, or enhancement but not a replacement, of the health and population sector programme (HPSP), which ends in less than a year's time, on June 30 next year. It makes little sense abandoning a programme that has cost nearly 1.7 billion dollars and supplant it with another nearly-two-billion-dollar one, especially when the former is yet to be fully implemented and its benefits hardly realised. Indeed, the HPSP has been a major disappointment, in terms of its slothful implementation. Into its fifth year now, it remains largely underdeveloped. Out of the planned 13,000 community clinics, 8,500 have been built and, worse still, further construction of clinics has been put off by the present government. Moreover, not long ago, the World Bank, our development partner in this particular programme, has made no bones about its displeasure over the slow pace and qualitative inadequacy of HPSP implementation.

It is true that merger of nutrition with health and population programme speaks of planners' prudence and in fact, one wonders why it was not included in the first phase of the sector-specific national healthcare programme. Reaching out to the hardcore poor with healthcare service and reducing malnutrition through locally managed bodies are goals worth striving for fulfilment. Also, the focus on decentralisation, restructuring of the family planning and national nutrition programme, major reforms in healthcare services, public-sector healthcare delivery and cost sharing is indeed heartening.

Nevertheless, no matter how sound the HNP looks on the drawing board and how inept the handling of the HPSP has been, the case is simply not made to replace the latter with the former. Instead, the HNP must be seen as an enhancement of the previous programme. Red tape has been a major impediment to the HPSP implementation and the new plan must take that into account. Basically, the HNP should start where the HPSP ends, reviewing and redressing the mistakes committed before.

Privileges in the pipeline for NRBs

Transition from remittance to investment awaited

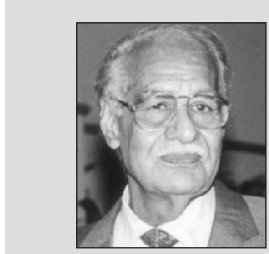
IT is a good move by the government to encourage Non-Resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) in a special way to send more foreign exchange to the country in the name of their beneficiaries at home. They will be selected from some two million NRBs at work abroad for being entitled to a string of home privileges depending upon their levels of income and positions overseas. To be called Important Non-Resident Bangladeshis or INRBs, they will be given the status of Commercially Important Person (CIP) and provided with a Regular Remitter's Card (RRC) to avail themselves of certain facilities when on a trip to Bangladesh.

However, it comes as a big surprise that such a routine protocol courtesy has taken so much time to be even contemplated for the sake of NRBs when their contribution to the national economy has been both public and state knowledge for a long time. Notably also, it has taken the appointment of a State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment (EWOE), a newly created portfolio, to set the ball rolling in the hitherto neglected area. A four-member committee comprising foreign secretary, commerce secretary and executive chairman of the Board of Investment (BOI) as members and the state minister for expatriate welfare and overseas employment as chairman decided on a new thrust to step up foreign currency remittances to the country.

We have two specific suggestions to make before the high-power committee. In the first place, NRBs with surplus money must be helped to cross the remittance threshold and come in a big way to invest their money in the infrastructural sector and core productive areas of the economy. That is where a special package of incentives need to be offered to the high-income bracket NRBs with a roadmap for investment in some clearly identifiable lucrative sectors. Surely the CIP label will not be enough.

The other point to stress will be to give due attention to the numerous small NRBs who, put together, contribute hugely to our forex reserve and thereby help tide over balance of payment difficulties. On home visits, they should feel hassle-free at the airport and out of it, too. That is, while giving 'privileges' to the big NRBs we must be careful not to sideline the interests of the smaller but numerically large expatriate Bangladeshi community.

Solving the unsolvable



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

THIS is not the first time that Srinagar and New Delhi will be talking over the quantum of accession. Some 40 years ago the same exercise was done. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had been released after a decade of internment. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had realised the mistake of having detained him after his statements conveying that Kashmir was not a bonded slave of India.

