

Date-expired fluid*Stop harassing patients in the name of treatment*

NOW the deadly practice of cheating people in every possible manner has made its way to hospitals also, and even patients in desperate need of medical care are not spared. A mobile court found, incredible though it may sound, a huge quantity of date-expired fluid and blood sugar tubes for kidney patients at the National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology. And two patients were being treated with the date-expired stuff at the hospital when the mobile court members stepped in.

The court has done a laudable job. But we believe that medicare is too important an area to be left to the unscrupulous elements having no regard for human lives. Only periodical or seasonal inspections by such courts are not enough. The latest findings are an extremely disturbing and sad example of how the existing medical facilities have been vitiated by corruption on an unprecedented scale.

The use of date-expired medicines amounts to committing murder for the sole purpose of making undue profits. The health ministry owes an explanation to the people as to how such crimes could be committed in a well known hospital.

What the mobile court has found is the tip of an iceberg. The fraudulent and hazardous practices at the hospitals are of various kinds taking place at different levels. The government has for too long allowed the hospital operators an absolute freehand which, admittedly, has led to setting up of some good clinics, and some bad ones as well. What is needed now is efficient hospital administration. The health ministry should immediately form an expert committee, with professionals having the requisite backgrounds, and go for a thorough investigation into the anomalies, irregularities and malpractice that plague the health sector as a whole. And inspection of clinics and hospitals on a regular basis must be made mandatory.

We find clinics and hospitals almost everywhere in the city, but few of us are aware of what is going on inside them. Are these so-called medicare providers following any guidelines or are they accountable to any authorities for their performance? The health authorities should introduce a gradation system to evaluate the performance of hospitals. A legal framework and a code of operation for running a hospital must also be developed to stop what we have witnessed at the kidney hospital. It is a totally unacceptable lowering of the value of human life, which only brings disgrace to those in charge of helping patients in distress.

Thai democracy*Lessons for Bangladesh*

We would like to begin by congratulating the Thai people for the fact that the political impasse that had shaken the country for the past few months now looks as though it is being resolved in an amicable manner acceptable to all. We commend the Thai people together with the Thai politicians and indeed the entire Thai political process, all of which have combined to bring about this reasoned and reasonable compromise.

There are lessons for Bangladesh to learn in how both the opposition and the government in Thailand have comported themselves during this process, and how the events have unfolded in a largely peaceful manner towards a workable and generally acceptable solution.

The first thing we note is that even though the anti-Thaksin protests went on for weeks at a time and in many places brought the country to a virtual stand-still, the opposition were granted all the democratic space that they needed in order to make themselves heard. There were no incidents of police beating up demonstrators and the police were evidently under order to maintain law and order but also given instructions to ensure that the demonstrators were able to fully express their dissent.

Nor were any aspersions cast against the patriotism or motives of the opposition, or was it suggested that they were there was anything untoward in the democratic expression of their dissent.

Second, we must commend Thaksin. We hold no brief for him one way or the other; however, we feel that credit must be given for the fact that he agreed to elections a full three years before the expiry of his term when he realized that he no longer enjoyed the confidence of a large segment of the population.

Similarly, his sensible decision to stand down after the ambiguous results, rather than to stick to his guns and fight it out, as he would have been able to do had he wished, must also be commended.

Finally, we would like to commend the role of the Thai people. The demonstrations were perfect examples of civil dissent and opposition that made their point in a forceful but peaceful manner that ultimately resulted in helping persuade Thaksin to step down.

The last few months have shown signs of a maturing democracy in Thailand, quite distinct from ours, where governments vow to not step down one minute before the end of their terms and where there is no culture of democratic dissent or compromise, even though our democracy is older. We could learn a lot from the events in Thailand of the past few months.

Hail to the high performing ministries

SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

But the most important ministry is the Ministry of Dillying and Dallying. This ministry has successfully held things back to earn the praise of the political analysts all over the world. No matter whether it is about sentencing dangerous criminals or granting bails to opposition activists or separating different branches of the government from one another, this ministry has performed excellently to 'fool all the people for all the time'.

