

The CMCH story

A key-hole view of public healthcare woes

THE predicament patients face day in and day out at the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) is a signature of the country's public healthcare system. Down from the thana health complexes right up to the leading public hospitals, it is same old story retold: personnel and logistical shortages, inadequate physical infrastructure, mismanagement and corruption bedeviling them. In the context, the performance audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office makes a tell-tale summation: 'all the investigative reports and scathing editorial comments in the print media on the sorry state of the public healthcare system have made little or no impact on the policymakers.'

Apart from the routine rhetoric, people at the helm have not bothered to take any comprehensive approach to revitalising the public healthcare network. Unfortunately but invariably, the poor and the marginalised section of society have to bear the brunt because they are the ones dependent entirely on the dysfunctional healthcare system. They cannot even dream of going overseas for treatment as the upper class does; nor can they afford private clinics and hospitals like the middle class do. In other words, governmental indifference over time has fostered a discriminatory healthcare arrangement in which the poor get the raw deal although they constitute the majority.

The sorry state of the state-run healthcare system boils down to the fact that these have remained stuck to their original set-up, in terms of personnel and logistics and infrastructure, while the number of patients has exponentially increased. More importantly, the annual outlay for the public health sector has also been more or less static. There has been year-to-year increase in budgetary allocation but it has had more to do with inflation than anything else. The bulk of the annual allocation is still spent on staff salary, procurement of medicines, etc. The space is not there for infrastructural refurbishment, personnel development, let alone research.

The donors have regularly injected money into the health sector, which, unfortunately, has slipped through the cracks of legendary mismanagement and corruption in the administrative ranks. The Health and Population Sector Programme has only been supplanted by the Health and Nutrition Programme, the ground reality has remained the same. Discipline has to be top-down; unless the government gets its act together, corruption and mismanagement will continue to plague the healthcare system and the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office will continue to come up with one damning report after another.

Mosquito menace

Mayor after mayor

WE are not sure whether we should feel angry or frustrated over this or just accept it as a norm. Mosquitoes are back -- and in full force. City-dwellers have been waiting with hopes that the concerned authorities this time around would not fail to save them from the annual ordeal of excruciating mosquito bites. But to their utter dismay, well into the winter season, their expectations seem belied.

'Prothom Alo' has reported that Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) does not have enough insecticides to kill off mosquitoes. Adding insult to the injury, most of the spraying machines are either out of order or have gone beyond repair. Those that are working are being used in some elite areas as well as at some government offices, according to the report. But what has been more frustrating is the authorities' lack of initiative to prevent infestation of mosquitoes from the time the breeding season had begun almost three months ago.

While campaigning for his post, DCC mayor Sadek Hussain Khoka had pledged a 'mosquito free' capital city, but it would not be wrong to say that he has reneged on that commitment. DCC has called tenders to buy more insecticides, but we ask -- isn't it quite late in the day to be doing so when they had known it for a fact all the time they did not have enough to go on with. Though the mayor has claimed spraying has been going on regularly, we have no way knowing from the result that it was the case.

As always, what the authority seems to have failed to understand is that collecting insecticide and larvicide and spraying them is not of the only answer to the problem. Regular cleaning up of the hyacinths in water-bodies, small lagoons and ponds where the mosquitoes breed, is as important but that's where lack of action seems to be most evident. Every year we urge the authorities to take timely steps against mosquito-breeding but such entreaties fall on deaf ears with insufferable regularity. It is absolutely imperative for the DCC now to make amends on this and give the inhabitants of the city the minimum comfort of life they deserve at home.

Gujarat: The watershed in Hindutva politics



M ABDUL HAFIZ

MOST observers reckon that Gujarat's been the most crucial state assembly election in India for a decade with the results that were anticipated earlier -- a land slide by the ruling BJP. In a state hard hit by neglect, draught and riot it was surprisingly the Hindu card that triumphed. The people intoxicated with communal passion voted the BJP to power by two third majority. It has portended a period of profound change in the right flank of Indian politics pushing it further to the right. In a country proud of its hoary tradition of secular democracy, the great Indians now have to put up with the hate mongers and the forces that threaten to wreck whatever little of its secular edifice is still left. These forces are the lunatic fringe of the Sangh Parivar -- the Shiv Sena, the VHP and Bajrang Dal and a crop of new organisation raising suicide squad and private armies to enforce their creed. The inner contradictions within the BJP are finally beginning to surface. It will inevitably split BJP and Sangh Parivar in the not too distant future.

