FOUNDER EDITOR LATE S. M. ALI

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### 'Drugs' manufactured underground

Swift action a must to flush out those involved

RIMINALITY appears to be taking an increasingly wider dimension in the country. That, at least, is the impression one has now that a fake drugs factory has been discovered in the capital. What does cause amazement is the fact that the spurious medicine factory was unearthed by the law enforcers only a day after the High Court ordered a testing of all medicine samples at present available in the market. With the discovery of this factory and the nabbing of the individuals behind it, one is impelled into asking how such activities can go on and through individuals who appear to have little or no fear of the repercussions of their actions, not only for themselves but also for those who are the targets of their wrong acts. Now that this so-called factory has been exposed, there is the very legitimate fear among citizens that more such dens may be in operation all across the city and indeed at various spots across the country. Judging by the fact that it is not only the young couple involved in this particular case but also a host of other unscrupulous elements engaged with them in the sordid business, one can safely draw the conclusion that a wider network may be at work here.

There are quite a few questions which come up here. The first relates to the matter of the drug stores which have been selling these false medicines. The second concerns the materials which have gone into the manufacture of the 'drugs'. A third question relates to the adverse effects these 'drugs' may have caused to those who have been hoodwinked into buying and using them. All of these questions now lead to the very palpable conclusion that a wholesale drive must be launched not only against people who are engaged in the illegal trade but also against those who may have been playing a crucial role in promoting them in return for financial and other gratification. Obviously, these so-called drugs could not have been made available to pharmacies without the approval of some dishonest doctors and other medical personnel. Again, it is not hard to see how patients may have been prescribed such 'medicines' by doctors, thus adding to the feeling that a kind of mafia may be at work behind such immoral acts.

The requirement now is pretty simple. Since the suspicion of the law enforcers -- and it is one we share with them -- is that a nexus of manufacturers of illegal drugs, a section of doctors and medical representatives is behind the malpractice, it is critically important that swift and sustained action be taken to flush out everyone who may be engaged in this nasty business. Playing with the lives of people is not only a sin but a serious crime as well. Which is why we expect the law enforcers to go no-holds-barred against these elements. The whole vicious cycle must be unmasked.

#### Education system at junior level

Schools must have all manner of support

T a pre-examination briefing a few days ago, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid explained that in arlier times, a small percentage of class VIII students used to sit for scholarship exams. As the junior scholarship exams and final exams for class VIII students will not be held separately any more, teachers do not have to remain occupied with selected students without giving attention to others. The uniform exam and evaluation system will also reduce the pressure of double exams on the students.

An important economic issue is linked with this statement, that is, the government is yet to declare the number of students who will be given scholarships. The government needs to affirm whether it has decided to spend less or more money than for the previous system of primary and junior level scholarships. Besides providing scholarships the students should also be rewarded with books and other relevant materials to encourage them to enhance their reading habits. An additional matter is that students must pass the exam to get enrolled in class nine. This is a good initiative in terms of enrolling quality students for the next class, those who can perform better in further public exams.

The evaluation system must be very fair and accountable. The government should encourage students to produce answers in their own expression rather than persuading them to learn lessons by rote. It is worthwhile to mention that Training for Teachers (ToT) is a prerequisite for this. If the teachers are not properly trained they will not be able to assess exam sheets in a competent manner.

The number of students participating in the JSC and JDC shows that the total percentage of girls' participation is higher than that for boys. But the ratio should be considered separately for rural and urban areas. It is assumed that girls' participation is higher in the urban areas. In this regard, the government needs to identify gender aggregated data and initiate an advocacy campaign in the villages, where girls' participation is less. The government can also launch free education up to class VIII both for boys and girls to minimize the dropout rate. But if parents are not provided with alternatives that will make it possible for them to send their wards to school and offences like eve teasing or sexual harassment are not stopped, the dropout rate will continue to rise in future.

Students were evaluated under first, second and third divisions at the primary school exam last year. To encourage students at the lower divisions a reward system may also be launched. A student can be poor in maths but s/he can be brilliant in essay writing or vice versa. Identifying those students in a short time will not be a problem in the digital era.

The coaching business will be bolstered more as many of the students will be desperate for better results. To minimize the malpractice, the government needs to support every school through training and sufficient logistics and library facilities, even in the hard-to-reach areas, so that a massive participation of students and quality education can be ensured.

# EDITÖRIAL

The Daily Star

## Digital Bangladesh: Goal or slogan?

Modern technology, including ICT, is only a means or a tool to achieve certain goals, which the prime minister outlined in her speech. How can the means be our goal? If we try to convert a means or a tool into a goal, we may enter into a vicious circle, possibly missing the goal in the process.

ABDUL MATIN

TE shall turn our country into 'Digital Bangladesh' " has become a slogan of the present government. Since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that, everyone belonging to the grand alliance has been echoing the slogan, like in a chorus. As a result, it has spread to the remotest corners of Bangladesh.

