

Most blindness caused by cataract is preventable

Want of financial assistance an impediment

We find ourselves at a loss for words when confronted with the fact that 650,000 out of a total of 750,000 people go blind each year, ought not to have gone blind since their cataract condition was curable. They lost their precious eyesight for want of finance and medical services. These were the subjects of discussion at a roundtable conference held recently where speakers drove home some unsavoury facts about the dismal condition of eye treatment services in the country.

Unpleasant as it may sound, the bulk of Bangladeshi people reside overwhelmingly in the rural areas are bereft of requisite medical facilities that cater to cataract treatment. The treatment of cataract which causes a clouding of the natural lenses in the eye resulting in impaired vision that ultimately leads to blindness. As stated earlier, this condition can be successfully treated through operation. As 90% of the medical specialists and paramedics involved in the treatment of this condition reside, not in the district towns and villages but in the major metropolitan cities, for a patient to receive appropriate and timely treatment, s/he must travel to one of the major cities. Given the nature of disease, the patient must be accompanied by at least one attendant. All this costs money -- money most patients do not have. Given a choice between zero treatment due to lack of finance, the sad reality is that for nearly 9 out 10 patients, it results in blindness.

The time has surely come for those who have been fortunate enough to be successful in life to show compassion for their less than fortunate brethren. Thanks to advances in medical science and the nature of the disease itself, treatment of cataract is not expensive like cancer treatment. And it is not only the wealthy that can make a difference by extending a helping hand. Were financial and corporate institutions like banks and conglomerates to get involved in fundraising, there is little to suggest why 90% of patients who go blind today could not be with sight tomorrow.

Death from drowning

A much-neglected child killer

A Unicef report highlighting the scourge of child fatalities through drowning in Bangladesh presents a serious health issue. What makes an appalling reading is the fact that it remains largely undetected and unrecognised as a concern. Therefore, it is neglected and not put on the radar screen of the government, health ministry and child health and welfare organisations.

The rate of mortality from drowning is one among every four children aged between one and four years. The incidence of deaths is that much high in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand countries which experience moderate to severe flooding.

It is disquieting to note that more children die from drowning than from diseases like measles, polio, whooping cough, tetanus, diphtheria and tuberculosis. While there are vaccines and standard antidotes against all these child diseases, the only method to effectively curb drowning is to resort to prevention. A vast majority of such deaths are preventable because these tend to occur within a close proximity to households. Only children wandering out of sight stray into local water bodies and hazard of different kinds.

The preventive interventions can come in two tested ways: First, eighty percent reduction in deaths can be achieved by placing children under localised nurseries when their mothers are out at work. The second method tried out with 90 percent success consists in participation of babies in *SwimSafe* programme meaning swimming and safe rescue training module.

With such affordable interventions, all we need now is awareness building in communities on do's and don'ts and sensitising mothers about ways to avert the hidden but manageable dangers.

When one learns that the actual figure of deaths by drowning among Bangladeshi children exceeds known death toll, the government, NGOs, local bodies and communities will have to get their acts together. They must work in concert with the Unicef in tandem to provide the necessary infrastructure including logistics to enable parents to save their babies from drowning.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 26

1879

Russia and the United Kingdom sign the Treaty of Gandamak establishing an Afghan state.

1908

At Masjed Soleyman in southwest Persia, the first major commercial oil strike in the Middle East is made.

1942

World War II: The Battle of Bir Hakeim takes place.

1972

The United States and the Soviet Union sign the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

1986

The European Community adopts the European flag.

1991

Zviad Gamsakhurdia becomes the first elected President of the Republic of Georgia in the post-Soviet era.

1998

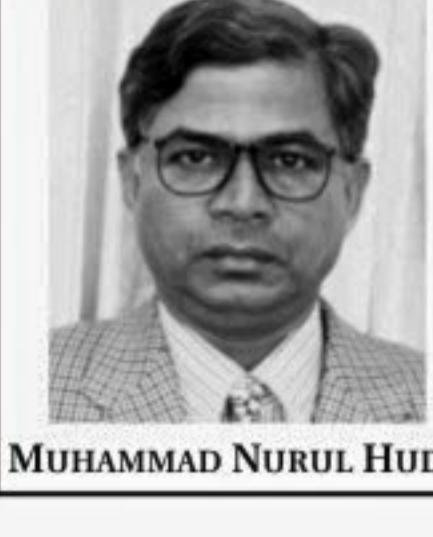
Veterans reject Japanese 'sorrow.' Emperor Akihito of Japan speaks of his "pain" over the suffering inflicted by his country during World War II, but war veterans feel he does not go far enough.

2000

Hezbollah celebrates Israeli retreat.

STRAIGHT LINE

Influencing law enforcement responses



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

In the modern world policing cannot be totally independent of government in all matters. For example, policing requires

funding, and that funding comes from public money raised in tax or local government revenue and administered by some level of government. Whether the money for policing is raised from local taxes, state or national government budgets or a mixture of these, the ability to increase or withhold funds enables the funding agency to exercise serious constraints upon policing.