With the one-eyed media find fault in everything, we have discovered that some of the ministries are doing excellent job despite resource constraints and opposition propaganda. These high performing ministries have been working assiduously from the background to prop up the image of the country. For example, at the moment the Ministry of Candle Affairs is showing great performance in the country. The ministry is busy round the clock to ensure unhampered production and distribution of candles to each and every home so that citizens may carry on with their life, whatever is left of it, in the frequent load shedding. In gratitude the gratified citizens are trying their best to keep themselves in good humour (read 'humidity') in the sweltering heat with the flickering candlelight. The candle sector has become the number one revenue-generating sector and as a result candle factory owners are becoming millionaires overnight.

Today, a candle worth two costs take eight. Some find the price of candles scandalous. Nevertheless, that surely is a healthy sign for the economy. There is rumour in the air that top guns from the World Bank and ADB are soon coming to Dhaka

ing fast). You see, it is not that he gets the chance to come before the camera that often. It is like, no new sinking, no appearance on TV. On camera he usually warns the passenger vessel owners of dire consequences for not listening to his instructions. But, as the minister in charge of the Ministry of Sinking will huff and puff in public, his PRO will know what to tell the owners of the vessels in private. This has been going on for the last five years and people simply love him for that.

The Ministry of Grounded Aircraft is happy to have something to do at last. As long as the entire fleet was flying from Toronto to Timbuktu the ministry people had no work. Once grounding of the planes began they woke up from their slumber and started preparing tender documents. They need to give the contract to some engineering firm that can convert the big passenger airplanes into passenger buses to run on inter-city routes. Not a bad idea really. Imagine carrying three hundred plus passengers by road to make up for the loss the airline sector incurred in last thirty years. This decision to convert planes into buses will go into the Guinness Book of World Records.

Then there is the new

addition the Ministry of Letter Writing. This particular ministry is awfully busy these days. Senior officials are working round the clock. They are preparing drafts of letters for the opposition and carrying those personally to the right persons. But it is proving to be a hazardous task as the letters have the habit of coming back with many queries. The moment a letter returns with queries the research wing of the ministry along with the intelligence officials sit down with the minister to draft yet another reply. This again has to be vetted by many 'brothers' sitting at various addresses before placing before the high command. It is reported that the minister has requested the establishment for more officers skilled in letter writing. The letters are about the intended dialogue between the government and the opposition. But, to me, it appears that these men will have no energy left once the letter writing exercise will be over.

Another ministry that is working round the clock is the Ministry for Escalating Prices. From the secretary down to the peon everyone is visiting the kitchen markets from dawn to dusk to find out if price of any particular commodity has gone down. As soon as they identify one such commodity they

immediately prepare files to get the minister's approval for escalating the price. They have no fear in doing that since none other than the prime minister has declared that despite price escalation people are happy. Bingo! That's exactly what the traders and importers and hoarders and smugglers wanted to hear. As long as the high command will not confess that people are having navvishash (last throes), they will go on amassing wealth. Election time is here boys! The more the merrier!

Perhaps the most interesting ministry is the one called the Ministry of Deserting and Amorous Athletes. This ministry sends men and women clad in national blazer to various foreign countries apparently to take part in sporting events. They are sent abroad allegedly to make the country proud by winning medals. But once these men and women land in the foreign countries some of them desert the camp not to return ever. Couple of months ago one of them walked away and did not return. Most of these runaway sportsmen and sportswomen of the country join the sporting events even though they do not qualify. Does not matter. They have an influential uncle or brother or brother-in-law in the right place. Then there are many sports 'personalities' who are known to be the amorous kind who get involved in necking and pecking with the members of the opposite gender from the home country or that of the host country.

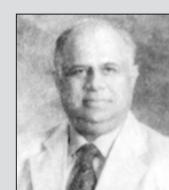
Some months back it happened inside the country. And recently during the Commonwealth Games in Australia one of our shooters came bit too close of a local damsel in a sauna bath and scared the life out of her. As

the guy did not know where to keep his arms he had put them around the girl. This guy did not shoot straight to win medals in the tough competition, not even a bronze, but he surely got the name of the country on the pages of the local newspapers. The ministry people are proud of him. He is their blue-eyed baby. They argue, if Shane Warne can do it and if David Beckham can do it, why can't our very own shooter do it too? Well, I guess the police in Australia lack humor. They took the shooter to the court and the team manager had to trouble-shoot for him. The shooter shot to fame not by shooting the target in the competition but by doing something else. The minister in charge of the Ministry of Deserting and Amorous Athletes was not available to answer why more of such persons are not selected and sent abroad.

