

Dengue situation turns grimmer by the day

DCC should make amends for their neglect immediately

A news report has one more screaming title on dengue outbreak: three lives taken by the scourge, including that of a doctor, and that 34 patients were admitted to city hospitals in a single day. Yet another fatality among doctors; but hardly surprising. How could anyone be immune to something that, by its very attacking nature, unable to discriminate between medicos and non-medicos?

Government statistics put the latest figure of afflicted at 1,227 with 16 among them having died. Children have proved to be the most vulnerable group. Monsoon which is the high risk season is not even half-way through. So, the worries deepen.

Basically, statistics, whether of official or unofficial origins, can hardly depict the inherently alarming dengue situation that faces us today. It is the scientific surveys carried out in Dhaka rather belatedly -- one must say after the alarm bell has actually started ringing and not before that -- which conjure up the real gravity of the situation. A DCC survey last month found out that eight out of its 10 zones have an alarming concentration of Aedes mosquito. More to the point, the normal larvae presence of 20 per container on the bruteax index (BI) has been dangerously outstripped by 215 larvae found in a single container. Little wonder, the number of adult Aedes in the city has risen five to ten times the normal level. Unchecked infestation of eggs and larvae has allowed zillions of adult mosquitoes to grow. If anything, the receding flood waters will only give them newer hang-outs.

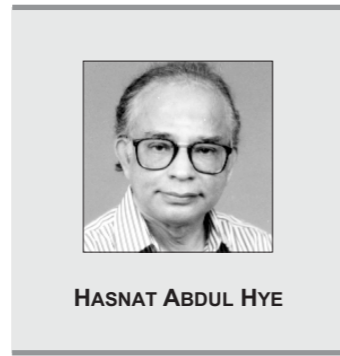
The Dhaka City Corporation is vociferous now in its expression of serious concern at the dengue situation, somewhat betraying a sense that public attention is being diverted from its insecticide spraying failure to a hype of some kind. It is also going all out with an awareness building campaign to seek public cooperation in keeping neighbourhoods clean which should have been embarked upon earlier. The civil society groups themselves are at work there anyway. But the over-riding public feeling is: had the DCC paid heed to expert warnings last year that the fatal infection could come in a wave if not warded off by a timely intervention, the situation could not have come to a pass it has.

The Daily Star's sustained probe into where things might have gone wrong has come out with some startling revelations. With last year's stock of larvicide exhausted in killing 'eggs of other species of mosquitoes, culex for instance', and not (very strangely) Aedes, the need arose for importing it before the current monsoon season would set in. But we began on a wrong-footing, not merely by using up last year's stock of larvicide on other specie of mosquito but also more seriously by approaching the current season with a zero stock of it. How could this happen? Who is responsible for it? Why isn't there any mechanism to punish people guilty of criminal negligence pertaining to a serious public health hazard?

The DCC neither sent any sample of larvicide to the plant protection department for approval nor did its mayor okay purchase of 8000 litres of it till Wednesday. Furthermore, the corporation does not have any approved adulticide in stock to be able to kill adult mosquitoes.

There is no second opinion among experts that large-scale spraying of larvicide and adulticide can bail us out of the grave situation we have worked ourselves into through sheer lack of planning and timely action. We urge the health and local government ministries and the DCC mayor to make a public statement about the status on the Aedes mosquito containment agenda. It's a pressing task and there is absolutely no time to waste brooding over it.

Forgive, yes; forget, never



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

THE two authorities are poles apart, and the actions mentioned in their declarations did not have the same background and consequences. But the timing of the two declarations, though a pure coincidence, cannot fail to startle because of the eerily common characteristics: the long delay that has taken for them to appear. On July 16 the Irish Republican Army (IRA) apologised for thirty years' of killing and maiming innocent non-combatants. Hardline Unionists and other critics of the IRA promptly commented that the apology was only half-hearted and did not go far enough.

In the second declaration made during the same month Pakistan formally regretted for the "excesses" of the "calamitous events" of 1971. President Pervez Musharraf during his visit to Dhaka recorded the remorse in the visitor's book in the National Mausoleum on July 29 with the following words: "Your brothers and sisters in Pakistan share the pain of the event of 1971." At the official dinner he said: "We feel sorry for the tragedy, which left deep scars on both of our nations." As in the case of the IRA declaration the one made by the Pakistani president was also seen as falling short of expectations. Like the IRA declaration, it too was seen as half-hearted and not going far enough. It was evident that President Musharraf did not tender unconditional apology. That stood in sharp contrast with the unequivocal apology made by the Japanese for

