

DHAKA WEDNESDAY AUGUST 14, 2002

Dengue drives capital to a point of despair

More blood separators, treatment outlets needed

HE Ministry of Health and the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) refused to learn from history, it seems. Last year, when a steady stream of patients started pouring into different hospitals and clinics in the capital and elsewhere with dengue infection, they argued that the prevalence was seasonal and not in any way alarming. The DCC, meanwhile, sat pretty in the feign belief that the situation did not warrant any emergency measure. Eventually, the dengue onslaught did take a serious turn and most clinics and hospitals found themselves hard pressed to cope with an ever-increasing number of patients. There was as well shortage of blood and platelets due to absence of adequate number of separators at different state-run health outlets. Luckily, last-minute intervention avoided a major catastrophe. Last year's lesson was to be prepared for dengue prevalence at the onset of monsoon this year around, a lesson not learnt.

The same story was retold this year, too. The DCC was caught napping by the sudden spurt of aedes population. It remained blind and deaf to media reports and outcry from the citizenry for full-scale anti-mosquito drive. In fact, it did not have enough larvicide or adulticide in store, the procurement procedure having lost way in bureaucratic wilderness. Finally, when the fogging and spraying operations began in the city and the suburbs, dengue had spread at an alarming rate. Meanwhile, the ministry concerned made no effort to enhance either logistic or personnel strength at the public healthcare outlets for any emergency. There was no follow-up or stocktaking at any level. That four out of six blood separators at different state-run hospitals remain out of order bears a poignant testimony to that effect. Overall, the ministry and the DCC have once again let a problem snowball into a serious crisis that could lead to several deaths in the end.

The government should wake up to the fact that dengue infection has assumed ominous proportions and undertake certain emergency measures. Doctors on its payroll must be put on alert so that they are available for additional duties whenever and wherever needed. Meanwhile, hospitals and other healthcare outlets in the public sector must be equipped with adequate numbers of blood separators immediately and procurement of these lifesaving devices must not be hampered by red-tapism at any level. Also, it should begin immediate community-level programmes so that people participate in blood donation programmes so as to cope with the prevailing crisis at the blood banks.

Encroachers eat up rivers as authorities stand still

Do something to show respect for public opinion

HE activists -- members of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon

-- and the decision makers on environmental issues -ministers Sadek Hossain Khoka who moonlights as the Mayor as well and Col. Akbar Hussain -- went around on a river trip to observe how the rivers of Dhaka were being captured by encroachers. What they saw confirmed that the rivers were in a state of desperation -- some of it spawned by the government inaction itself

One of the more memorable images associated with the caretaker government was the demolition of the illegal constructions erected on the banks of river Buriganga. It was an enduring image of a government willing to stand up for what is best for the environment while protecting the rights of the people. More importantly, it was an excellent display of a reform-minded government. What we have now is the reversal of the scene which is eating into public morale. This is despite Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon's heroic efforts to stop the rot as the government appears helpless to do anything.

Yet the government has always been long on promises and postures as defenders of public rights and the authorities can find no excuses to explain as to how the situation came to this. The business as usual approach regarding destruction of rivers has been the deadliest thumbs down to public opinion.

While Col. Akbar has suggested that certain parts of the river

The expatriate

K.A.S. MURSHID

ANGLADESHIS have truly emerged as a travelling people. Gone are the days when our self- image was essentially agrarian and static, even moribund. As someone once remarked the last time Bengalis ventured forth beyond their paddy fields in any significant numbers was when Vijay Singh set sail for Sri Lanka some three thousand years ago or was it the case that his ship was caught in a storm and was blown off-course all the way to Lanka? Things have indeed changed today as all classes of people are now on the move: poor and rich, young and old, men and women. They are to be found in every country in the world from Japan to Norway, from Alaska to Zimbabwe. The overwhelming bulk of migrants are blue-collar workers with little or no education, mainly in the Middle East and Malavsia. There is however, another breed of better educated, middle or lower middle class young male migrants -- determined, bold and innovative.