Nehru's interlocutor was Lal Bahadur Shastri. The Sheikh's associate was Mirza Afzal Beg, a Kashmiri with vast legal and constitutional background. The talking point was the fallout from the instrument of accession which the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir had signed to integrate the state with the Indian Union after the British had left. This instrument had given New Delhi only three subjects: Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications. After the detention of the Sheikh in 1953, the whole concept of autonomy underwent a change. New Delhi got pushed beyond the three subjects. Many laws were "enacted" by the pliable state assemblies. The Sheikh questioned the basis of all such laws and wanted them withdrawn. Shastri, the Sheikh and Beg would

talk almost every day on this subject. I was then Shastri's information officer. The press briefings were dull because there was no real information to communicate except that the three had met. After a few days, the newspapers stopped carrying even that bit.

I would often inquire from Shastri what they were discussing. He would reply, "Practically nothing." They went over again and again which laws were enacted in the

idea was to associate Pakistan with a final solution. Sheikh did not talk about independence to General Ayub Khan, then martial law administrator, as the records say. But the Sheikh reportedly proposed a condominium or confederation. Ayub rejected both the proposals. Nehru died suddenly in 1964 and Shastri in 1966. This ended the Sheikh's dream.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi picked up the thread in the begin-

realise that he did not have the pull which he had once at the centre. The matter was left at that.

Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and his son Omar Abdullah, the National Conference president, are legally correct in their contention that the state acceded to India only in three subjects. But when the Sheikh, the person who was mainly responsible for accession to India, himself agreed to rules and regulations beyond the three subjects,

so.

My fear is that the RSS, whose parivar includes the BJP, has already made up its mind. It has proposed the trifurcation of the state because it has come to believe that the 1953 status will not be the final solution, acceptable either to the Muslim-majority valley of Kashmir or Pakistan. It is a communal approach. But the RSS is not associated with anything else. It thinks that the Hindu-majority Jammu and

now. The killing by the terrorists and the propaganda for trifurcation are too much for Kashmiriyat. On top of it some in the Hurriyat do not believe in the concept of pluralism. And the Pakistan establishment has seldom shirked from playing a communal card.

Islamabad may have stopped infiltration but the damage it has done to itself and India in supporting religious and jihadi elements is irreparable. A new mood has come to prevail, that of fundamentalism. It is a Frankenstein's monster and it is now eating up Pakistan. It also has an adverse effect on India's pluralistic society. Muslims are bearing the brunt. This suits the Hindutva forces. They can spread their hate-Muslim policy more effectively. The Muslim community is not getting its due either politically, economically or socially. Less than three per cent of Muslims have employment in government. The representation in state assemblies and parliament is also low, not proportional to the 15 per cent population. And when a carnage like the one in Gujarat gets pushed into the background without the guilty being punished, the secular character of India becomes a bigger question mark.

Even then a Muslim has been elected as the President of India. Two Muslims made the country proud when India beat England in the Nat West Trophy cricket final at Lord's. Another Muslim produced a film, Lagaan, which reached the highest slot by getting nominated for an Oscar. Such instances sustain hopes that despite the efforts to Hinduise the society, the minority community is not disheartened and is with the majority in wanting to take India to the pinnacle of glory.

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Unfortunately Kashmiriyat, a secular pull, has weakened in the state over the years. Terrorists have played havoc with it. They have communalised the movement, which was once for a democratic, secular state. Their planned killing of Hindus and Sikhs has contaminated Kashmir...The climate is changing now. The killing by the terrorists and the propaganda for trifurcation are too

state or extended to it when the Sheikh was under detention. To verify whether they were outside the three subjects -- defence, foreign affairs and communications -- the Sheikh's repeated question was how New Delhi had come to extend certain central laws to Jammu and Kashmir when it had no authority to do so. Shastri was on the defensive. "What is in the mind of the Sheikh?" I once asked Shastri privately. First, he hesitated a bit, then said that the Sheikh was for independence. Reports in the fifties were that the concept of independence was something which Adlai Stevenson, who once contested the US presidential election, had sold to the Sheikh at Srinagar when the two met. The talks between Shastri and the Sheikh were suspended when the latter visited Pakistan. Nehru's

Parthasarathy, a senior bureaucrat whom she used often for important talks, was the interlocutor. By then East Pakistan had seceded from Pakistan to become independent Bangladesh. During his discussions with Parthasarathy, the Sheikh was in a chastened mood. He dropped the title of Prime Minister for the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir. He accepted many laws which the centre had extended to the state "with its permission." They went beyond the three subjects -- defence, foreign affairs and communications. What is known as the Indira-Sheikh accord was reached and Kashmir could review central laws extended to the state. It was not the autonomy of the 1953 status but it gave Jammu and Kashmir a visible identity. The Sheikh did

how can his successors reopen the whole thing and reject the changes the Sheikh had concurred with?