war crimes and the apologies expressed formally by the Vatican and the Germans to the Jews. Regret is not synonymous with apology and cannot be substituted for it. It is not as formal, comprehensive and cathartic as apology. Regret is a social finesse with a veneer of transient embarrassment. Apology, on the other hand, is embedded deeply in moral bedrock that distinguishes between good and evil. There cannot be a stronger acknowledgement of wrongdoing

the victim and the oppressor. The events of 1971 set in motion by the military-bureaucratic-industrial clique of Pakistan and ending in a ruthless military crackdown was a tragedy for Bengalis because it was they who were killed, raped, maimed and made homeless refugees. The number of victims, mostly civilians, ran into several millions. By no stretch of imagination the Pakistan army and their compatriots in West Pakistan can be thought of experiencing this 'tragedy' as vic-

brutality and terror. It cannot be that the advisors of the Pakistan president did not know that they were blatantly attempting to dissimulate and equivocate when they drafted the declaration of 'regret'. It is understandable why even while aware of committing duplicity and prevarication, they had to go ahead with damage control through double entendre. As spin-doctors they had little choice other than going for window-dressing. When one realises their predicament one may

President Musharraf's policies. But the IRA statement included a section, which is very significant and facilitates acceptance of their limited apology. The IRA statement said: "The future will not be found in denying collective failures and mistakes or closing minds and hearts to the plight of those who have been hurt. That includes all of the victims of the conflict, combatants and non-combatants alike." This makes the present apology of the IRA the first step in a process to

ence of those nine months when Bengalis were killed in hundreds of thousands, women were raped, children were bayoneted and homes were torched sending millions as refugees. We shall not forget the brutal oppression by the occupation army for long nine months and the triumph over it because they have made us what we are today: a free nation in an independent sovereign country. The events of 1971 with all their horrifying dimensions and immeasurable suffering have defined us as a proud nation. We will, therefore, remember events of 1971 as the birth pangs of a nation that emerged through "blood, sweat and tears". We cannot forget the heroic resistance made by the Mukti Bahini comprising civilians, Bengalis in Pakistan army who could escape with their lives and the help we got from India. We will salute the heroes, known and unknown, who laid down their lives so that their brothers and sisters could live with honour and dignity. If apology from Pakistan comes, we will forgive them once for all. But we will not forget 1971. It is not simply a year in calendar. It is the testament to our indomitable spirit and affirmation of our determination to live in dignity and honour. Nineteen seventy-one is the watershed when we were called upon by destiny to write the first chapter of our nation's history. To forget 1971 is to forget that history.

Gabriel Marquez wrote: "Races condemned to a hundred years of solitude do not have a second chance on earth." God in his infinite mercy will not condemn us to such a fate. Because of our 'baptism in fire' we will not languish in forlorn solitude. We will look forward with confidence and hope. We will remember 1971, with pain and sorrow, from here to eternity. We shall not forget.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

To forget 1971 is to forget that history. Gabriel Marquez wrote: "Races condemned to a hundred years of solitude do not have a second chance on earth." ... Because of our 'baptism in fire' we will not languish in forlorn solitude. We will look forward with confidence and hope. We will remember 1971, with pain and sorrow, from here to eternity. We shall not forget.

and culpability than apology.

The distinction is not a matter of semantics but of substantive connotation. Because of this many in Bangladesh are not happy and satisfied with the Pakistani president's words of regrets. Even in Pakistan Human Rights organisations have called for unconditional apology by the Pakistan government considering what has been said as too little too late. Ironically, even today majority of Pakistanis do not know about the atrocities committed by the Pakistan army in 1971. Even the Hamoodur Rahman Commission has not told the whole truth about 1971 except criticising Pakistan army for their lack of fighting spirit. This report was available to Pakistanis only through the Internet because even now the army is chary about letting the true story of 1971 be known to the people.

Not only the use of 'remorse' and 'regret' by the Pakistani president fail to capture the enormity of the crime committed against Bengalis in 1971, the reference to 'tragedy' and 'deep scars' obfuscate the issue of

times. Similarly, the atrocities committed and genocide carried out in cold blood by the occupation army in what has been called by the Pakistani president 'a tragedy', left 'deep scars', mental and physical, only on Bengalis in East Pakistan because they were at the receiving end of the diabolic plan to subjugate or eliminate them. Whoever heard that those who inflict whiplashes on others have scars on their back? So the postulation of a common 'tragedy' shared by Bengalis and the West Pakistanis as well as the argument of sharing in the pain from 'deep scars' by both are non-sequitars. It is a fallacious sophistry in an absurd attempt to distract attention from the truth of a cold-blooded genocide that cannot be comprehended fully by the overused word 'tragedy'. 'Military crackdown' to deny the democratic rights of the majority represented by Bangladeshis comes nearer the truth. 'Genocide' hits the bull's eye and there are echoes of it in 'massacre'. 'Tragedy' is too sanitised, too abstract to convey the horrendous