Does the general public understand the term "digital"? Here are some examples to show what ordinary people mean by digital. Last year, I went to a village mosque to offer Jumah prayers. While announcing the time of the Eid prayer, the imam of the mosque said: "The Eid prayer will be held at 8 in the morning according to the old time and at 9 according to the 'digital time.' "

If you complain about the high prices of essential items at a grocery shop, you may get this answer: "Sir, please forget about the old prices. Now all transactions are made at digital rates." Surely the word "digital" has created some confusion amongst the people.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina defined "Digital Bangladesh" while addressing the inaugural function of a workshop titled "E-Governance, Service at Doorsteps" one year ago. In her speech she said: "Digital Bangladesh does not only mean the use of computers everywhere. Digital Bangladesh is a modern philosophy of using appropriate technology in implementing all pledges of the government, including poverty eradication, ensuring quality education and health facilities, generating employment opportunities for the people."

The prime minister further said that the main aims of building digital Bangladesh were to ensure people's empowerment, establish transparency, accountability and good governance at every level and sector, and take government services to the doorsteps of the people. In this connection, she talked about introduction of e-governance, e-service, e-business and maximum utilisation of modern technology including ICT.

The intention of the prime minister to establish transparency, accountability and good governance as mentioned above is most appreciable. She is also absolutely right in her approach for using the most modern technology including ICT to achieve her objectives. She also confirmed that her final goal is to build "Sonar Bangla."

I do, however, have some reservations regarding the widespread use (or misuse?) of the term "Digital Bangladesh." The reasons for my reservations are discussed below.

What is meant by digital Bangladesh? Digital is a technical term that comes from the word digit (in Latin digitus means finger, used for counting). A digit is a symbol that represents a number like 0, 1, 2, 3, to 9. A digital system is a data processing technology that uses discrete, i.e. discontinuous, values whereas an analogue or non-digital system uses a continuous range of values.

A computer, a meter, a watch, a telephone system may be either analogue or digital depending on which technology is used. There are many devices which use a combination of both digital and analogue systems. We use digital telephone system in Bangladesh even though the handsets operate on analogue systems.

Digital technology does not necessarily mean computer technology alone. There are many devices/instruments which use digital systems and, naturally, we call them digital devices, like digital computers, digital watches, digital meters, digital cameras etc. Is Bangladesh analogous to any of the devices just mentioned? No, it

The slogan of "Digital Bangladesh" appears to be unique and naive. Is there any other country in the world which claims or desires to be called "digital"? The answer is perhaps in the negative. Why? Most probably, no other country is convinced about the "magical charm" of the term "digital." Then, why are we?

The prime minister, in her speech, justifiably referred to the use of modern technology, appropriate technology and ICT to achieve the desired objectives for the development of Bangladesh. The use of modern technology including ICT has been the policy in each and every country in the world. Does "Digital Bangladesh" include all such tools?

The scope of the modern technology including ICT will be drastically curtailed if it is confined to the philosophy of socalled "Digital Bangladesh." Most countries in the world are more advanced than us in application of modern technology and ICT even though they do not shout any digital slogan.



Digital devices driving development.

We are lagging behind because we believe more in slogans than in actions. If you want an example, just visit any office of the BRTA to get a fitness certificate of your car. You will be required to produce more than half a dozen photocopies of documents which are already available in their files or computers. This is what we have achieved in 22 months after having shouted the slogan of digital Bangladesh.

Can computerisation alone ensure transparency in all sectors? Are we not aware of large- scale frauds in e-banking, credit card purchases, e-business etc? Can modern technology alone bring about any change in Bangladesh? No, and the prime minister is aware of that. For this reason, she stressed the importance of human resource development, change in our mentality, positive thinking and application of innovative ideas.

A machine on its own can produce nothing. The man behind the machine is more important than the machine. Accordingly, Bangabandhu attached the top most priority to the development of human resources when he said: "We need men with golden qualities (sonar manush) to build golden Bangladesh." Why are we then putting so much importance on digital Bangladesh? By doing so, are we not attaching more importance to the machine than to the man? Is it not like putting the horse behind the cart?

Our goal was and remains the establishment of "Sonar Bangla," which was the dream of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the theme of our national anthem, "My golden Bangladesh." Do we need any other goal or slogan? No, we don't. Now we need only action, nothing more or nothing less.

Sonar Bangla, a happy and prosperous Bangladesh, is an all-pervasive goal inclusive of anything good, beautiful or desirable. It is easily understood by everybody, with or without any formal education. We are all tuned to this goal. For the realisation of this goal, we may fix and quantify our targets in terms of economic parameters, like per capita GDP, literacy rate, per capita calorie intake, child mortality, longevity, number of hospital beds/doctors/nurses per 1,000 people etc., that we want to achieve by 2021.

Any goal, other than sonar Bangla, will only derail the nation from its prime objective of materialising the dream of Bangbandhu. The undue emphasis now being attached to the slogan of "Digital Bangladesh" is overshadowing, if not bypassing, Bangabandhu's dream. The present government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is least expected to pursue such a course.

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## Nuclear cloak and dagger

As I look back, I come to the conclusion that India's entire nuclear energy programme is a cloak and dagger story. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who asked Homi Bhabha to initiate the nuclear energy programme, may not have had the bomb in view, but he definitely had the glory of authorising the infrastructure to preserve our options.