The threat by Omar Abdullah that New Delhi should either accept the 1953 status or face the Hurriyat's independence does not create any ripples. If he can reconcile himself to his presence in the BJP-led government even after the Gujarat carnage, he can also water down his demands. He should learn from his father that riding two horses at the same time is politically possible, if not morally. The 1953 autonomy is certainly a possibility. But it can't happen until the rest of India is convinced that after the 1953 autonomy status there will be no problem called Kashmir. Both Hurriyat and Pakistan have to understand this. They have to be brought round -- may be America and the UK can do

the Buddhist-majority Ladakh must be "saved."

Unfortunately Kashmiriyat, a secular pull, has weakened in the state over the years. Terrorists have played havoc with it. They have communalised the movement, which was once for a democratic, secular state. Their planned killing of Hindus and Sikhs has contaminated Kashmir. Whether it was Qasim Nagar a few days earlier or Kala Chat two months ago, their target was one religious community, Jammu is a Hindu majority region which has largely stayed away from the movements in the valley. Its problems with Srinagar are many but it has been part and parcel of a secular democratic structure. The exit of Kashmiri pandits gave the state a jolt but it was able to hold together. The climate is changing

Past haunts President Bush



HARUN UR RASHID

PRESIDENT Bush appears to be in trouble politically for his past as a corporate director because his old deals undermines his credibility as a corporate reformer in response to the wave of accounting scandals sweeping across the US. On 8th July President Bush announced his reforms for corporate America. He told corporate "fat cats" to behave well. President Bush created a high-powered task force headed by the Deputy Attorney General and the Chairman of Security Exchange Commission to provide direction for investigations and prosecutions of criminal activity.

On 11 July, President's Republican main rival Senator John McCain, in a stinging attack on "morally challenged executives", reported to have urged the head of the Security Exchange Commission Harvey Pitt to resign and urged the Congress to pass reform legislation opposed by the White House. With his address, Senator McCain put himself at the centre of a debate over corporate misconduct that has the Bush administration on the defensive. Senator's proposals to regulate companies were reportedly far tougher than those proposed by President Bush.

The corporate fraud has opened Pandora's box including the past conduct of President Bush as a company director. Reports indicate that his past does not seem to be impeccable. In 1990 Mr. Bush was a

member of the Board of Texas-based Harken Energy and sold 220,000 shares of Harken stock shortly before the company announced huge losses and the share price fell. The Exchange Commission is reported to have looked into whether Mr. Bush, a member of Harken's audit committee, had profited from information that was not available to other investors. President Bush's credibility is at stake because an internal

Petroleum deal was so similar to what Enron did to hide losses that Harken could have been a model for the now-disgraced company. President Bush's conduct with Harken is now the centre of the debate in the US. It is believed that Mr. Bush would not have been allowed to serve on Harken's audit committee if the reform proposals he outlined had been in effect at the time. Another transaction of Harken would have violated Mr. Bush's

allegedly fraudulent business practices while he was chairman and chief executive of Halliburton, a Texas-based oil company he headed until 2000. It is reported that the company made him rich, when he left he cashed in stock options worth US\$35 million which were never to reach such a high price again.

US investors want more than fine words from President Bush. They are demanding accounts of the

BOTTOM LINE

This is for the first time after September 11, that Mr. Bush's popularity seems to have been dented in the eyes of the public. Since his speech on 8th July for corporate reforms, Wall Street stocks fell sharply and the investors are nervous and angry. This is not a good time for the Bush administration. It is anybody's guess to what extent the administration can divert the attention of the people from corporate fraud to war on

memorandum of the Security Exchange Commission, made public on 11 July, suggested that President Bush was initially uncooperative a decade ago as a business executive with investigators looking into suspected insider trading.