For those wedded to a pluralistic, secular concept of India within the BJP this inevitability may seem a blessing in disguise; it is, at the same time, likely to prop up a fright-

eningly communal and populist pseudo-Hindu political formation locally. The latest contradictions that innocuously existed in the BJP for long, however, turned into confrontation before the election in Gujarat when the VHP took off its gloves and accused not only prime minister Vajpayee but also LK Advani for being 'pseudo-secular'. Advani earned the Parivar's ire also by asserting in the Parliament recently that India could never be a "Hindu

1977, perhaps all the way back to the days of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee the founder of Hindu Mahashava from which grew the BJP of today. The contradiction has been between a pluralistic concept of Hindutva and a monolithic one. In the former the Hindutva is seen more as a cultural concept. It insisted on all Indians becoming "Hindus" regardless of their religion. What the minorities were urged to do was to accept this and thereby

cal dominance. Far from relegating religion to the private sphere if makes it an explicit component of politics and very much a part of public debate, sphere and contestation. It regards religious pluralism not as a source of strength but as weakness -- a weakness not shared by Judaism, Christianity or Islam. This form of Hindutva sees no place in India for the minorities. India would emerge far stronger - its upholders assert -- if it became a

party in only seven states it had no option but to enter into a coalition with non-Congress secular parties in other states. It therefore began to shed its coercive elements of Hindutva from its electoral platform. This strategy yielded results, but it also immensely reinforced benign Hindutva at the cost of malignant one. The VHP and Bajrang Dal found almost no place in the governments of 1998 and 1999.

vote bank away from Vajpayee and Advani to itself. It has finally found this leader in Narendra Modi -- the man pilloried for his role in the riot that scarred Gujarat after 27 February. More than 2000 died in pogrom set in motion by Modi's government itself. The state government's alleged motive was electoral which has been fulfilled by unabashedly selling Hindutva card. To achieve this Modi espoused each and every tenets of malignant Hindutva and the latter found its leader it had so far lacked.

A bad press notwithstanding, throughout the Gujarat crisis Vajpayee and Advani did their best within the constraints of India's federal system to rein Modi in. They sent George Farnandes to Ahmedabad to lecture Modi and call out the Army. They threatened Modi with the use of Article 355 of the constitution and sent supercop KPS Gill to reinvoke the Gujarat police. Vajpayee is known to have at least contemplated the removal of Modi and opposed his attempt to advance the Gujarat election date. When terrorists killed 40 persons at Akshardham Temple supposedly in retaliation for the killings of Muslims, both Vajpayee and Advani visited Gandhi Nagar to ensure that there was no Hindu backlash.

But ultimately, it is alleged, that they did not do enough. In the struggle between the centre and the state the state triumphed: to the BJP ranks and files this was also a victory of monolithic over pluralistic Hindutva within the party. Now with the victory Modi and his brand of Hindutva in Gujarat it marks the end of Vajpayee era and puts Advani more and more in the line of fire.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BISS.

PERSPECTIVES

Throughout the Gujarat crisis Vajpayee and Advani did their best within the constraints of India's federal system to rein Modi in... When terrorists killed 40 persons at Akshardham Temple supposedly in retaliation for the killings of Muslims, both Vajpayee and Advani visited Gandhi Nagar to ensure that there was no Hindu backlash... But ultimately, it is alleged, that they did not do enough. In the straggle between the centre and the state the state triumphed... Now with the victory Modi and his brand of Hindutva in Gujarat it marks the end of Vajpayee era and puts Advani more and more in the line of fire.

Rastrya" and that in this perception he and the Prime Minister had unanimity. While Vajpayee had been receiving flaks from the VHP for more than two years, a similar attack on Advani was entirely new. Initially it was thought to be one of those verbal excesses born out of power struggle within the BJP. That it was more than that became clear when a day later Bal Thackrey joined the denunciation of Advani accusing him of having stabbed "not just Hindus but the entire country" in the back. This explicit attack on Advani and the collaboration between the Shiv Sena and VHP are indicative of a revolution brewing up in Sangh Parivar.

The genesis of the contradictions that threatens to split the BJP dates back to first Janata Government

reaffirm their Indianness. But in practice, this by and large peaceful exhortation became mixed up with the coercion and violence unleashed by VHP and Bajrang Dal putting intolerable pressure on ordinary Muslims. But in essence this version of Hindutva accepted the religious pluralism and endorsed the relegation of religion to the private sphere which is basic tenet of India's secular constitution. This benign Hindutva was given its most powerful expression by Vajpayee in his new year's musings from Kumarakom three years ago. A few who read these musings then had no doubts about whom was his homily addressed to...