KULDIP NAYAR

T'S difficult to say what will be the verdict of history on the Indo-US ▲ nuclear pact. But one thing which cannot be denied is the untiring, relentless effort by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He even staked his government to get the nod from Parliament.

Yet the opposition -- the BJP and the communists making common cause for the first time in the history of parliament -- was able to place substantial responsibility for any future compensation on the nuclear plant suppliers. It has now been enshrined in legislation. This was not to the liking of Manmohan Singh. He could visualise that the responsibility provision would keep the American investors away, and this happened. They wanted the dilution of liability.

The prime minister saw cold water poured on his plan to bring American investors to the field of nuclear energy. But he is not the man to give up when the stake is cheap nuclear energy, which he sees as his answer to the problem of poverty in the countryside. Therefore, he has gone to the extent of signing the Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC) at the IAEA in Vienna. The Convention sets parameters on a nuclear operator's liability in the event of an accident.

That the prime minister has power to sign an international convention is not the point at issue. He can do so. What is not understandable is why he has gone over the entire exercise outside India, outside Parliament and outside his cabinet. In

other words, whatever was agreed in Parliament has, in effect, been negated by signing of the Convention.

Such things are not acceptable in democratic countries. Bypassing parliament means overriding the norms of democracy. Parliament was rightly concerned over the responsibility of the suppliers and debated for days to ensure that they would not run away from their moral and legal obligations to protect the public. A reluctant Manmohan Singh had to give in because of pressure from practically all parties in the opposition.

They too were keen to get cheap nuclear power, but they had had a bitter experience from what happened in Bhopal in 1984. An American company had installed an outdated gas plant, which leaked to kill some 3,000 people and maim another 8,000. The environment had become so poisonous that hundreds of others living there have perished since the tragedy.

Till today, it is not known why the American company, Union Carbide, was let off lightly and why its chairman was flown in a state plane to Delhi safely, en route to America. Former union minister Arjun Singh was then the chief minister and Rajiv Gandhi the prime minister.

Parliament has learned the lesson that if the responsibility of suppliers is not spelt out, many Bhopals could happen. Sadly, Manmohan Singh has undone by signing the Convention what Parliament has institutionalised by law. That the two houses will see the debate revived about the suppliers' liability is of little satisfac-

tion because the harm done through the Convention cannot be undone. It is an international convention, which, I believe, cannot be overruled by domestic legislation.

I am surprised that neither the BJP, nor the Left, has made an issue of the convention. In fact, I have not seen much of criticism either. The media too has kept quiet. Maybe, both the opposition and the media have not yet realised the repercussions of the Convention, which ensures that the suppliers will now have a limited liability in the event of a Bhopal-style nuclear accident.

Could New Delhi have paid the price? The story circulating is that President Obama would push India's case to be included as a member of the elite nuclear weapons club comprising the US, China, Great Britain, France and Russia. This is said to be a stepping- stone to becoming a permanent member with veto rights at the equally elite United Nations Security Council. Moreover, this status will open India's access to advanced and controlled technologies, as well as the flow of advanced military, civilian and dual use technologies that are currently not available to India.

As I look back, I come to the conclusion that India's entire nuclear energy programme is a cloak and dagger story. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who asked Homi Bhabha to initiate the nuclear energy programme, may not have had the bomb in view, but he definitely had the glory of authorising the infrastructure to preserve our options.

The truth about when we decided to go for the bomb is in all likelihood contained within the Bhabha papers that are currently "preserved" within the confines of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) in Trombay. I have tried to have access to those papers, but have drawn a blank. I believe only a select few have been allowed to look at them. They include the official archivist at BARC, Indira Chowdhury, who has written an uncritical, glowing biography of Bhabha.

It is ironical that the clearance of colossal nuclear energy plans coincides with the 25th anniversary of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which has championed the cause of hundreds of thousands of displaced tribals facing destruction with the completion of the Sardar Sarovar dam

The major point of contrast, of course, is on the question of land. For the government is offering the guaranteed, subsides availability of land to international and domestic investors, even as the fertile land of tribals and farmers face imminent submergence.

That the "damning" of Narmada -- with 30 big and about 3,000 small dams planned to be built across the river -- is a tragedy admitted even by Union Minister of Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh. "I am not anti-dam wallah," Ramesh said. "But the fact remains that the Narmada project, one of the best planned projects in the world, has been one of the worst implemented," he said. "I have to say that we have betrayed the people in the case of the Narmada project," he continued.

A total of 243,787.558 hectares of land has been allotted to industries under the various MoUs signed. Out of this, 49,704.81 hectares is government land, 12,487.719 hectares is forest land and the remaining 194,082.748 hectares is agricultural land acquired by industries. Compared to this, the total amount of land needed to rehabilitate those displaced by the Narmada dam projects, according to Medha Patkar, leading the anti-dam agitation, is only 61,000 hectares.

But then the Narmada leaders do not have the clout that the American nuclear plant suppliers have. Manmohan Singh has even bypassed Parliament to make it possible for them to come to India. But he has not, even after giving a promise, done anything to relocate thousands who have been driven out of their homes and hearths to enable the dam to come up.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.