can help stop the spread of germs and prevent illnesses like influenza, bronchitis, swine flu, diphtheria, measles, conjunctivitis, leprosy, chicken pox and scabies among many more, not to mention acne and other skin problems and diseases.

Hand washing requires no effort and is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of many types of infections and illnesses. It has the potential to save more lives than any single vaccine or medical intervention and billions of dollars in medical expenses and medicines.





There are more than 3.5 million children under the age of five who die every year from diarrhoeal disease and pneumonia–and many are preventable.

Although most people clean their hands with water, medical science tells us it is not enough and the use of soap is essential. A recent study by Michigan State University claims most people wash their hands for only six-seconds whereas 20-seconds is recommended.

To convey the message of hygiene to the populace effectively, it would help ENORMOUSLY if hospitals, diagnostic centres, doctors' surgeries and such like set the example in their own facilities.

It's time the standards of hygiene in Bangladesh were raised with every individual playing their part; preventable diseases prevented, and vile and disgusting bad habits like picking one's nose in public or spitting on the pavement are frowned upon and deemed unacceptable behaviour.

There can never be enough emphasis on good hygiene practices such as washing your hands regularly with soap and running water, cleaning all utensils before cooking and keeping cooking places clean to prevent communicable diseases.

While TV, magazine and newspaper adverts and posters are productive and play an essential and supporting role in conveying the vital messages and importance of hand hygiene to the masses, TV soap operas reign supreme.

People tune in to soap operas to see a reflection of their own mundane boring lives on the small screen in hope they will find escape from, or solutions to, the problems they themselves face. While a 30-second commercial has the power to help convince the viewer s/he should be using brand-X toothpaste, no doubt a 60-minute 'real-life' soap opera has the power to influence the thinking of the entire family.

To harness this enormous subliminal power effectively, it is essential that TV scriptwriters play an active patriotic role and are encouraged (if not forced) by the government (as part of their transmission agreement) to write scenes into their dramas that promote good hygiene practices (and other important society-benefiting issues) that benefit and profit the nation (or cancel their licences).

While the entertainment value of soap operas themselves might be questionable, they can at least serve and help protect the health of their viewers by promoting the proper and beneficial use of soap. After all they are SOAP operas!

If the adage *'cleanliness is next to godliness'* is true; then *'God helps those who help themselves'* is its partner. And the washing of hands properly is as good a place as any to begin.

The writer is a former newspaper publisher and editor, an award winning writer, a humanitarian, human rights advocate, and a long time caring friend of Bangladesh.