LATE S. M. ALI

**DHAKA SUNDAY NOVEMBER 24, 2002** 

# Deaths of children

Hospitals performing well below expectations

HE news that at least 66 children died in the Rajshahi Medical Hospital (RMCH) in the past three weeks concerns us immensely. If statistics are to be relied on, it hardly needs saying that the RMCH has failed miserably to deal with one of the major problems of the health sector -- child mortality. We demand immediate inquiry into the matter and urgent action by the health ministry for this scandalous situation.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the situation is better in other government-owned hospitals. Regrettably, these hospitals, which are supposed to cater to the needs of the majority of the people, are very shabbily managed. The RMCH managers have tried to defend themselves by saying that the hospital does not yet have a special unit for taking care of the new-born babies. That might be true, but what defies understanding is why a hospital like the RMCH, a premier medicare centre in the northern region, should be run without that facility. Well, resource constraint is the obvious answer, but then there are sectors that must perform better in our collective interest, and hospitals certainly belong to that category.

Almost all the public sector hospitals are in extremely bad shape, as there is nothing called modern hospital management in most of those dilapidated structures. The policy-makers, however, should realise that in our times hospital management cannot be left to laymen having neither the training nor the background for performing the task satisfactorily. Today hospital management is a highly specialised science.

Our hospitals are not even making the best use of the available funds, and their performance is well below the popular expectations. The charges of corruption and anomalies that are often levelled against the hospitals do make the point clear.

The health ministry must address the issue in right earnest. We would like to suggest that a task force, with the objective of improving hospital management, be set up immediately. The decision-makers should also consider convening a meeting of the administrative heads of the public sector hospitals, and go for a correct assessment of the ground reality through an exchange of ideas and information. Finally, they have to feel that the tax payers' money, which is allocated for the health sector, should mean something in practical terms. To put it more clearly, people have the right to get the service that they need from the hospitals.

## Inoperative traffic signals Why the signals were not fixed on time?

T is rather difficult to say which bit of news is more significant than the other that only ten but all traffic signals in the capital have been out of order for last two years or that the authority has decided to fix all of them though the whole process might take more than two years! We don't know how to express our disappointment and anger about the whole chaotic situation on the roads. It sounds simply unbelievable when we find out that traffic police have been directing the traffic manually and they have even been given 'sharp screwdrivers to control unruly rickshaw pullers by pricking their tyers.'

We simply ask is this the way traffic in a capital city should be controlled? Why the electronic traffic signals were not fixed on time? The department responsible for doing the job seems to have completely failed in its duty. Would someone please tell us what were the actual reasons for such irresponsible conduct? This kind of indifference to public safety is totally unacceptable to us.

We always complain about the continuous chaos on the streets. And there are many reasons for the chaos different types of vehicles, whether it's slow or fast moving, ply on the same streets, there seems to be no control on the number of buses and trucks that should be allowed on the roads, and now the inoperative traffic signals. As there is also a tendency of flouting traffic rules by the road users, it becomes virtually impossible for the traffic police to control all the vehicles manually, especially at rush hours. Therefore we would like to appeal to the city dwellers as well that they can do themselves a favour by following the rules.

Otherwise reaching to the destination on time without wasting precious time may remain a dream for many days in the future. We have to remember that this is our city, keeping its roads safe and free of jam is our responsibility too, not just the concerned authorities'. At the same time, we thank the authority for at last waking up from their slumber and taking steps to fix all the traffic signals. But we would also expect them to do their best in order to accelerate the process so that their failures in the past could somewhat be erased.