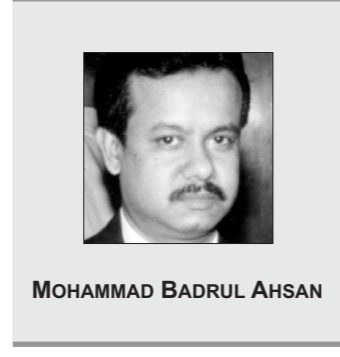
even have some sympathy for them. The dilemma they faced is as simple as it is stark: how to win over Bangladeshis at a time when Pakistan badly needs strong friends in the region? How to accomplish this goal without antagonising the constituency of President Musharraf viz. the Pakistan army? When one identifies this dilemma the reason for the use of words with equivocal meanings becomes apparent. It explains but does not exonerate them from the guilt of not being ingenuous and straightforward.

Interestingly, the half-heartedness and pussyfooting in the words of apology by the IRA were also occasioned by the same compulsion of not antagonising the hard-core IRA members. Just as the IRA could not express apology for all of their terror attacks on civilians and non-civilians for fear of a rebellion in their ranks, Pakistan also may not be in a position now to tender unconditional apology, particularly when elements within its army are reportedly unhappy with some of

be completed in future. The Pakistani gesture should have been in a similar vein giving hints of more to come, which would have made the half-hearted regret more significant and therefore welcome. If it is Pakistan's idea to break the ice on the subject at first and then complete the thaw at the next stage it remains problematic. Only future will reveal the extent and degree of their penitence. If the declaration of 'regret' was not opportunistic and transient the second stage in the process of 'healing the wound' viz. declaration of apology should materialise before long. In its absence the window of goodwill, opened after thirty years, will be closed shut or look unhealed.

With unconditional apology coming from Pakistan in the near future we will be willing and ready to forgive them. We may even apologise for the killing of the few non-Bengalis in 1971 without going into the question of who did what first. That is greatness in magnanimity and we should be seen as equal to it. But we cannot forget the experi-

More than a resignation



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IT is an ironic fact that good sense prevails only after the harm is done. Last week, the vice-chancellor of Dhaka University tendered his resignation in the interest of, as he said in a cheeky line, "the university and fair investigation". Even if one ignores the comic potential in what he said, one cannot help wondering why it took him one full week to make up his mind. By that time, in case he didn't realise, he harmed his own image, and also that of the party, which put him in power.

One cannot help wondering how a higher-educated man like him failed to realise what was common sense to the rest of us. It was wrong to send police to the female dormitories in the dead of night, period. The excuses he tried to give couldn't save him in the end. It's a surprise that he didn't see it coming.

What was he thinking all that time? What was going on in his fabulous mind, before he ordered the attack and then tried to defend it for an entire week? Did he weigh all options before creating the insoluble mess, which turned him into a joke? We all make mistakes and we

all make errors in judgement, but the intelligent ones are always prepared with an answer. The simplest of that answer is a five-lettered word called "sorry", if one must not think of anything better.

By the end of last week, it was obvious that the vice-chancellor, who became history, didn't have an answer. Of course, he tried to tell us many things, but it all sounded hollow and unconvincing, much like the muddled words of someone caught in the act. And those who are

with his ignorance of sublime values, which, as a teacher, he was to inculcate in others.

There are several schools of thought as to why the vice-chancellor must have acted the way he did, one of which claims that he had walked into a trap laid down by his enemies. So what? Nobody said life was a walk in the park. And even if he should draw sympathy for being framed by his enemies, he blew his chances because there was no class in his subsequent act.

widening the gap between education and politics in our mind. True, our academic centres have supplied critical manpower to politics for decades. True, most of our politicians were once student leaders, who perfected their skills on campus and then put fire into national politics. But those were the halcyon days of our national history. Bright students would make bright leaders, was the credo back then.

Understood that education is ideal while politics is real, and

consideration for others. That is where education comes in as a moderating force and communication tool. It tempers imagination with experience, parochialism with knowledge, and ignorance with information. Education is meant to increase the efficiency of politics.

While, the opposite is true for us. Politics is interfering with the efficacy of education. If we look at the incident of Shamsunnahar Hall, it is the words of a vice-chancellor pitted against the words of a provost, and

School, the tragedy of Dhaka University was tantamount to defiling a deity in its worship. The great discipline, which is meant to bring sobering effect on politics itself was disturbed by political agitation.