The another concept of Hindutva is exact anti thesis of the first one. It insists not only on cultural but politi-

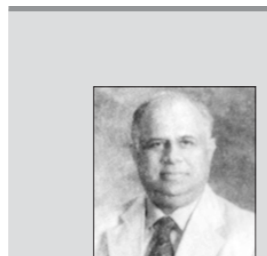
Hindu nation and sent all Muslims to Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. Other minorities also should know their places. The earliest champion of this monolithic variant of Hindutva was not the BJP, but Shivsena.

The two forms of Hindutva have fed off each other ever since. This cooperation reechoed its peak during 1990 confrontation over the Babri mosque and the parliamentary election that followed in May-June 1991. In this election the BJP emerged as the second largest party in the parliament and Advani became the leader of the opposition. The electoral success however brought the clash between the two forms of Hindutva to the surface. Now as coming to power in Delhi became distinct possibility the BJP realised that with a vote base of the

The conflict between the two forms of Hindutva first surfaced in the attacks on the Christians by the elements of VHP in the second half of 1998. This challenge to the Vajpayee-Advani variant of Hindutva could have been restrained easily, had it not coincided with a string of BJP defeats in the states where the BJP was incumbent government. What was, in fact, at work in these defeats was an incumbency factor. But the proponents of the malignant version of Hindutva were able to claim that the BJP was losing because it had jettisoned its Hindutva plank.

In spite of its upbeat mood and rising crest of success for years what the monolithic Hindutva lacked till early this year was a leader who could swing the Sangh Parivar's

Good governance versus populism



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

GOOD governance and populism cannot co-exist for long. History is replete with instances of (1) popular leaders failing to give good governance and (2) leaders who give good governance being hardly popular, at least during their lifetimes. While it would be too simplistic to say that popular leaders are not capable of good governance, that is only possible by leaders who are prepared to be unpopular i.e. have the ability to take tough decisions. Sher Shah Suri, who drove the Moghul Emperor Jahangir from his throne, was hardly as popular as the royal potentate he deposed, yet the short five years of reign before he died (and Jahangir was welcomed back by a fickle people as a conquering hero) is quoted as the one rule in the history of the sub-continent that is seen as the best period of South Asian administration. For that matter the two hundred years of British rule till 1947 over India was hardly populist in nature, it was tough but fair and counted as an example of good governance.

If we are to add up the "good governance" scorecard of the military regime upto Oct 12 there are many more pluses than minuses, if we were to go back further to the days before the President started his Referendum campaign, then those pluses are far more than those visible today. The "Referendum" can be said to be the watershed of the Musharraf Regime; his

rule being divided into the period "before Referendum" (BR) and "after Referendum" (AR). On the balance sheet the military regime has done extremely well BR but in public perception it has failed the acid test of credibility AR. While there were some misgivings before the elections as to supporting of favourites, a lot of people who supported Gen Musharraf wholeheartedly have been turned off AR

of time. He may well surprise us by having strength presently not visible on the surface, at the moment he is very much a "puppet on a string".

In the meantime, Pir Pagaro with his 13 swing votes has got his pound of flesh by (1) keeping Arbab Rahim out of CM contention and (2) getting his man Syed Muzaffar Shah elected as Speaker while the "Muttahidias", who, as the second largest majority party in Sindh

Nasrullah is back on song to do what he does best, toppling susceptible regimes.

The President may have fulfilled the letter of the compact made with the Pakistani public on Oct 12, 1999, the spirit of those vows has been violated by a display of rank pragmatism on the part of the President's men. Tariq Aziz and Maj Gen Ihtesham Zamir's political "management" pre-elections was under-

over in their graves. If George Bush was not motivating a mandate from his people for his war against terrorism by his present belligerent rhetoric, it would be a dereliction of duty. For third world countries, like Pakistan, where the elected representatives of the country stand in Parliament to say a collective "Fateha" for a self-confessed murderer, for the President to voluntarily emasculate his authority in the present circum-

nance for the most part. The citizens of Pakistan felt secure and safe, having much more freedom than in any of the military or democratic regimes before that. However what they have now are uncertainty and apprehension because of the blatant compromises made on principles, putting good governance on the back burner. Unfortunately the logic of good governance in any third world country belies the sanctity of pure democracy, to have good governance the ruler must be tough and fair. That went with the personality and stature of Musharraf till very lately. Every ruler wants to be liked and loved, unfortunately the ruler who provides good governance in the country must be prepared to be hated by the elite. This is because he has to step on the toes of the elite to give succour to the masses. Since the elite commands the media in all the countries of the world, the ruler must be also prepared to be temporarily disliked by the public in choosing good governance over populist measures. As a generous good-hearted being, Musharraf only gets tough when his own authority is threatened. Make no mistake, the Musharraf of the world are no pushovers, this man is a tough cookie, he must also act tough, a permanent accountability process is necessary to put the country firmly on the road to good governance. The rulers and the ruled must be indiscriminately taken to task for any misuse of their authority or their privileges.