Although Mr. Bush was eventually cleared of any illegal trading, his initial hesitation to provide documents to the Commission does not go well with the corporate responsibility. In another matter, Mr. Bush, as one of the three members of the audit committee of Harken, did not raise objections or expressed concern about the Harken's questionable deal with Aloha. In 1989 Harken's executives would sell a small chain of Hawaiian petrol stations called Aloha Petroleum to a group of investors who would pay US\$1 million up front but the accountants would record an immediate US\$7.9 million profit. Mr. Bush, a member of the Board's audit committee, was reported to have signed off the deal.

Political observers believe that the main sting is that the Aloha

reform proposals as well. On 11th July the White House confirmed that Harken made two loans to Mr. Bush while he served on the board of directors, a practice Mr. Bush now wants publicly held companies to prohibit.

The President's call for a new ethics of personal responsibility did not sit well with his past conduct as a director of Harken Energy. A commercial advertisement on US television was produced by American Family Voices ran as follows: "Remember the saying about foxes guarding the henhouse....well guess, what's happen in Washington? President Bush says he's getting tough on corporate fraud. But look at his record". It seems to be the first shot in a dirty war over the corporate scandals that have put the President in the front line.

Furthermore Vice President Cheney appears to be in the greatest personal difficulty. He is being sued by Judicial Watch, a conservative organisation, on behalf of two share holders for presiding over

companies they can trust and jail the corporate crooks. They cannot tolerate two sets of values any more, they can accept two sets of accounting books for companies.

Political observers believe that this is for the first time after September 11, that Mr. Bush's popularity seems to have been dented in the eyes of the public. Since his speech on 8th July for corporate reforms, Wall Street stocks fell sharply and the investors are nervous and angry. This is not a good time for the Bush administration. It is anybody's guess to what extent the administration can divert the attention of the people from corporate fraud to war on terrorism during the November Senate elections. The Democrats are pleased as Bush's leadership appears to crumble by his past conduct.

Barrister Harun Ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Keeping cable TV viewers hostage

This is not the first time that the cable operators have imposed their unjustified strike/cable hartal at the expense of the cable viewers. Their grudge against the taxing authority has nothing to do with us. Why should we bear the brunt of disagreement between the cable operators, cable distributors, and the taxing authority?

The cable operators at the end of their strike come to our houses demanding the full amount of bill despite stopping their service for several days. I think it's time the cable viewers expressed and exercised their justified right to subtract the proportionate amount from the monthly bill for the number of days the operators failed to provide the service they promised. Like political parties now the cable operators has started to hold the common people hostage for their own cause.

I indeed we need a "cable policy" where the viewers' legitimate right will also be protected.
Fahad Saleh
Dhaka

I cannot believe that the satellite channels that we have gotten used to is suddenly taken away from us! This is ridiculous!

What are the cable operators trying to achieve by going on a strike? What if the government does not fulfil their demands? Will they continue their strike forever? Cable channels are the only mode of entertainment we have in our country and we are being deprived of that.

The government should immediately look into this matter, which I doubt they will.
Lailah
Dhaka

I do acknowledge that the cable operators association does have the right to protest. But does their action bother the authority?

Remember the same "Authority" tried to censor the cable TV recently. It was the viewers who protested the move. Now the cable operators are repaying the viewers for their support! Will the cable operators charge the viewers for the whole month's service or will they compensate for the lost time, not to mention agony of the unwarranted unilateral forced

abstinence they enforced. Their problem needs to be addressed but this is certainly not the way.
Haroon Rasheed
Dhaka

"Death penalty for Shihab's killers"

I heaved a sigh of relief seeing the bold headline in the front page of July 18 of *The Daily Star* captioned "Death penalty for Shihab's killers".

Though it will not bring Shihab back and nothing can fill up the void and anguish that his parents will have to suffer life long, at least this is the least that we could expect done in this society we live in.
Z. Choudhury
Dhaka

Persona non grata

On July 16, I was turned back from the cantonment gates. The previous day one of friends was also turned back.