I have myself been going back and forth to Cambodia intermittently over the last six or seven years. I am witness to many changes that have taken place. often dramatic changes, over this relatively short period of time. When I was first in Phnom Penh there were approximately six Bangladeshi families in the city. The men (and one lady) were all working for NGOs. Most significantly there were no 'migrants' who

with investments in hotels, communications and forestry concessions. I think there were some moves by one or two Bangladeshi pharmaceutical companies to enter the market as well, although their efforts seemed less focused. Some garment manufacturers from Bandladesh were also beginning to eye the Cambodian market cautiously -- no, not as a destination country for RMG but for purposes of out-sourcing

Six years down the line the

Bangladeshi community has

expanded and diversified its ranks

considerably in Phnom Penh.

There have been significant

Bangladeshi investments in the

RMG sector in Cambodia, and with

the investments came a few hun-

dred garments 'professionals' as

well (the master cutters, techni-

cians and merchandisers etc.).

Then there are those in 'transit' --

biding their time in Phnom Penh

trying to obtain visas for Singapore

and Vietnam to (a) make their

passports look good and (b) look

for 'opportunities' in Cambodia itself. At this point, let me introduce the hero of this piece, Mr. Sani (not his real name)

Someone told us there actually was a Bangladeshi restaurant in town and the owner, Mr. Sani himself will cook genuine Bangladeshi food for Bangladeshi customers. Sure enough Sani treated us with alu bharta and begoon bharta along with papda and chitol fish, and his cooking was

certainly better than what Abdul

produces at home! It seemed that

Sani found his way to PP from

Singapore a couple of years ago --

possibly seeking to renew his

Singapore visa from there. He saw

potential in the place and began

toving with the idea of setting up a

small business. In two years he has

done very well: he owns a small

restaurant -- nothing fancy

although well situated just at the

entrance of the river ferry that takes

tourists to Siem Reap (Angkor Wat)

on the fast boat. So not surprisingly

he began to sell boat tickets and

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

He is the entrepreneur par excellence clearly able to take his new environment in his stride and even

excel. Good luck Sani... He is young, good-looking and well focused -- an unbeatable combination,

especially if your English is tolerably good and your personality pleasant. I am sure Amar will do very

well. Good luck Amar... This is the new generation of migrants, distinct from the labouring classes in

terms of family background and culture, lacking in capital but not in ideas and entrepreneurial ability.

soon went on to sell air tickets. Today, he has a well-structured business strategy. He has a guesthouse catering for the backpacker market and takes pride in saving that he can get a visa for Vietnam in a day (normally it takes at least 3 days). In addition he is importing beer form Germany and is dreaming about exporting to Bangladesh from the region. After many years of hard work he decided to bring in his family to PP. His daughter and

two sons, along with a wife who

man in Soi 7 in Bangkok who has a tailoring shop. I was drawn to his shop by the Bangla inscriptions displayed on his widow pane. Soon enough he convinced me that I needed to order at least two suits and some trousers and that his shirts were a tremendous bargain. He then proceeded to make elaborate plans for my next visit to town, providing me with information on the discount air tickets and hotel rates he could get for me -- all this of course simply because I was a deshi bhai! Actually I like these types so I allowed myself to be convinced and hoped that I wasn't getting ripped off too much. Amar (Thai corruption of Omar) came to Bangkok two or three years ago, married a local woman and eventually found himself owning a share in this shop. He is young, goodlooking and well focused -- an unbeatable combination, especially if your English is tolerably good and your personality pleasant. I am sure Amar will do verv well. Good luck Amar.

hardly spoke any English seemed This is the new generation of excited to be there although somemigrants, distinct from the labourwhat concerned about educational prospects of the children. Mr. Sani ing classes in terms of family backaround and culture. lacking in hasn't yet quite 'made it' but capital but not in ideas and entreseemed well on his way towards preneurial ability. One doesn't that objective. He is focused, hard know how many hundreds or working and amiable and has a thousand of Sanis and Amars there quick eye for exploiting an opportuare out there. On thing however is nity that should come his way. He is certain -- their numbers will rise, not the entrepreneur par excellence least because of our troubles at clearly able to take his new envihome. And why not? ronment in his stride and even

Dr K A S Murshid is an economist and Research Sani reminded me of the young Director, BIDS.

