

PM warning to truant doctors

The under-served rural patients need their service

DOCTORS skipping their duties after being posted in the rural areas are failing on two counts: They are being insensitive to the suffering humanity as well as running foul of their own professional code of conduct. The Prime minister Sheikh Hasina has rightly taken them to task for their playing truant after being placed at their rural postings.

The main reason of why the rural patients are underserved is that the doctors posted there, more often than not, remain absent from their office. The state-owned rural clinics as a result are in a sad plight. Due to lack of proper attention, most of those clinics have become a huge drain on the government's resources. Patients who are still compelled to go there may, if they like, get treatment at the hands of the non-specialist staff or may go without treatment altogether. And those who can afford, shift to districts or even to the capital for treatment. But the latter option is rather punishing for them.

But why should doctors be so unhappy with their rural postings, since there is no difference in pays and perks between the rural and the city postings in government service? Moreover, can't the government expect some honesty from them so far as the terms of their service are concerned, let alone the sacrifice their calling demands? And when a prime minister has to step in to a warn section of the doctors and remind them of their responsibilities, it does not speak well of the community itself.

However, patients' suffering is not simply a rural experience. Even in their urban setting, they have to go through endless ordeals at the diagnostic clinics in particular. A section of the doctors attending them are alleged to be more interested in the commissions derived from referrals.

Consequently, they have to go through more diagnostic tests than they need. But had those doctors been more sympathetic and ready to listen to their patients' complaints, many of those tests would prove to be redundant. In the worst-case scenario, the patients have not only to pay through the nose for the unnecessary diagnostic tests, some ill-starred ones may even have to pay the ultimate price. Some black sheep in the profession have thus cast a blot on the entire community, where most other members are so responsible and highly respected for their professional excellence and humane attitude towards their patients.

Interestingly, among all other professions, it is only the doctors', that involves taking of an oath called Hippocratic Oath. This, among other conditions, asserts that a doctor is a member of society with special obligations to all his fellow human beings.

As such, we expect that the doctors would at least be true to their professional ethics and serve the humanity on their own, without being told of their responsibilities towards their patients and the society at large.

Mounting cost of traffic jams

It's going beyond tolerance level

IF GDP growth erosion is 2 per cent on account of corruption, it would do the decision-makers well now to calculate the loss of productivity and fuel caused by spiraling traffic congestion in the capital. This will help them realise what a formidable challenge faces the national development goals. From the waste of valuable time in waiting on cars and buses between trips through the hardship of the majority who are stranded in the streets to the sapping of physical energy and mental disorientation, the cumulative negative effect on the national psyche is simply stupendous.

We have repeatedly drawn the attention of the government to various structural and man-made factors which together have created a traffic management nightmare but to little avail. Experiments like ordering 20-year old vehicles out of the street, trying out lane system without commensurate improvement in signaling have more or less failed when buses stop over arbitrarily picking up passengers and off-loading them at undesignated places. The parking mess is all too known to bear repetition.

Against the backdrop of the approaching Ramadan, the whole lot of traffic management inadequacies take on a degree of severity that certainly requires special handling. Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) have urged traders' associations to deploy community police in front of their business centers until before Eid day. What will the police be doing, granted, they would need ancillary support? Who will bear the costs of community police? For, if the businessmen share a part of the costs that may not be unfair but if they are to foot the whole bill they are likely to charge the consumers. Isn't it not the DCC who maintain community police? The matter should be judiciously approached.

The police authorities have also asked the bus terminal operators to increase the number of community police in and around the terminals during the month of Ramadan.

It is a welcome piece of news that among the contingency measures agreed upon between the DMP and the transport operators are strict enforcement of lane system, stern action against unregistered vehicles and debarring entry of inter-district buses -- all of these to facilitate city dwellers' reaching home before iftar. The DMP authorities have also vowed to get tough on fake drivers and helpers. Let see if the deployment of additional manpower translates into greater security, smoother traffic movement and reduced corruption.