That is a point to ponder for those who talk about banning student politics. It is not going to happen for so long as the politicians divide the teachers and teachers divide the students, or in whatever order one chooses to look at it. And mind it, there is nothing wrong with politics on campus if we take out the violence in it. Nothing is wrong if aspiring politicians want to hone their skills, and apply their ideological learning in national politics.

Taking out the violence in it remains the real challenge. It is more than the resignation of one inconsequential vice-chancellor, who couldn't handle it properly. Violence arises because minds collide outside their rational territories. It was said that one vice-chancellor and a provost, two expectedly rational minds, had to have a showdown like that. If we triage the incident of Shamsunnahar Hall, the students were its foremost victims. What suffered most though was the innocence of many of them, who must have been shocked by the attack in the middle of night.

The ultimate victim, in that sense, was their respect for the teachers and faith in the institution of learning. God saved them, should some of them go through a psychosis and lash out at their experience through violence.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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not forgetful would remember that this vice-chancellor had taken over the office one evening denying his predecessor the right to a proper farewell, his smiling face beaming across television screens all over this country.

So the man, who couldn't wait to become the vice-chancellor, was shooed away last week as the shortest-serving vice-chancellor in the history of Dhaka University. Hasty rise has hasty fall, and who should have known better than a man of letters that it is true amongst many lessons of life! This man of letters, who aspired to run the highest centre of learning in this country, ended up running a fool's errand. He spooked our conscience

It was already bad that he had made a mistake. He made it worse by the shtick he performed in order to cover it.

We need to analyse what happened beyond the humiliation of an inconsiderate man. Way, way back when there was something called character, this would have meant something. But these days, politicians are like Harry Houdini, the magician. They can escape all manners of shame. Let us say the vice-chancellor who goofed here will spoof elsewhere, and go at something again. Let us say, perhaps he will vanish like a firework, which has burned its combustibles.

However, the harm he has done goes beyond him and his party,

learned minds aren't necessarily great leaders. The backbenchers saved France and many US presidents never went to college. But is that the only connection between education and politics? Politics certainly isn't an employment opportunity, and it is meant for high-minded people who have idealistic needs.

That's where things have gone wrong for this nation. Idealism, the pursuit of noble purposes, principles or goals in life, doesn't exist anymore. Make no mistake, we have got ambitions, our strong desire to climb the ladder of life by a leap or two. Difference is that idealism teaches you to be ambitious for many, a private agenda rooted in the

one of them isn't telling us the truth. We need to remember that the vice-chancellor didn't resign because we could prove that he had lied to us. He resigned because he did what he shouldn't have done in the first place, and because he failed to manage the circumstantial evidence of what was utterly wrong.

Former US vice-president Hubert Humphrey said, "To err is human but to blame it on someone else is politics." That remains the crux of the whole thing that took place in Shamsunnahar Hall. The fact of life is that educated people engaged in this sort of low-down trick to become politicians. But to engage in it in academic institutions leaves bad taste in the mouth. After Viqarunnisa

Adibashis need patronage

JEROME SARKAR

THE 9th of August is the International Day for Indigenous People. Prime aim is to create awareness about tribal people. They need attention by the government and the people at large. We must remember that we owe a lot to the tribals. Many of us have grabbed their lands and properties. If they are poor and backward today, we are also responsible for it. We must now give them their due. The observation of the day should make us aware and stimulate us to repay our debts by sharing our assets with our tribal brothers and sisters.

Tribal minority communities live in small groups across Bangladesh. Not long ago, the indigenous people called Adibashis lived in peace and harmony with the nature of this once a very lush green landscape. With the ever increasing population and rising demand for lands, the tribal people such as Garos, Santals, Oraons, Rajbangshis, etc. have lost much of their pristine habitats or lands, trades, culture etc. to the over stretching pressure of majority communities. They have become a

vulnerable section.

A baseline study was conducted by RDRS Bangladesh on Adibashis' life and living condition within its working area in Rangpur-Dinajpur region in northwest part of Bangladesh. The survey results obtained through on-the-spot study indicate that the Santals, the Oraons, the Rajbangshis are the major indigenous communities living in the area.

Education and training: Tribals lag behind others in education and vocational training. Recommendations, therefore, emphasised the need primarily to improve their living condition by creating sources of income for their sustainability, scope for education and vocational training. With this end in view, the 'Education and Training Programme' was launched by RDRS in 2001. 'Group Approach' was adopted to bring the people together, raise awareness and motivate them for their stronger fraternity and sense of unity. The tribal adults have realized and accepted the premise that without unity they cannot rise above the line of poverty and survive as respectable human beings. The idea of small group formation was

therefore readily accepted.