An incongruous situation

were trying to settle in or hoping to

make a niche for themselves, e.g.

in the tourist market. Those were

the early days of political turbu-

lence, absence of order (as well as

laws) and a climate well-suited for

certain types of, shall we say, risky

investments (e.g. in shady banks.

drugs and arms). Even then there

were people and companies

closely charting out the potential of

Cambodia and making plans to

acquire a foothold in the country.

The Indian drug industry was

keenly interested. The Chinese, as

always, were the first to move in

concerned, including perhaps to voters: Benazir Bhutto, life Chairperson of PPP and recently reelected as Chairperson and Mian Nawaz Sharif, the President of the PML (Nawaz). The latter has allowed his vounger brother to be elected President of the PML(N). The crucially important question today is that whether these two leaders -- each of whom has been the PM twice after winning elections, now commonly believed to

tions of corruption tom tommed and laws made that transparently aim at them, the question is whether they will continue to be barred from participation in the Oct 2002 polls. Well, to the rest of the world, the election in which Nawaz and Benazir are kept barred -- as the declared intent of Musharraf is -cannot be free because they head two of the largest parties with known popularity. It is true that so

à-vis the Army; there are clear indications that both Nawaz and Benazir, in view of common adversity, are ready to bury their private animosity, well exploited in the past by known vested interests. That means that these two parties, especially with the two leaders present in the new Parliament, will dominate the scene. They may reject the constitutional amendments made by the Army regime and is sure to make the life of Presi-

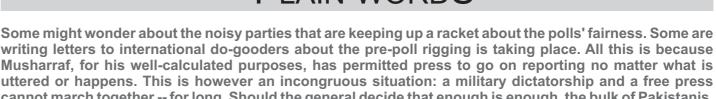
polls to produce the "positive results"; or (c) if the polls are not postponed and they are also not rigged, as the rest of the world is insisting, the Pakistan Army and Musharraf will be facing the situation that a former dictator of Pakistan faced in 1971 when Gen. Yahya Khan was presented with an election result that he just could not accept. If the former two options are denied by world opinion -- not a very likely thing -- the third eventu-

excel. Good luck Sani.

was not due to the UN, world opinion, great powers or even the US. The opinion of Pakistanis has never held back a military regime from any disastrous course. Yahya was planning a long stay several days after Dec. 16, '71 surrender, as was shown by the Constitution he had promulgated on Dec. 19 -that was the story of the official news agency which was killed at 10 p.m. that evening after there was a rumpus in the GHQ earlier in the day when younger officers began shouting at Yahya's number two: General Abdul Hameed.

So Musharraf can snap his fingers at the rest of the world at a pinch -- so long as the Army goes on sustaining him. There is nothing to suggest that the Army today can afford to desert Musharraf. The rest of the world will have to lump whatever the regime does.

Some might wonder about the noisy parties that are keeping up a racket about the polls' fairness. Some are writing letters to international do-gooders about the prepoll rigging is taking place. All this is because Musharraf, for his wellcalculated purposes, has permitted press to go on reporting no matter what is uttered or happens. This is however an incongruous situation: a military dictatorship and a free press cannot march together -- for long. Should the general decide that enough is enough, the bulk of Pakistanis, long helplessly accustomed to a mai baap kind of government, civil or military, will go on being the 'silent majority' they have been throughout the history. No, no revolution seems to impend