In a modern democracy operating under the separation of power system all three branches of government can exercise a form of constraint over the police. The executive, exercises financial control, appoints (and can dismiss) the chief officer and often other senior ranks. The legislature can define police powers and restrictions on those powers, and include in Police Acts or other statutes discipline codes and any other regulations that might be felt necessary by parliament. The judiciary, too, can exercise some control over police, certainly in common law systems, by setting precedent which establishes acceptable police practice.

Thus police are constrained rather than controlled which establishes by the legislature, judiciary and executive, and within these parameters police retain the right to carry out their tasks as they choose. The line is a fine one, and government starts to control police when finance is provided or withheld for particular policing schemes, or when senior officers are appointed to fulfil the particular whims of the executive. At the extremes, the independence of police from any control and absolute government control of police are both undesirable.

An alternative form of government control is by the executive appointing a particular chief officer whose views on policing accord with those of the appointing body, which almost implies a contractual obligation to carry out policing in the manner required. Once again, this has its dangers, in that once appointed the chief officer may well

become the government puppet, placing police firmly under government control.

The whole society has an interest in the way it is policed, but certain groups within it have either more interest than others, or more power to affect the way policing is carried out. Consideration of the interests and influence of particular groups or sections of society will help to establish the role each can play in police accountability. The interest shown in different aspects of policing by various groups can conveniently be divided in two categories -- professional and personal interest.

The interest shown by politicians, courts, media, etc., is professional in that these groups have duties that affect and are affected by police. Members or representatives of the community, who may be actively involved in police matters like Neighbourhood Watch volunteers, or be members of groups who have, or fear, bad relations with the police, or even be private individuals who have had bad experiences of police, have a personal interest in policing matters.

Perhaps the most

important of the professionally interested groups within society are elected politicians. Nevertheless, even a back-bench member of parliament has a guaranteed forum, parliament itself, for raising issues about police, and members of the government have even more authority.

The media themselves have considerable power of hold both individuals and groups accountable, and police are no exception. At worst, the media are self-appointed pursuers of perceived wrongdoers, but at best painstaking investigative journalism can shine a light into dark, corrupt corners and keep it there until something is done about it.

Other matters brought to public attention by the media are the worldwide television showing of the videotape of the Rodney King beating in 1991 which forced a full inquiry and include police racism and violence in Los Angeles, and the publication in a Sunday tabloid newspaper of photographs of a senior detective apparently enjoying a Cyprus holiday with a notorious

London gangland figure, which prompted the Humphries corruption inquiry in London during the 1970s.

Although there is a danger of bias, as with any media reporting, unless the media of any society develops a witch-hunt against its police, or decides its police can do no wrong, the media have an important role in maintaining the style of policing acceptable to the public. Even though the police are not formally answerable to the media, if the media choose to make a story out of a particular incident in which police behaved well or badly, then some response from police is called for.

If an incident gets media coverage, public opinion is largely formed by the immediate news story and the subsequent full investigation rarely rates the same level of publicity.

The importance of the media cannot be overestimated, in that it is the prime source of information for the public on all matters of which individuals do not have personal or specific professional knowledge.

The public's relationship with its police is largely dependent on how the public perceives its police, and those perceptions are largely determined by the media.

Despite the verdict of not guilty by the jury in the Rodney King case, the video shown on world-wide television had convinced many millions of people that the police officers involved had carried out an unwarranted and brutal assault, and that the Los Angeles Police Department was under a serious cloud.

Police organisations have been forced to shed their traditional reluctance to speak to the press, and are more likely to respond to media questions. This is, in some respects, a potentially hazardous course, especially where a criminal investigation is continuing. In Britain, particularly, sub judice rules preclude publications of comments which may prejudice or anticipate a court ruling.

Unfortunately, the police response to a media inquiry about a particular complaint against police that "[a] full enquiry will be carried out, and to avoid prejudicing that no further comment is possible," is often seen by the public as the response of an organisation with something to hide.

While police as an investigating agency are prevented by sub judice rules from giving details of suspects, opinions, suspicions or apportionment of blame, few such restrictions apply to members of the public, who often choose to be interviewed giving their own highly coloured eye-witness account of an incident: this account may well be the only one that is heard by the public.

The courts, and by extension other parts of the justice system such as public prosecution departments and defence lawyers, are also interested parties in policing, with significant power to affect police behaviour. In case of flagrant breaches of acceptable standards of police behaviour, where individuals are subjected to physical or human rights abuses, police officers may appear as defendants in criminal or civil cases to be dealt with by the courts.

Public goodwill and support have a very different part to play in determining the manner in which society is policed from the part played by the professional groups discussed earlier. If public support can be maintained, then this provides the grassroots feedback that is vital to modern community policing: without it, indeed, there can be no mutual understanding, cooperation and respect between police and community.