But the most important ministry is the Ministry of Dillying and Dallying. This ministry has successfully held things back to earn the praise of the political analysts all over the world. No matter whether it is about sentencing dangerous criminals or granting bails to opposition activists or separating different branches of the government from one another, this ministry has performed excellently to 'fool all the people for all the time'.

I have been told that some rogue governments in some foreign countries are going to invite the mighty minister to deliver lectures at breakfast meetings. They apparently are interested to have some tips from him. This no doubt is a matter of national pride.

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

Changing geo-political equationIKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi**AS I SEE IT**

While the US has certainly more to offer to India than China, India's interests would have been better served by cementing its relationship with its great neighbour rather than getting into confrontation with it. Given the stated strategic intent of US to build up India for containment of China, is this possible? And even if the US-India deal falls through due to some odd reason, will China trust India anymore?

committed to promotion of democratic values, has promoted political reform to go ahead or even side by side with economic reform. China as the remaining heartland of communism has carried out constant economic reforms since the late 1970s while only gradually allowing political reform. Glasnost before Perestroika led to a near catastrophic economic collapse in the Soviet Union and the COMECON countries, it is only the discovery of vast reserves of oil and gas that has sustained economic reform. In Russia and many of its former satellites, communism has been replaced by a new brand of nationalist authoritarianism, the nouveau rulers being mainly apprentices of the old Communist regimes.

Socialism was India's choice on gaining independence as opposed to the capitalist bent of other countries of the region. Instead of following the free market trend in time with the rest of the world, Pakistan and Bangladesh did a 180 degree and adopted the economically insane route of a socialist economy in the 1970s, probably losing three decades of a head-start.

Faced with economic collapse, both countries under military dictatorships in the 80s did another 180 degree to privatization and de-

nationalization. India which changed direction last in the late 80s and early 90s, has gained most in the last decade by adopting the road to a free market economy. Its population size and the entrepreneurial skills of its business leaders has helped.

While China is still far ahead economically, India is bound to advance spectacularly in the next decade, mainly on the strength of its IT potential and the sophisticated manner the potential has been harnessed and exploited.

India as a potential antidote to

China has been force-multiplied in the US perception by its being a vast market for a wide range of US products.

A major unspoken factor that makes India a natural strategic partner is the fact that despite India's secular credentials, it happens to be a Hindu state, and it has shown its trapping in curbing the rise of Islam within India.

The cementing of the US-India relationship was an event long overdue. India certainly has vast energy needs that cannot be met by conventional means, that it took the shape of a nuclear deal that runs counter to US policy on non-proliferation is surprising, and rather ham-handed. While giving India credit for intelligently manipulating the Iran-Pakistan-India gas

pipeline issue to force the US to offer alternate sources of energy, the obstacles to be overcome have been understated as well as the downside to the deal, viz (1) an increasingly skeptical US Congress about India's nuclear credentials (2) calling the US "evil" for over 50 years, India's socialist masses will take some convincing (3) ASEAN neighbors in the East and Muslim countries in the Middle East worry about India as an emerging superpower with nuclear sabres to rattle as well as domination of the Indian Ocean, and last but not least, (4) will China accept this arrangement lying down?

As a US partner, India will find itself the subject of vastly increased cynosure by US legislators and the media, discovering issues long kept under wraps viz (1) the widespread Naxalite movement, (2) the Christian revolts in Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram, (3) a dozen others/such insurrections all over India including near anarchy in parts of Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, etc and (4) the wide disparity between the rich and the poor, etc, etc.

India's non-aligned status in the world was well respected, now it is clearly aligned to the US. Given the energy shortages, Indian leaders

must be gambling they may get away with it because of their past record. It is at best a calculated risk, at worst it is a major strategic blunder.

We are into the fifth decade after India's short sharp war with China in 1962. During this time there has been growing rapprochement with China, China going so far as to give de-facto recognition to India's occupation of Sikkim. Currently, border talks are in the final stage of successful negotiations and formal two-way trade has crossed billions of US dollars.

The US-India nuclear nexus has drawn a sharp response from China, it puts an official stamp on the US-India alliance for containment of China. While China does not covet any territory on the land mass of Asia, its only remaining concern being offshore Taiwan, no sovereign country in the world can stand an alliance ostensibly meant to be against it. Other than a strong denouement of the US-India nuclear deal, China has initiated moves that recognize that this arrangement is dangerous to China.