The President is a good man, in fact he is a wonderful human being. He is not vindictive and he has none of the arrogance we normally associate with our rulers. That he wants to be liked has been the undoing of his popularity, a Catch-22 that can only be corrected by his immediately taking tough and fair decisions, that includes allowing the real representatives of the people to rule the people who have elected them.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

In third world countries where adult literacy is low and perception has a greater say than facts, it becomes the bounden duty of those in power to ensure that absolute power does not fall into dangerous or fickle hands. That is the basis of the doctrine of necessity... However what the citizens of Pakistan have now are uncertainty and apprehension because of the blatant compromises made on principles, putting good governance on the back burner. Unfortunately the logic of good governance in any third world country belies the sanctity of pure democracy, to have good governance the ruler must be tough and fair... The rulers and the ruled must be indiscriminately taken to task for any misuse of their authority or their privileges.

by the goings-on of the last nine weeks or so. The October 12 results dictated a PML(Q)-led coalition in the Centre, an MMA government in NWFP, Balochistan with a "pot-pourri coalition" inclusive of the PML(Q) as a senior partner and PPP-led coalition in Sindh. This master plan was scuttled by the "Fazlur Rehman spanner". Ms Benazir threw into the works, thereafter the regime's wise men decided that the PPP did not deserve any democratic consideration. In the process they used the "Patriots" to shoot down the PPP's aspirations for having their man as PM, they then got carried away and put paid to any PPP hopes to making the government in Sindh. While this may be good in the short run, the compromise choice of Chief Minister, Ali Mohammad Maher, does not excite much confidence in sustaining this coalition rule for any length

should have led the Sindh Government if the PPP failed to do so, are on course to get the Governorship for Ishrat ul Ibad. This leaves PPP out in the cold, for the moment. The heavens would not have fallen if PPP had been allowed a democratic opportunity to form the Sindh Government, they got the most seats and the most votes in Sindh, it was theirs by electoral right. Not that their leader did not play a major part by effectively scuttling her own party's chances by her shenanigans! Getting Ali Mohammad Maher elected as the CM was the easy part, to keep all the coalition partners in line will test a magician's penchant for juggling. This is not what this country deserved after three years of excellent military rule, this is not what the military regime promised the people of Pakistan at the end of the rule. If political frustrations boil over, Nawabzada

standable, one accepted this as the military regime's right to ensure that their excellent reforms enacted over the past three years were not frustrated, one called it pragmatic idealism. However, their political overdrive post-elections has gone over the fail-safe time. In third world countries where adult literacy is low and perception has a greater say than facts, it becomes the bounden duty of those in power to ensure that absolute power does not fall into dangerous or fickle hands. That is the basis of the doctrine of necessity, and for those in the democratic west who may not be comfortable with this philosophy, just look at the measures the bastion of the great democracy on earth is taking. The US is well within its rights to seek to protect not only the present but also the future of its citizens by instituting measures that would have the founding fathers turning

stances would be to invite civil disorder leading to anarchy. He has to preside fully over the "transition" to full democracy. So that the dictatorship of a vocal minority does not dominate "the great silent majority". Musharraf needs the authority (duly adjusted to cater for democratic norms) to maintain the semblance of sanity necessary for the citizens of Pakistan to live a civilized life. This authority could well be imposed through the barrel of the gun but for three years of military rule it rested more on the President's credibility, unfortunately his wise men have taken that bankable asset and dented it badly. It may not be in smithereens but the glass has cracked. The post-election moves of the President's wise men has been counter-productive to the image of the Musharraf regime.

This military regime certainly provided Pakistan with good gover-

Track down the bomb attackers

A R SHAMSUL ISLAM

IS it a fait accompli that Bangladesh will be traumatised every now and then by massive bomb attacks without knowing who are the attackers and why has she been targeted repeatedly? So far the last in the series came upon in Mymensingh on the 7th instant only one day after the Eid when the festive mood among the Muslims was hanging heavily. This time thunderous explosions visited one after another in four packed cinema halls in a span of 60 minutes instantly killing 17 and badly wounding about 200. Incidentally 92 persons were killed in 10 intensive bomb attacks during the past four years.

As usual the favourite blame-game of the chief political parties was not long in coming. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia told that those who were conspiring to tarnish the country's image abroad might be linked to this carnage. The

opposition leader Sheikh Hasina smartly retaliated by saying that the fundamentalist elements in the fold of the government were likely to be responsible for the mayhem in Mymensingh.