# War on crime

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

HY, one may ask, do people in democratic societies at great cost go through the process of popular elections at determined periodicity, a process Edmund Burke once described as " a mighty evil"? According to popular wisdom the object is to be governed by a group of people in whom the majority have reposed trust confident in their belief that as they are "of the people" they will govern "for the people". Since power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, President Dwight Eisenhower felt a free government would weaken without exhaustive debate, and even heated debate on issues and programmes which would help produce distilled wisdom; and in the absence of such furious and torrid interface the possibility remains of the emergence of the greatest of all evils, a weak government.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in a recent speech described some of the features of a "failed state" which of late has rapped the attention of the international community because of its war against terrorism. In Straw's description a failed state would be unable (a) to control its territory and guarantee the security of its citizens; (b) maintain rule of law, promote human rights and provide effective governance; and (c) deliver public goods to its people (e.g. economic growth, education, health care etc). Security criteria, according to Jack Straw, could be assessed by the failure of the government to prevent plunder of its valuable resources (such as diamond in Congo); prevent the production and transportation of illegal drugs (as in Afghanistan and Myanmar); ethnic, religious and inter-group tension. Rampant corruption, inability of the population to influence government policy, unstable economy or its heavy dependence on certain industries or agriculture: ineffective economic management; social inequality; high unemployment etc would be other indicators. The international com-

munity has to keep watch should these symptoms or multiplicity of the symptoms were to emerge so that diplomatic and developmental engagements can be initiated with the afflicted before the disease becomes a contagion and terminal.

Albeit, mankind has made quantum leaps in the field of technology during the second half of the last century and has achieved material advancement in more than geometric progression (though inequitably); yet the tools of humanity's destruction have also come within the reach of some delinguent states whose rulers are neither accountable to their own people nor to the international com-munity.

Fortunately Bangladesh is vet to display in a decisive manner many

ity enveloping the entire spectrum of our society and the failure of the law enforcing agencies to act as effective guardians of the people's safety, the government's initiative to call in the army to fight crime was welcomed by all till custodial deaths started rising. Hong Kong based Human Rights Commission (The Daily Star-10.11.02) expressed its concern as follows: "Based on Asia's contemporary history, it appears that this type of military operation without any legal foundation is another attempt to silence the dissenting opposition, resulting in 'state terrorism', even though authorities insist that the operation is to improve law and order and is not politically motivated". The newspaper urged the law enforceConstitution become unalterable and thereby are placed beyond the violative actions of the executive and the legislature. Enjoyment of the rights, however, is not unfettered and is subordinate to circumstances where collective interests are given priority over individual rights and interests. Both the Bangladesh Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) implicitly agree that restrictions may be imposed on ground of public interest, public order or morality, state security etc. Such restrictions can be imposed by the parliament.

Regardless of the legality or otherwise of the Operation Clean Heart increasing custodial deaths (notwithstanding the fact that some of the dead were allegedly well

against him, except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land". Hobe's pessimism was generated during the so-called Fnalish Revolution (1640-1660), a time of great upheaval and disorder when the people were fed up by the excesses of parliamentary rule and the lack of central authority goading him to advocate a form of government by which the ruled would hand over all authority to the ruler as the only disinterested party in the society who could rise above selfish interest to preserve peace and justice. Magna Carta, American Declaration of Independence, or the Bill of Rights are milestones in the progress of civilization and their mention is not a nostalgic replay of the by-gone days. Principles laid of " the despicable practice of torture" and of her " pressure on governments to publicly condemn torture, enact legislation, investigate and prosecute abusive officers, train law enforcement officers, and medical personnel and provide compensation and rehabilitation of the victims". US State Department's International Religious Freedom Report 2002 castigates Bangladeshi "police, who are generally ineffective in upholding law and order, often are slow to assist members of religious minorities who have been victims of crimes...religious minorities are disadvantaged in practice in such areas as access to jobs in government or the military or in political office". Despite the practices of discrimination mentioned above the tone and tenor of the Religious Freedom Report does not accord with the reports of Far Eastern Economic Review and Time magazine on the so-called rise of fundamentalism in Bangladesh.