Modern policing increasingly encourages public involvement. Even one individual having a small involvement with police in Neighbourhood Watch, for example, can act as a conduit for information from society to its police and vice versa. Community policing would struggle to survive without public involvement on relevant committees.

While the effect of legislation and the courts particularly is to set limits to police action, individuals within the community taking a personal interest in policing can affect more positive results in encouraging strategies rather than setting limits. This is not to claim that personal interest groups do not have a role in establishing minimum behavioural standards for policing, but that they, more than any other group, have a chance to influence positive changes by promoting more effective and relevant strategies and approaches in policing.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Can Brazil stop Iran

BERNARD ARONSON

BRAZIL, the saying used to go, is the land of the future -- and always will be. But when Brazil's President, Dilma Rousseff, visits the White House next week, she will come as the leader of a country whose future has arrived.

With huge new offshore oil discoveries and foreign investment flooding in, Brazil's economy, growing twice as fast as America's, has surpassed Britain's to become the world's seventh largest. As a member of the Group of 20 and host of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, Brazil is an emerging global leader.

But there is one area where it has an opportunity to lead and has failed to: preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Brazil should take the bold step of voluntarily ending its uranium enrichment program and calling on other nations, including Iran, to follow its example.

Brazil started off as a force for nonproliferation. It voluntarily placed its nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision in 1991 and later joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. But in 2004, Brazil, home to the world's fifth largest uranium reserves, also proclaimed that all states had an "inalienable right" to enrich uranium for "peaceful purposes." It then constructed an enrichment facility and

fought with the IAEA for more than a year before giving inspectors access.

Brazil says its enrichment program is for peaceful purposes, and there is no reason to doubt it. The treaty permits signers to produce enriched uranium to fuel commercial and research reactors, store the radioactive fuel and reprocess spent fuel as long as all nuclear facilities are subject to IAEA oversight.

But its greatest flaw is that the same facilities that enrich uranium for peaceful purposes can also be used to enrich it further for nuclear weapons. And reprocessed fuel from peaceful reactors yields plutonium that can be used in nuclear bombs. By exploiting this "enrichment loophole," North Korea developed a covert program to reprocess spent fuel, withdrew from the treaty and, soon after, developed nuclear weapons. Iran is trying to do the same.

Of the countries now operating or constructing nuclear energy or research reactors under the treaty, more than 40 also have the capabilities to build nuclear weapons by exploiting this loophole. If Iran develops this capability, it could, as President Obama has warned, exert inexorable pressure on Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey to quickly pursue nuclear weapons themselves.

Brazil has unique standing among developing nations to address this proliferation danger because of its historic, nationalist defense of enrich-

ment. If it were to renounce its right to enrich uranium in the name of international peace, close its enrichment facility, embrace a longstanding United Nations proposal to accept enriched uranium from the IAEA, let the agency reprocess its spent fuel -- essentially the deal offered to Iran -- and call on other states that have signed the treaty to do the same, it would transform the nuclear debate.

A new Brazilian stance would take away Iran's principal argument that the advanced nuclear weapons states are pursuing a form of "nuclear apartheid" by pulling up the enrichment "drawbridge" before developing nations have a chance to cross.

It would also give Iran a face-saving way to join other developing nations in a new multilateral effort to suspend enrichment rather than appearing to yield to Western sanctions and threats. Finally, if Brazil and other developing nations were to give up enrichment, it would make possible a new concerted international effort to close the enrichment loophole permanently by amending the nonproliferation treaty.

There are obstacles. Powerful commercial and military constituencies have a vested interest in continuing Brazil's enrichment program, and Brazilian nationalists would have to be mollified. Thus, it is vital that Brazil be perceived as acting on its own rather than yielding to pressure from Washington.

Still, the United States could offer

incentives behind closed doors. Obama is weighing proposals to reduce America's fully operational nuclear arsenal by 30 percent or even more. Brazil currently leads a group of eight non-nuclear states that are pressuring nuclear powers, including the United States, to deliver on their treaty commitments and move toward eventual nuclear disarmament -- and if there were a breakthrough on this front Brazil would be given substantial credit. Congress and the White House could also revisit the punitive tariff on Brazil's sugar-cane-based ethanol, which forces Americans to rely on more expensive corn-based ethanol and drives up the global price of food.

Renouncing its enrichment rights would overnight catapult Brazil into a position of global leadership on the most urgent security challenge facing the international community. And Brazil's leadership would inevitably shape the context for any future discussions about Brazil's permanent membership on an expanded United Nations Security Council -- one of its longstanding ambitions.

At a moment when the world is facing the prospect of war with Iran, Rousseff has the opportunity to make a courageous overture to help defuse the crisis; she should seize it.

The writer, a private equity manager, was assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs from 1989 to 1993.

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