Income generating activities: On 7 June 2002, we set off on a journey to visit the RDRS projects for Adibashis and get a first hand picture of the progress of the programme. An inter-active session with a female group of Adibashis namely 'Chotta Chowlia Golapzal Mahila Group' in Bhognagar village of Birganj Upazila under Dinajpur District was organized. From discussion, it was gathered that the Group consisted of 18 female members and their group saving stood at Tk.3,603/=.

Three members had already taken loans for investment in farm production. Martha Murmu, Lolita Soren and others narrated their history that their forefathers owned vast stretches of lands but now their land ownership is rapidly shrinking. They now live and work on lands of others. The womenfolk were seen harvesting maize in one crop field while another group of womenfolk was seen transplanting crop seedlings. Male members are either labourers or self-employed. Nearby one elderly man was weaving a fish net and another was making bamboo baskets. These

were their ancestral trades. Handicraft was one of their prime professions but now it is dwindling away very fast.

We visited another Group, namely 'Krishnopur Adivashi Mahila Group' in Thakurgaon, formed in early January 2002. Some group members have joined Adult literacy course. Many of them now can at least write their names. This indicates their verve, spirit and urge to learn and open up scopes for further income generation and upgradation of living condition.

Traditions and culture: Continuity and promotion of cultural norms and values is an inalienable urge of any race or society. Tribal culture is rich but is fading away fast due to neglect, isolation, lack of opportunities, scope and support. Tribals on their own cannot do anything significant to enrich and maintain their cultural heritages. They need assistance of others. They need to increase their skills for furthering their source of income.

We also visited a Mechanical Training class where a team of 11 Adibashi boys from different areas of Thakurgaon district were undergoing training at RDRS-run Training Centre. Mechanical training included motorcycle and bicycle

repairing. The boys also suggested for power-tiller repairing training course, which they said, would open up another area of opportunities for them. A power-tiller machine, as they reported, can be adopted to serve as "autorickshaw" "speed-boat" and "wheat crushing machine", etc. depending on and matching with seasonal needs. This indicates their verve, spirit and urge to learn and open up scopes for further income generation and upgradation of living condition.

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The training invigorated the

participants with hopes and aroused their spirit to revive the almost forgotten and dying culture. The participants were back with a fillip to form groups to sustain positive values and enrich their culture inheritances. By promoting their folk songs, traditional dance with the playing of traditional musical instruments, an attempt was made to revive and preserve their lost heritage. Participants categorically stated that at any cost Adibashi culture should be preserved for true existence of Adibashis. In order to retrieve and enliven the cultural heritage of Adibashis, their cultural activities may be audio and video taped and broadcast more and more on Radio and Television by the government agencies, private commercial entities and NGOs.

Dissemination of information: Orientation programmes on primary health care, establishment of vegetable gardens, practice of homestead farming, use of safe drinking water and sanitary latrines, efficient use of micro-credit facilities, employment and other income generation activities are to be organised.

We came across another

Adibashi (Santal) village in Birganj. All were serene and peaceful. Air was so refreshing. Houses were surrounded by green trees. Fields were filled with maize crop. The maize grows well in the locality. Sugar cane fields were also seen. A discussion session was initiated with a group of Adibashis. Interestingly, no sex abuse exists among tribal people, no tortures/oppression of women was reported. However, it is sad to admit that sometimes the tribal females become victims of sexual harassment of some sadist members of majority community. In a tribal community, women are independent at home and outside. They have no dowry system. So there exists no violation against women.

In case of sickness, they depend on traditional herbal medicines. They cannot afford to buy medicines marketed by commercial pharmacists. This has rather become a boon for them. They derive their healthiness from Mother Nature.

Where do they stand? So far, very little has been done by the government and the NGOs for the tribal people. But whatever little

opportunity came their way, tribals took full advantage of it. They are keen to improve their lot but they do not have resources. They need help of others. A lot is to be done. Tribals are still a very backward community. The government and NGOs, therefore should take some practical measures to improve the lot of the tribals. Tribals are peace loving. By promoting their interests, we shall virtually promote peace and serenity for ourselves too.

Suggestions: a) The Adibashis need to be involved in the mainstream development activities; b) Training on awareness, advocacy, legal rights, human rights, etc. be imparted to them; c) Efforts to build up confidence, courage and diligence in tribal people should be made; d) Time to time, fair (mela) or similar festive activities should be encouraged and organised where Adibashis and non-Adibashis can publicly participate to bridge the existing gap between them with brotherhood, mutual co-operation and respect.