This article does not have a conclusion or a prescription on how to wage war on crimes because the situation is still evolving and only future would tell whether in the ultimate cost-benefit analysis, the absence of concrete legal coverage and mounting custodial deaths would prove to be tolerable derogation from democratic values compared to the return of societal enjoyment of freedom -- individual, economic and institutional -- from the assaults by domestic terrorists and aberrant behaviour of some segments of our society contradictory to the basic tenets of good governance. In the ultimate analysis Doctrine of Efficacy and/or Doctrine of Necessity, which have in the past sanctioned extraconstitutional measures, can be relied upon to provide legal justification to this extra-ordinary situa-

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behaviour of some segments of our society contradictory to the basic tenets of good governance.

It is the first time since the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington that the Prime Minister has

made such an open assessment in public of the possible threat to this country from global terrorism. But the

important question is: How well-prepared -- or under-prepared -- is Britain to tackle a similar emergency?

Intelligence experts believe that terrorist groups are trying to devise -- perhaps have already devised --

biological weapons capable of spreading smallpox, anthrax or a biotoxin named ricin that affects the

of these symptoms. Admittedly the donors have often expressed their disappointment over the lack of performance of successive governments. In a recent speech the World Bank Country Director Frederick Temple expanded the meaning of governance beyond targeting corruption. Good governance, he felt, also included transparency, accountability, fairness, and responsiveness to citizens. In his view "poor governance is pervasive in Bangladesh". He saw in the recent recourse to army drive against domestic terrorism " a clear indication, among other things, of the inability of the police to cope with rising crime" and emphasized the importance " to establish the legal basis of army involvement and to maintain human rights"(Speech delivered to the American Chamber of Commerce on 4th November

Given the dark cloud of criminal-

ment authorities to respect the rights enumerated in several articles of our Constitution and some clauses of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding protection of life and personal liberty; on safeguards as to arrests and detention; and on protection in respect of trial and punishment. In the opinion of the paper Rights enumerated in articles 32.33.35.36.37 and 43 are regarded as fundamental rights in our Constitution. These articles together with other articles containing other fundamental rights have found place in Part III of our Constitution. Provisions of this Part are enforceable by law and any law inconsistent with them is void". Noted Indian columnist Kuldip Nayar writing on Ansal Plaza shoot-out at Delhi (DS-16.11.02) commented " no governance is worth a dime if human rights are not an integral part to it". Fundamental rights inscribed in the

known criminals) have raised questions in the minds of the people. Bangladesh government, however, flatly denied that there was any death in army custody since deployment of the troops to fight crimes Government statement (of 18<sup>t</sup> November) added that the Prime Minister deployed the army as per her executive authority and there was no plan to make any new law. Even if one were to assume that Hobbesian "state of nature" as one of without order where " continual fear and danger of violent death" renders life " solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" exists in Bangladesh (which evidently it does not), vigilante character of the law enforcement authorities would contradict the Magna Carta principles, particularly where the English King promised " no man shall be taken or imprisoned or deseized or outlawed or exiled or in way destroyed, nor we will go or send

prevailing today as they did centuries ago. Frederick Temple argued that

down in these documents encapsu-

late the essence of civilized values

the people of Bangladesh were fed up with poor governance and that the demand for better government was thus in the first instance a compelling domestic demand. Besides, he pointed out that foreign assistance was increasingly being allocated on the basis of performance than on need. In recent past UN reports have assessed law enforcement agencies as unresponsive, corrupt, brutal and aggressive abusers of judicial rights of the poor. In this context US commitment to fight torture becomes relevant (US State Department- Bureau of International Organization Affairs-November 4, 2002- Washington D.C.). The document expresses the US' unequivocal condemnation

# **Britain facing terror threat**

circulatory system of humans and animals alike.