The chaos theory of a nation



Caught in the whirlwind of chaos.

This is another example. Actions are flying apart from consequences. Virtues aren't rewarded; vices aren't reprimanded. Right isn't sequestered from wrong. Truth isn't distinguished from false.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE universe was in chaos before there was any order. The Big Bang theory tells that the universe began with the explosion of a single mass of material, and the pieces are still flying apart. If you are watching the state of things in this country, you know it makes sense.

Lately, two of those pieces flew apart right in front of our bulging eyes when the police and the bureaucrats clashed in the media. Their invectives simply exposed doubts already expounded in public mind; "law and order" in this country is no more than a catchphrase where a wretched

conjunction merely holds together two dissonant nouns.

The district commissioners complained that the police officers in certain police stations were abetting drug dealers. It's hard to believe that they could actually say it, but it's even harder to accept that none of them has lost his job. No less shocking was the police rebuttal. They demanded magistrates should be appointed under the authority of police supers. Nary a word was spoken to clarify whether the allegation brought against them was true or false.

It was as if a spectator sport between two fight-to-the-end gladiators. But the surprise for me wasn't over yet. The bureau-

crats spiced up their grievances with what should be equivalent to signing their own death warrant. They admitted that even though they chaired the law and order committees in the districts, the police supers did not obey them. Gosh! I don't know if they realise how badly they have undermined their own image.

More pieces are flying. Last week the factory owners and the garments workers drifted apart. They drifted so far in opposite directions that nothing short of a miracle could bring them together again. But the drifting did not happen overnight. The workers asked for a raise, and the factory owners refused to comply. A stitch in time could have saved nine. Now the whole fabric threatens to come apart.

Two other pieces continue to fly apart. The government and the opposition not only do not reconcile their differences, but things between them are getting worse. It is not so bad they cannot stand each other, but the country is becoming oblivious that it takes two sides to run a parliament.

In 1827 a Scottish botanist named Robert Brown discovered the Brownian motion, which is seemingly random movement of particles suspended in a fluid. This country right now is in a similar condition. Random movement and fluidity are the hallmarks of national contention.

Needless to say, it's chaos. The prime minister says in the parliament that she has been poisoned. Opposition politicians warn the prime minister of dire consequences that sound like veiled threats. A lot of people in this country are floating on free rage. Almost anybody can get away with almost anything said.

This is another example. Actions are flying apart from consequences. Virtues aren't rewarded; vices aren't reprimanded. Right isn't sequestered from wrong. Truth isn't distinguished from false.

So it's chaos. Nobody is who he is, man amalgamated with mask. Every face is a farce, and every name is a bluff. The district commissioners do not have authority. The police do not obey the law. Things fly apart: identity from appearance, authority from position, and intention from obligation.

Albert Einstein laid out his understanding of the Big Bang theory when he said that for every one billion particles of antimatter there were one billion and one particles of matter. "And when the mutual annihilation was complete, one billionth remained, and that's our present universe," he joked.

Every force has a counterforce, every upstream has a downstream, and every dream has a nightmare. But everything is its own opposite in our case, every crooked is straight and every fake is original. Our moral universe is a complete wash. Every antimatter annihilates every matter. The one-billionth thing doesn't exist. Things are falling apart.

We have conflicts and clashes. We also have compromises. But compromises only comprise of conflicts, opening fresh wounds instead of healing old ones. Independence, constitution, elections and parliament, all the unifying factors in a democracy, have divided us.

Like I said, the universe was in chaos before there was any order. In 1876, Gore Vidal describes an America fraught with crimes, corruption and chaos, when upper class Americans preferred to spend more time in Paris and London. Then a mighty nation emerged three-quarters of a century later when the Second World War firmly established it at the forefront of the new world order.

Things flying apart come together. Individuals start from scratch and build an empire. It happens to nations as well. They go through rise and fall.

Where does it place this country? Is it rising or falling? Is it chaos or order? Knowing the question is half the answer.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is Editor, First News and a columnist of The Daily Star. E-mail: badrul151@yahoo.com.