have been doctored by the mili- these two politicians through sus- dent Pervez Musharraf difficult who ality will have to be faced. warts who have sent a fairly hightary's intelligence services -- will tained and well-aimed propa- has got himself elected for five How many divisions stand behind powered monitoring team that has back when they are now being barred from contesting by President and CE Gen. Pervez Musharraf. Both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir head parties that have won the polls twice, no matter how fair they were or were not: at least Authority in Pakistan cannot say that those polls were bogus. The last government by Nawaz had a two-thirds majority. The PPP has the reputa-

much mud has been thrown at

writing letters to international do-gooders about the pre-poll rigging is taking place. All this is because Musharraf, for his well-calculated purposes, has permitted press to go on reporting no matter what is uttered or happens. This is however an incongruous situation: a military dictatorship and a free press cannot march together -- for long. Should the general decide that enough is enough, the bulk of Pakistanis, long helplessly accustomed to a mai baap kind of government, civil or military, will go on being the 'silent majority' they have been throughout the history.

ganda, backed by selective docuyears through a commonly susmentation in the courts, that some pected referendum. They may has come to stick; their proclivity to amend the constitution in ways the indulge in corrupt practices is assumed by too many people, though no conclusive court judgement, with any credibility, can be cited. At any rate, the voters do not seem to be impressed by this massive propaganda. Or else, the entire legal team of Musharraf will not be moving heaven and earth to ensure that these two shall not take

bank area should be freed for essential constructions. Mayor Khoka has said that granting of lands to any bodies that negatively affects the health of the river is not acceptable. Given that the statement has come from men of authority one fails to understand what stands between has already been a settled fact of public opinion, law and policy regarding eviction of encroachers.

However, should the rivers not be protected it will be impossible not to reach conclusions about the nature of the government regarding its commitment to free the rivers from illegal beneficiaries. It will be negating the whole notion of public ownership of natural resources.

As the wealthy and powerful constantly flout the laws and exploit scarce natural resources for their own need and the government stands as a helpless bystander, it risks a backlash of public ire it can ill-afford.

en in the country probing recor and looking at procedures. Pakistan government has protested, calling some of the Commonwealth Secretary General's remarks insulting and uncalled for. European Union has been accused of interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. These are ominous statements. However, no one expects such highly-placed foreigners to become subdued and

M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

almost usual the country is being

ruled by a general, outside law and

constitution. He has promised an

election on October 10 next. The

rest of the world wants the polls to

Many outsiders are, in view of

the common image of five recent

elections, becoming outspoken.

Foremost among them are two:

Secretary General of Common-

wealth and European Union stal-

be transparently free.

AKISTAN politics is so

multilayered but

unconnected realities. As is

a huff.

docile or even leave the country in

Meantime two individuals are causing much discomfort to all

tion of being the largest political party, with a commonly recognised vote bank in three provinces.

Thanks to the steps taken, accusa-

part in the polls. What does this nervousness show? The two may cooperate vis-

OPINION

Army and Musharraf may not like. The National Assembly may create difficulties in passing an indemnity law to absolve the generals for coup-making three years ago and to pardon all their trespasses. No, that will not do from the military's viewpoint: it will not take this risk that will result in a first-rate crisis.

But that will need either (a) not holding the election and arbitrarily increasing the life span of the

Musharraf regime; or (b) to rig the

the words of Commonwealth SG Javier Solana? -- it may well be asked. With President George Bush, Rumsfeld and Blair behind him, Musharraf can opt for either the postponement of the polls or ensuring "positive results" through using the administration creatively, in a political sense. Pakistani generals are quite capable of contemptuously ignoring world opinion when they have to. Didn't Yahya go on spitting at world opinion for nine long blood-soaked months?

remains : is it enough to compen-

sate the loss of the parents or also

to get our pride back as a civilized

According to a report published

in a national daily on Sunday last,

one businessman said.' The killers

should be executed in public."