One gesture is particularly revealing, China has invited President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting in May 2006. Pakistan here has only an observer status. While the US has certainly more to offer to India than China, India's interests would have been better served by cementing its relationship with its great neighbour rather than getting into confrontation with it. Given the stated strategic intent of US to build up India for containment of China, is this possible? And even if the US-India deal falls through due to some odd reason, will China trust India anymore?

Even with full maturity in the realm of external affairs, of con-

cern to Pakistan is the major US tilt to India and how it will impact on a possible Kashmir solution or arrangement. Certainly the US would want India not to be distracted by Kashmir in its role of replacing the state of Iran as policeman of the region, they would rather India free itself of its narrow agenda over Kashmir and opt for its wider role in the world. That would be the smart thing to do, unfortunately given India's history of pursuing tactical initiatives, most of which have turned into strategic blunders, India will probably opt for both, trying to have its cake and eat it also, maintaining the status quo over Kashmir while striving to become an acceptable world power. To that end, it has been given the stamp of US (and by inference, western) approval while Pakistan has been sidelined, or so India hopes.

The October 8 earthquake allowed the first steps for de-escalation to be taken, a pragmatic approach will make the ground realities more palatable to both sides on Kashmir including the pulling back troops to a suitable distance from the LOC, cross-border-trade, movement of Kashmiris freely across the LOC, etc. While Pakistan should certainly go the whole mile for a suitable solution/arrangement for Kashmir, it is not in the nature of its people to be Balkanized as the changing geo-political equation initiated by the US-India deal envisages. All relationships have to be on equitable basis or they will fail the test of both patience and time.

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

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR**EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR**

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.

Holy Hajj

It is appreciated that the govt is planning well ahead for the easy transportation and comfortable flight of the Hajjis from Bangladesh during the next Hajj in 2007. In the past, we had the bitter experience that the govt machinery including the Biman and the civil aviation authorities used to play hide and seek with the helpless Hajjis, which is not at all desirable.

We would request the authorities to be sincere in hiring the houses in the holy cities in Saudi Arabia-- no brokers should be allowed to act as middleman.

Peerzada Syed Rofiqul Hussain
Hila Shahab Bari, Habiganj

Import of vehicles from India

India was fulfilling its transportation needs by locally manufactured vehicles for a long time until the car manufacturing industries were made open to foreign investment

on joint-venture basis a few years ago. Heavy tax & duty are levied on imported vehicles.

In Bangladesh most of our cars are imported from Japan, costing a huge amount of foreign exchange. Other brands of cars are imported from European countries and the US.

If we import most of our vehicles from India, I believe we can save a lot of foreign exchange but at the same time I am afraid of the huge trade imbalance we have with India and if we stop import of Japanese vehicles (cars), Japan might be displeased as one of our major economic donors.

Our economists may devise a strategy in this regard as car is still a luxury item in Bangladesh.

Thomas Gomes Bhura
Monipuripara, Tejgaon, Dhaka

Fate of Afghan apos-

tate

I must say that I could not agree

more with Mr. Hassan's article on the 3rd April edition of your daily regarding the fate of the Afghan apostate. It is good to see that one of the leading dailies of Bangladesh is tackling these 'sensitive' issues in an enlightened manner. I strongly believe that contemporary Muslims must play an active role in salvaging their religion from the grip of dogmatists (such as the Takfeeri Wahabis). A thorough understanding of today's fundamentalist terrorist movements will show everyone clearly that much can be blamed to such narrow, rigid interpretations of Islam. Enlightened Muslims must pave the way to a broader, figurative understanding of their religion guided by reason in this dynamic, fast-moving world so that they are not left behind in the crevices of darkness and ignorance.

Monwar Hussain
Mirpur-14, Dhaka

Punish the culprits

There is no doubt that DS is a mirror of Bangladesh. It focuses on all important developments and

Road in Chatkhil

Chatkhil municipal area in Noakhali district is a busy trade and business centre. The area is important because it is directly linked to Ramgarh, Begumganj, Chittagong and Dhaka. But like darkness under a lamp, about three kilometres road from the bridge No. 11 to Badalkote Bazar saw no development in years causing untold suffering to the commuting people of Sundarpur, Fatehpur, Badalkote and Mekrarchar villages.

The inhabitants of the area fervently hope that the honourable MP and the chairman of municipality would take the necessary steps to renovate the road and alleviate the sufferings of the people.

Md. Obaidul Huq
Chatkhil

Role of press