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

S ECURITY sources in the UK claim that they are received received. receiving intelligence that Islamist extremists based abroad are planning to carry out a poison gas attack on the London Underground. They have in fact gone as far as to warn that terrorists may strike anywhere in Britain any time before Christmas this year. Their warning coincides with the arrest earlier this month of three men, aged between early 20s and mid-30s, who reportedly arrived in the UK from North Africa, charged under Section 57 of the Terrorism Act 2000 with the possession of articles for the preparation, instigation and commission of terrorism acts. It has been alleged that these three men were planning to kill hundreds by releasing cyanide gas in the Underground system. The situation is scarily reminiscent of a similar attack in Japan in 1995 by five members of the religious fanatic cult Aum Shinrikvo who released sarin gas in the Tokyo subway with devastatingly fatal consequences. Security agencies like MI5, MI6 and GCHQ have also reported an increase in "background noise" -from communication intercepts as well as from informants -- pointing to "a clear intention" by terrorists to attack the Underground, among other targets, in Britain and in Western Europe.

The British Government is beginning to take these warnings very seriously. The Prime Minister Tony Blair has called for constant public vigilance while also appealing to the spirit and resolve of the British people. Addressing the Lord Mayor's annual banquet in London

he said that "barely a day goes by" without fresh intelligence pointing to a new threat to British interests. He remarked that it was becoming more and more likely that the kind of atrocity seen recently in Bali, Yemen and Moscow will come to British shores. "As with all wars, it will test not just our ability to fight," he said: "but our character, our resilience and our belief in our own way of life.' He also issued the stern warning that although he had total confidence Britain would win this war, victory "will not be without pain or come without a price." However, Mr Blair insisted that whatever happened normal life had to go on. To shut down shopping centres, railways, airports and roads every time there was a threat "really would be conceding defeat in the war against terrorism", he added. The Home Secretary David Blunkett also echoed the Prime Minister's words when he told BBC1's Breakfast with Frost programme: "We will do everything we can to protect Britain.

We need the vigilance of everyone

around us, particularly at major

airports and particular gathering

points where people know there is a

investigate the 28 deaths in army

custody and the findings must be

made public. Mere statements and

tossing of blames on one or another

are by no means enough to further

democracy in our country or for that

Shamsher Chowdhury, Dhaka

matter, in any country.

It is the first time since the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington that the Prime Minister has made such an open assessment in public of the possible threat this country from global terrorism But the important question is: How well-prepared -- or under-prepared - is Britain to tackle a similar emergency? Intelligence experts believe that terrorist groups are trying to devise -- perhaps have already devised -- biological weapons capable of spreading smallpox, anthrax or a biotoxin named ricin that affects the circulatory system of humans and animals alike. The National Audit Office has warned that the NHS (National Health Service) is poorly equipped to cope in the event of a chemical or biological attack as there is a lack of decontamination facilities and biological chemical as well as radiological protection suits or gas masks even for NHS and rescue services staff. The situation is particularly bad in London as half the hospitals in the capital have no effective plans in place for dealing with such attacks,

including nuclear accidents, which

are likely to happen when they are least expected. There is also the fear of the so-called 'dirty bomb', which is basically a conventional explosive device packed with radioactive materials routinely used in nospitais or even school science laboratories. This bomb may not cause mass destruction or even kill or maim too many people. But it is perfectly capable of paralysing a city or town with fear and creating utter chaos and subsequently leading to enormous cleaning up costs.

Crackdown on crime APART from sounding an ominous note about possible terrorist attacks on Britain, the Government is also preparing a dramatic shake-up of the legal system for combating rising crime. The Queen's Speech inaugurating the winter session of the Parliament, which sets out the Government's programme for the next year, revealed a number of measures intended to "re-balance the system emphatically in favour of the victims of crimes", thus preventing "offenders to get away too easily." Some of the highlights of the proposed measures are:

Juries will be allowed to hear previous convictions and hearsay evidence against the accused. Criminals will face a second trial

for the same offence if "overto light", thus effectively invalidating the law of Double Jeopardy. Drug dealers and organised criminals will have their homes

and other assets confiscated. Sex offenders and violent criminals will not be released until and unless it can be conclusively decided that they are no longer a threat to the public

On-the-spot fines for those found guilty of creating public nuisance and vandalism and more powers for Local Authorities to deal with petty crime and truancy. Parents of truant children will be penalised if they fail to co-operate with schools.