Another woman - a mother may be

killers of Shihab Ahmed and Bappi

in front of a hungry tiger as punish-

ment for the heinous crime they

have committed. Of course we

want 'exemplary' punishment for

them: we also believe that speedy

disposal of cases and ensuring fair

justice is being hampered in this

very country as there exist enor-

mous gaps, loopholes in the laws

as well as in our public prosecution

system that make them somewhat

weak; and we have to make sure

that the laws are implemented in a

proper and effective manner. But

even achieving all these, I am

afraid, will not be sufficient to attain

-- more or less -- a violence-free

people need proper counselling

even thinks of throwing those

That he went after nine months MB Naqvi is a leading columist in Pakistan.

A rude awakening

TAZIN AZIZ CHAUDHURY, ASHA NAYEEM ISLAM, RAQUIB CHOWDHURY, SHAMSUL HOQUE, ROBAET FERDOUS. ZAHID HASSAN CHOWDHURY

HAKA University -- the name gives us a warm happy feeling, a rush of tender, bitter-sweet memories of our student days, unadulterated pride and joy that we are now teaching where we once were students. For us and many other new generation teachers like us, life has been quite care-free and fun, as we all commonly passionately love teaching, love our classes and our students and being where we are. Party politics is something out of our immediate domain, something we are aware of but not into. Sure we enjoy a healthy political argument now and then, exchanging ideas and in general we're pretty busy with other academic activities like exams, invigilations, marks tabulations, course outlines and distributions, publications and what not.

Contrary to popular belief life is hectic for most junior university teachers, we can hardly spare time for a social life at times. Yet the myth persists -- university teachers are a bunch of selfish, non-intellectuals who constantly bicker amongst themselves; university students are dangerous violent goons and since there is always something or the other going on, the university is closed very often, classes are

hardly taken, exams always postponed

The 23rd of July was a rude awakening for many of us. For the first time ever many of us, the neutral, colourless teachers felt outraged by what had occurred, because it was not, is not and will never be a political issue; it was a violation of human rights, women's rights to be more precise. The horrifying stories our students told us of the night raid on their dormitory were enough to force us and many others into action for the first

Yes the students were angry; they were confused, emotionally and physically hurt and so were we. How could this happen? Why was it necessary to send the police force at the dead of night to a dormitory full of young girls? Couldn't the matter have been resolved in other ways? Couldn't the authorities have waited till dawn? We are yet to know the real reasons. The judicial probe commission may reveal the real reasons but we feel that this dreadful event could have been completely avoided had the issue not

authorities. Initially the students turned to

test the incident were attacked by

the police force, the following day. What had happened in the middle of the night at Shamsunnahar Hall, while Dhaka was asleep, happened againÊ-- now in broad daylight -- in front of everyone. Even under such extreme conditions our students didn't resort to mindless violence. What followed was beyond anyone's control. The authorities vacated all the dormitories and the university was declared closed for an indefinite period -- the teachers were powerless to do anything. A group of students protested the

sudden closure, we felt quite rightly, by demonstrating in front of Rokeya Hall. Although we felt helpless too, we didn't feel it was a great idea for the students to stay in front of Rokeya Hall, primarily for security reasons. The successful emptying and aversion of a crisis at Rokeya Hall because of the provost's and other teachers' counselling is an eve opener as to what could have been done in the case of Shamsunnahar Hall Most of the students' movements

have been violent -- this one protest

stands out as a symbol of our future

generation's patience and maturity.

Under the 'provoking' circum-

stances they were very focussed

and controlled and kept their calm;

they didn't go on car burning sprees

or senseless gunfights. They dem-

onstrated and went on a hunger

strike. As teachers and fellow

human beings we feel proud of

been treated politically by the

legal as well as peaceful means of protest. The students demonstrated, they abstained from classes and exams, they brought out processions. But to make matters worse a group of students who had gone to the VC's office to prothese brave youngsters.