Aren't they aware of what implications their allegations bear in national and international arenas? The government has formed a one-man judicial commission with a Justice to probe the incident. Willn't its activities be influenced by the remarks of the Prime Minister and the truth obstructed from being revealed?

On the other hand whereas a vigorous attempt by a section of foreign media to paint Bangladesh as a religious fundamentalist country has been a foot Sheikh Hasina's accusation will simply strengthen their design.

The report of the Reuters correspondent in Dhaka, flashing across the world that the Home Minister opined the Mymensingh bomb operation might be linked to Al-Qaeda network had confused the situation a lot. It was an echo of the

Unfounded allegations and counter-allegations that the government and the opposition have so far irresponsibly indulged in will bring no fruit except providing, knowingly or unknowingly, shelter and strength to the quarters carrying the menacing game of bomb blasts.

voice of those foreign journalists determined to brand Bangladesh a fundamentalist country. This put the government to a very embarrassing situation. However the Home Minister flatly denied having any talk to the correspondent, let alone passing that comment. Still equally firmly the Reuters stood by its former report. The Reuters correspondent in Dhaka has been arrested for passing 'fabricated' news to malign Bangladesh. We do not know where and how the matter will end up.

Two former police chiefs held different kinds of views on the incidents of bomb attack. One thought those incidents might not be mutually related. It means these were perpetrated by different gangs for different purposes targeting upon

different groups of men. The other police chief observed that the Mymensingh bomb blasts needed to be enquired with high importance and great care. The way the bombs were timed to be exploded one after another in four cinema halls in perfect harmony presupposed it to be an act of a specialised group having men, money, expertise and experience. According to Army experts the combustibles used in the bombs were powerful and generally used in the army operation. The bombs are learnt to have been fitted with sophisticated remote control devices.

By and large the local people, administration, police, leaders, business community etc are of the opinion that the bomb operation was

masterminded by highly sophisticated agencies maybe from outside the country.

Whose work is the tragedy of Mymensingh? There is no claim for any quarters. This is the characteristic of all other bomb attacks in Bangladesh in the past also, that nobody had ever acknowledged responsibility or claimed credit not even over phone for those incidents. Generally when a clandestine political group, tribal sect, even bandit combine hit a target as a means to achieving their object they post credit for their performance. The secessionist militias of Kashmir, separatists of Sri Lanka, rebels and freedom fighters all over the world like those in Latin America, Middle East, Indonesia etc have

observed this practice.

What is most depressing and intriguing us that though massive bomb attacks throughout nook and corner of the country had taken place almost uninterruptedly killing and maiming many, none of our governments could ever track down who perpetrated those dastardly acts, let alone punishing them. No doubt bomb blasts had caused nationwide shock, condemnation, uproar, protests, resentments, instituting probe committees, conducting police-CID investigations etc, but practically all came to naught.

During Awami Leagues rule seven bomb blasts occurred killing 71 and maiming several hundreds. A judicial commission headed by

Justice Abdul Bari Sarker was formed to investigate all the seven bomb incidents. Initially the report held Awami League responsible for six attacks except one at the Kadiani mosque in Khulna. Interestingly the commission were sharply divided in their opinion and their members vehemently reacted against the opinion of the chairman. In fact the credibility of the commission's report fizzled out in no time.

The hard fact is that it is wholly unacceptable that bomb attacks will be launched upon us routinely and we will go on digesting them after performing temporary, time-bound condemnation and uproar exercise. The irresistible need of the hour is to let the nation know who are the masterminds of these beastly acts and what are their heinous motives. To achieve these objectives it will demand the entire nation to rise to the occasion as a single force. All sects of the society -- politicians, law-makers, intelligentsia, businessmen, workers etc -- should be fully aware of the grave consequences of

this menace and unconditionally contribute their best to fighting out this evil bent upon destroying us. Equally important is to foster a strong unity among the discordant political parties, chiefly the government and the opposition, to embark upon a joint venture to identify and apprehend the bomb attackers. It is the doubtless compulsion of the government to take the lead in the national campaign to seize the sinister forces responsible for bomb blasts. Efficient, free, impartial, unbiased, non-partisan, political prejudice-free investigations should be launched forthwith to unearth the plot. Unfounded allegations and counter-allegations that the government and the opposition have so far irresponsibly indulged in will bring no fruit except providing, knowingly or unknowingly, shelter and strength to the quarters carrying the menacing game of bomb blasts.

A R Shamsul Islam, is retired Principal, Govt Mohila College, Pabna