Bureaucrats in the line of fire



As the situation stands today, reprimanding one bureaucrat and rewarding the other is not going to help. As I said in the foregoing, in terms of professional acumen there is hardly any difference.

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

BUREAUCRACY from time immemorial has been the single most important factor in the administration and management of a country, whether in peacetime or during war. It is simply vital for the smooth functioning of a democratic state. Yet it has never been above controversy and suspicion, both real and perceived.

It is, thus, our impression that if the bureaucracy is to function properly and effectively, both the people who are at the helm of political management of the state and the bureaucrats must have a clear understanding of the issues at stake. Throwing balls into the other's court is not

going to help.

To begin with, there has to be a clear understanding of the limitations and obligations of bureaucrats. The government must also realise that bureaucrats and bureaucrats alone have a clear knowledge, information and understanding of the various rules of procedures in civil administration of the country at large. With due respect, this is where bureaucrats have an edge over the ministers and the lawmakers.

Frankly, in terms of professional knowledge, a large number of the present lawmakers are way behind the bureaucrats. As a result, it may be right, to some extent, to say that the bureaucrats are taking advantage of their superior level of knowhow and

expertise.

Thus, it will be a misrepresentation of facts to say that the failure of the government's overall development targets and all-round good governance is being hindered and slowed down by the bureaucrats, particularly those belonging to the ranks from the levels of deputy secretary to secretary. Bureaucracy follows a strict pecking order, and it is not understandable as to why section officers have been left out of the net.

In the meantime, the government must realise that with the departure of the erstwhile officers of the CSP cadres there has been a considerable downward swing in the qualitative content of the entire civil bureaucracy in the country. Frankly, while evaluating the overall performance of the bureaucrats one should also take this point into consideration.

To be fair, it must also be said whenever a new government comes into power, bureaucrats are the first ones, as media reports state, to face the music. Officers and officials are transferred at random, often from one city to another or to some remote corner of the country. Nine out of ten of these transfers are done on political considerations by the ruling party. This in turn has not only severely disrupted their family lives but also adversely affected the overall morale of the bureaucratic community.

Yet, after all is said and done, not everything is in order with the bureaucrats. For years, they have been known for their wanton indulgence in corruption. Knowingly and unknowingly, they have been more self-serving than being the servants of the people and the state. They are bogged down by an attitude that is both arrogant and unduly egoistic.

On this side of the fence, the present regime does not portray a healthy picture either. The overall performance of our lawmakers has been questioned both by the government, and that too at the highest level, the civil society and the public at

large. Surely the bureaucrats alone cannot be held responsible for poor performance.

Most of the other operatives of the government, like the police and the intelligence agencies, have become almost non-functional. They seem to be above questioning. None other than the home minister herself came up with a statement the other day that there was no incidence of crossfire in the country at a time when the high court had asked the government to stop the incidences of crossfire.

On the other hand, a number of our lawmakers were involved in incidents that were highly unlawful and criminal in nature but have never been reprimanded. Just think for a while what Rajuk has done to the safety and security of the people, affecting the city's overall environment by allowing people to build housing complexes by grabbing reclaimed land and filling in most of the vital water bodies around the city. We wonder as to how many Rajuk officers have been taken to task, particularly at the level of a secretary or below.

This has led people to believe that there is a culture of impunity prevailing in the country. In the light of the above, the government's caution and warning, asking for improvement of their performance, may not go down well with the bureaucrats. Besides, as the situation stands today, reprimanding one bureaucrat and rewarding the other is not going to help. As I said in the foregoing, in terms of professional acumen there is hardly any difference.

Thus, the CEO of our administration would have achieved better results by making it a session of "meet the bureaucrats," turning it into a consultation meeting. The way matters stand now, it looks as though bureaucrats are the only possible segment with a potential of failing the government. The government should, therefore, think of a better strategy in dealing with the bureaucrats.

Shamsher Chowdhury is a columnist for The Daily Star.