The Prime Minister has asked the Home Secretary to set up a new unit which will examine and assess in detail the problem of anti-social behaviour currently plaguing societv. But legal and civil liberties groups have expressed concern

over these plans. "The idea that reducing the rights of defendants benefits the victims of crimes is fundamentally flawed," they said in a joint statement, warning that "misguided" proposals could lead to an increase in the number of innocent people being punished.

WITH these words the invincible

### My name is Bond, James Bond

British super-spy created by Ian Fleming made his screen debut in the 1962 film Dr No. Forty years and twenty-two films later. Agent 007 is back in action once more, ready to save mankind from a megalomaniac bent on world domination. In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Bond film *Die Another Day*, released world-wide on 20<sup>th</sup> Novemher actor Pierce Brosna 007 mantle for the fourth time. Halle Berry -- one of the most sought after actresses in Hollywood these days, apart from being an Oscar winner, no less -- plays Jinx, the ultimate femme fatale. The world premiere of Die Another Day was held at London's Royal Albert Hall on 18th November. The occasion was graced by the presence of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. It will be the only movie seen by the Queen this year, and although we may never know whether she enjoyed it or not, being present at the screening can probably be looked upon as one of her Royal duties -- after all, Bond has been in Her Maiestv's public service for forty years -- fifty. counting the books, because Fleming's first Bond book was published in 1952. Such long and dedicated service cannot surely be allowed to remain unacknowledged and unre-

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



# Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

## "The denial that brings discredit to govt"

Mahfuz Anam's commentary "The denial that brings discredit to govt." (November 22) is very timely. He has raised issues that concern all the citizens of Bangladesh. Military juntas all over the world, usually lie when they hand out press releases. We have now lived to see such false statements coming from a political government's press department. Doesn't the government realise that they are answerable and accountable to the people for what they do and what they say? Do they think that they can force the people to silence like they do to the opposition party politicians in parliament?

In just over a month up till now 28 people have died and hundreds more have been allegedly tortured in the army camps. Death occurred either while in the hands of the army or on being handed over to the police or immediately after being deposited in hospitals. The army has a code of conduct, a system of investigation and a method of trial

All these cases of death and torture must be investigated forthwith. There should be an immediate investigation into these deaths and physical torture by the competent police authority. Their findings must be made public. and this must be done without any delay.

I hear that there are now special courts to try serious crimes. What can be more serious than death in army-police custody? BNP must not hide behind press statements. Both Awami League and BNP as the major political parties should have their own investigation teams to find out what happened and their findngs should be published.

We are an infant democracy. We have to make everyone accountable for their deeds if we want to develop a sustainable democration structure, protect human rights and establish rule of law in the country. We must not accept less. Sultan Mahmud Shariff, London

Thank you for yet another quality commentary on the subject. I can only add by saying that the situation has reached a dangerous point and t extremely sad and unfortunate.

Let's look at the matter from yet another perspective, at a time when our national image is at its highest stage of vulnerability, situations like these are far from desirable. While the PIO's remarks are ridiculous the government's silence is unpardonable. Neither the army nor this government and not even the criminals of today will last forever. What will be left behind by actions like this is a legacy

which Bangladesh can ill afford. One by one our institutional infrastructures have been vandalised. Thanks to corrupt politics and bureaucratic entangle which infected every single aspects of our society. Now the army have joined in. The deaths in custody cannot be treated or equated in anyway. Those accused in the recent Bali bomb blast are said to have been treated better than those held in army custody. They have at least not died one by one of heart failure.