Learning is an endless on going process. They have taught us to be united, to forget our differences and to protest against injustice. Being a teacher is a major responsibility not confined to the class alone. We are responsible for so much more. Are we really fulfilling our responsibilities? We don't know and a lot of us have serious doubts about it. We do know that yes we tried to do so, and we did unite, overcoming all individual differences among the teachers' community and yes, we stood up for the rights of our students. The issue at stake wasn't a demand put forward by any particular political section of our country rather it was an issue arising from a traumatic event that united teachers and students alike and the whole nation and so it wasn't political in the sense practiced in Bangladesh.

Current events at DU have put both teachers and students under public scrutiny. Many have voiced their bitter scathing comments about us, our students and the future ofÊ DU. We feel our students have the potential to give so much more than we give them the chance to. They aren't our opponents, rather the opposite is true, they are our future and they are an integral part of our identity. Without them we have no value or identity.

Look at our past be it the language movement, the independence movement, the removal of a dictatorial regime or standing up

against martial law -- their contribution is undeniable. All protests against any oppression have

always come from the DU students. They frequently come forward in social issues too. They raise funds for flood relief, winter clothing, ailing journalists, cancer patients, kidney transplants not to mention organising regular blood donor groups. In spite of the turmoil of campus life, living in halls, financial constraints and personal sorrows they laugh and sing and recite poems, hold open air concerts, musical soirees, drama presentations, go on field trips, study tours and live their life to the fullest giving us of themselves

selflessly. Who says that today's 'elite' do not go to DU and that they attend private or foreign universities? Look around you most of the 'real people' attended DU at some point or other. Learning isn't just about getting a degree, attending classes and passing exams. Learning is life long, it's intrinsic, it's respecting yourself and others, caring, giving, doing, feeling and a lot more. Looking at our beloved DU students we know there is hope that we aren't doing such a bad job after all and we feel privileged to guide and teach such wonderful people. Does anyone still feel that there is no education at all at DU?

The writers are young teachers of Dhaka Univ

They must be saved

nation?

don't know what word's can express my feeling of agony. I am simply shocked, 'what kind of a society do we live in, where young men in their teens and twenties, strangle little boys to death and either chop their bodies into pieces and dump into manholes or simply dump their bodies into river just because their kidnap plans had gone awry? What kind of a society is it where young people think crime is the easiest way to make money? Obviously I am referring to the shocking and monstrous incidents of killing of 13year-old child Khondaker Shihab Ahmed and 7-year-old Rubayet Ahmed Bappi. In the case of illfated Bappi the parents are still looking for their beloved son's remains as the body of Bappi is yet to be found. Can anyone of us imagine what a miscrable condition they have fallen in? How can they be consoled?

society 'By giving them justice' one may answer. Yes, the father of Bappi requested, according to the press. the Prime Minister to award exemplary punishment to those culprits responsible. The kidnappers and killers of Khondaker Shihab Ahmed have been sentenced to unrest, etc make them so. We have death after a speedy trial. Hope to work on these also. The young that the same will happen in the case of Bappi. But still questions

and guideline. They need job for their livelihood, opportunities to boost their moral values, enough chance to have candid pleasure in leisure, etc. The concerned families should provide counselling and guideline in the first place. Of course we, the activists, also can do something within our limitations in this regard apart from working for women and children by holding programmes on youngsters. As far as job opportunities are concerned government has to bear the core responsibility. Rich and highly privileged section of the society can and should come forward to create jobs for the increasing number of jobless youth. To prevent youngsters' involvement with different unlawful activities we need them to engage themselves in candid recreational activities during their spare times. By setting up clubs and social organisations in every locality and village the concerned guardians and social leaders can motivate them.

The bottomline is clear enough : We should not forget the fact we have to do anything and everythat the section of young generathing possible at all levels of the tion that has been committing society to save our young generacrimes is not born-criminals. Varition from total ruin. They, the future ous socio-economic reasons i.e. of the nation, should be and must joblessness, lack of moral pedabe saved. gogy, non-education, political

> Salma Ali, women and child rights activist, is Executive Director of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers'Association

SALMA ALI