My friend and I are tax paying Bangladeshi citizens who contribute to this country in honest work more than most of our leaders put together. Between the two of us we employ over 5,000 people directly and almost twice that number

indirectly and bring in Tk. 120 crores annually. Yet we do not have the right to enter the cantonment. We contribute more to this country than half these people in uniform yet we are denied our rights.

My Financial Advisor told me last month that I should pay a respectable amount in personal income taxes as befits my position. I had agreed but now I am changing my mind. To hell with paying taxes, why should I? The military lives off my tax money but denies me my rights. I am not going to countenance that.

I was wondering how much of the land in Bangladesh is owned by the military? I know for a fact that the cantonments outside of Dhaka are forever expanding swallowing up the farmlands around them. As this continues more and more of my country will turn fallow and out of bounds for us.

The business wing of the military is also expanding its web. So far as I know, we have the Trust Bank, Filling Station, Milonayoty, Water Garden Hotel and many more that we are unaware of. Not to mention every golf course in Bangladesh as well as cinemas and shops. I won't even get into Sena Kalyan Trust's

business activities and encroachment on our waterways.
Emile
Dhaka

Excellent column

I would like to thank Mr. Badrul Ahsan for his column "Love beyond death" (July 12) and "Benefits of honesty" (July 19). It is simply outstanding, touched my heart.
Manzoor Elahi, M.D.
Akron, Ohio, USA

Army comes cheaper

The recent report of Transparency International found the first class government officers to be the most corrupt segment of our society (July 10). Their corruption caused a loss of more than taka 11000 crore in last year alone.

The budget for our army this year is taka 3900 crore; of which taka 600 crore will be provided by the army itself from the money it earns from UN peace keeping missions. So, for taka 3300 crore (less than one third of the misappropriated money) we have a workable army that keeps a hundred thousand fairly trained and equipped men ready for any national eventuality. What did we get for taka 11000

crore that was misappropriated by the government officers last year? Some Bangladeshi citizens (a few of whom like to identify themselves as MA, Biggles, Bastiat etc in this column) miss no chance to preach that our army is eating up everything we have. They are well-educated and sensible people and I am sure they have their reasons to include the army in their hate-list. But now perhaps they should re-prioritise their hatred?
Hassan
On e-mail

Hamida Ali hands over charge: Who's benefited?

—The way the students, the teachers, the staff, the guardians, the governing-body, the media protested the resignation of Mrs. Hamida Ali was a clear indication of her extreme popularity as a principal of VNSC.

She could have ended her highly successful career, spanning nearly two decades, more gracefully had she shown respect to the service rules and resigned willingly. Arguably, she might have given another extension since so many

people wanted her to stay on. But, that would mean how callous we can be to disregard rules for petty benefits, as if rules are there for being ignored!

Mrs. Hamida Ali resigned anyway. But what's the outcome? It's the win of consciousness over emotion, a rare phenomenon in our society indeed!

Monirul Haque
Dhaka

It appears from the reports and the photos recently published on Mrs. Hamida Ali, the former Principal of VNSC, that she was, if not anything else, a very popular Principal. The guardians, some of whom with definite political bias, a section of the press, and most unfortunately, the students of VNSC while showing all kinds of praises on Mrs. Ali sadly forgot one of the most important qualities which any good school worth its name tries to inculcate among its students. That is, discipline. I am sorry to mention that Mrs. Ali herself was the first to violate this great quality which is required of any teacher.

In any civilised society, it is the government, which is the supreme authority to uphold the laws, the

rules and the regulations. In this particular case, the government has not forced Mrs. Ali out of the job. It has only ensured that she, like any other head of private school or college, goes on retirement at an age of 65 as decided by the law of the land. What is there to be so fussy about it?

What justification do the Governing Body of VNSC, the parents and some newsmen have to incite the students to the extent that they damage public vehicles on the road and create blockades on public thoroughfares?

As an ideal teacher, as many people claim Mrs. Ali to be one, she should have told her students and teachers that as per the law of the state, it was time for her to go, and they must accept her departure in good grace. No one in this world is indispensable, and Mrs. Ali is no exception.

Ashraf
New DOHS, Mohakhali