Come what may the norms and the rule of law must prevail. I appeal to the people, the intelligentsia and the civil society in particular to raise their protest and condemn all these undemocratic moves by the army and also the government before it's too late. The government must immediately

"An appeal to Bill Gates" This is in reference to the recent string of letters regarding Dr. Chowdhury's original letter "An Appeal to Bill Gates.' The Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation has already provided large amounts of fund for health programs, research, and organisations in Bangladesh, Examples include the \$1 million Gates Award for Global Health to ICDDR,B in 2001, a \$50 million grant to Columbia University to research public health in Bangladesh (among a few other countries), a \$26 million grant program in Bangladesh (among a few others), \$78 million to UNICEF to fight polio in Bangladesh (again, among a few others), and more.

The Gates Foundation website

"The nation builders of tomorrow"

# It looks like the recent letter by Mr.

has more detailed information

(<a href="http://www.gatesfoundation.org">http://www.gatesfoundation.org</a>).

Sved Faisal, Chicago, IL, USA

Abdul Hannan, "The nation builders of tomorrow" has created quite a stir among the students who studied under English medium schools. It seems Mr. Hannan wrote the letter out of deep frustration about the glorification and the movements towards English medium schools which is plaguing the country by storm and he seems to suggest that these institutions are only a means for the students to get out of the nation and not to 'build' one. It was quite a generalised point of view but did have some truth in it.

In a country where basic necessities of life are hard to attain what would you do if you were a responsible, caring parent? Right, send him/her to an English medium school and hope for a greater prospect of future. Anybody in their right mind would do so if they have the means to provide for it.

The current generation is paying

a hefty price for the living condition of the country. Instead of having a prosperous country we've been set back far behind and the scars are too deep to handle and that's why they are forced to think outward to save themselves first and foremost, then maybe someday 'the nation'. This young generation is practically dragged out of the country against their will and that is the cold hard reality they face. No kid in his/her right mind would want to leave their parents and motherland to live in a foreign soil unless they feel genuinely threatened to live in their own homeland.

Now, war is not a pretty picture, but to get passed the scars and the political, economical and social ills which is deeply rooted in our system we would need to work together as one and for that it will require student resources both from abroad and within the country to come up with solutions and to build a better tomorrow for our nation. There is a tremendous longing among many Bangladeshi students studying abroad to be able to contribute for the nation but feels hopeless and alone to take on the challenge on their own. We need to find a way to

get these students together so that they don't feel alone and alienated. Too much burden has been placed on the current generation and it will take time to get over it. The challenges we face are enormous, of course. but I do believe it can certainly be tackled. Mahmood Hasan, Connecticut,

## "Anatomy is destiny" Mahammad Badrul Ahsan's column

"Anatomy is destiny" (November 22) makes powerful and emotional reading full of big concepts and ideas signifying ultimately nothing.

It is not anatomy or anything else but "Hindsight which is destiny" i.e. 'Hindsight of the living noting or defining the destiny of the departed!' If anatomy or genes etc were engrams on the 'chip of destiny'. then reading this chip and forecasting of such destiny accurately (or nearly so) should be possible. If that is not the case the claims hold no water and is nothing but tautology to baffle the common man like the idea 'survival of the fittest', which on intelligent analysis is rubbish because those who have survived

fittest are the survivors, conveying no new or interesting information to Shafi Ahmed, London, UK

are the fittest, and those who are the

## Our police force

A lot of debate is going on regarding the deployment of army to fight crimes and criminals. One group is supporting the army deploymen and they have heaved a sigh of relief at the 'improvement of law and order situation' while the other group is concerned about democracy and also questions the deaths in army custody

One point is beyond doubt police has failed to do their job. No body has anything positive to say about our police force. There are millions of complaints against them. They take bribe, take toll, give shelter to the criminals and the list goes on. It is because their incompetence the army had to be called

All I have to say is unless we do something about our corrupt police force, we'll have to call in the army over and over again. Alam. UK