

## Antibiotic resistance at an alarming level

Wake up call to ensure their proper use

THE WHO has made an ominous forecast: an estimated 10 million deaths per year and a global gross domestic product 2-3 percent less than would otherwise be by 2050. Such a catastrophe is predicted in view of the rising antimicrobial resistance in people all over the globe. Over-prescription and improper use of antibiotics are the main causes behind their developing resistance against serious diseases. For Bangladesh, where antibiotics can be bought over the counter and are indiscriminately prescribed by even non medical practitioners, this should be a wakeup call.

A report in this paper quotes a top official of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) saying that many patients die in Bangladesh from hospital wounds because the antibiotics have stopped working. A UK-based journal, in a research study, has found that people in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to kidney and liver diseases due to improper use of antibiotics. Forty-four percent doctors prescribe antibiotics without diagnosis as required by WHO guidelines. The research has also found drug companies bribing doctors in cash or kind to prescribe antibiotics.

These findings should be enough to make the government take immediate steps. A comprehensive research is needed to find out the number of deaths and complications due to antimicrobial resistance. Massive awareness campaigns have to be initiated to educate people on the reasons behind antibiotic resistance such as not completing the full course. Doctors, moreover, must be required by law to prescribe antibiotics only after proper medical investigation.

Unless these measures are taken, we will be entering a time when it will be difficult, if not impossible, to fight diseases that were once curable.

## Land ports are a vital infrastructure

Make them fit for optimal utilisation

WE cannot but express our concern over the wretched condition of Bangladesh's land ports with India and Myanmar as called to attention at a seminar on land port development last Sunday. Of the 22 checkpoints, only 10 are operational, of which Benapole alone handles 80 percent of Bangladesh's cross-border trade with India. As a result, the infrastructure bears the burden of heavy traffic, resulting in perishable goods being laid to waste. To make matters unpropitious for cross-border trade, the land port does not have any BSTI outfit, making it difficult for exporters to quickly secure clearance for their products.

The situation is worse in other land ports. It is not understandable how we can expect trade with our neighbours to grow and local businesses to flourish while most of the land ports do not have any office room for government officials, neither do they have any proper warehouse. It is regrettable that we have only one land port at our border with Myanmar, a country that, according to experts, is brimming with business potential. Opening up new land ports with Myanmar will help local industries to flourish.

The government should take immediate steps to improve infrastructural facilities at the land ports along our border with Myanmar and India's north eastern states where the potential for growth in trade is huge and remains largely unrealised.

## COMMENTS

**"Jatka netting on"**  
(September 5, 2015)

**Amina Razia**  
The day is near when our future generation will learn about our national fish from books, and not by seeing them with their own eyes.

**Hashem Mian**  
If this trend continues, hilsa is going to be extinct very soon.

**Abul Fathah**  
Some fishermen and fish traders are devoid of ethics. Implementation of laws is necessary to stop this illegal and unethical netting of jatka.

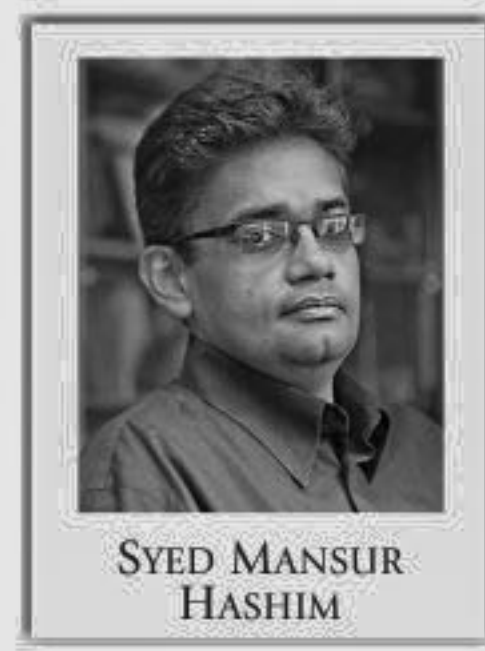
**Hoq Ziaul**  
And they cry that they don't get any hilsa in the river! How will they get if they net jatkas like this?!

**Ahmad Irthiza**  
We just don't have the patience to let these grow!

**Shehzad Mohammad Al Faruk**  
What is the government doing? Can't they take any initiative to stop this?

**Rafiq Islam**  
It's because people do not understand the consequences of buying baby fish. People who buy these fish should know that there won't be enough fish left for their children and grandchildren. If we stop buying them, then the catching would also stop automatically.

# An unmitigated humanitarian disaster



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

SYRIAN refugees are crossing the Aegean in a bid to get to Europe and safety. They are pouring in through Greece, Serbia and Hungary, and countries that

make up the European Union (EU) cannot agree on what to do with this sea of humanity. EU foreign ministers are set to gather in Luxemburg on September 11 and respective member nations are sending their home ministers to Brussels on September 14 in a bid to agree on a long term mechanism to deal with the massive influx of refugees Europe is witnessing presently.

While governments mull and talk about what to do about the unprecedented arrival of so many thousands of people on their doorstep, the United Nations has urged for a single policy to be adopted. U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres stated, "Europe cannot go on responding to this crisis with a piecemeal or incremental approach. No country can do it alone, and no country can refuse to do its part."

At a time when the neo-right parties are on the rise in Europe, opening the doors to the Syrian influx is not easy for any European government. There have been clashes reported in Greece, which is witnessing the arrival of as many as 5,000 migrants and refugees on a single day. Last week, the city of Kos was the stage of an attack on a group of refugees by a violent group of nearly 25 people shouting "go back to your countries" or other such racial slurs. Coupled with the shift in politics and the economic depression that Greece has suffered for years, refugees could not have arrived at a worse time. But then Greece, like Hungary and France, are all merely stops on a journey leading to Germany, the country of choice for most Syrians.

Germany expects to open its borders to as many as one million asylum seekers. Although the media in that country has been generally sympathetic to the plight of refugees, there have been violent clashes. According to data released by the German interior ministry, there have been nearly 340 assaults on refugee shelters since the beginning of

the year, which is a jump of nearly 100 incidents from that of 2014. Germany, the strongest economy in EU, is proposing a quota system that will be under discussion during the emergency summit due to be held on September 14. Ms. Merkel has lashed out at other member countries and the UK for refusing to share the burden of the intake. The quota system proposed by Germans has received less than a lukewarm response from countries like Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and the UK.

meta-analysis of existing studies of costs, impacts and protection', published on February 4, 2014 had the following to say in its Executive Summary: "In a region already hosting millions of Palestine and Iraqi refugees, the unprecedented scale of the Syrian crisis is producing immense additional strains on the resources and capacities of neighbouring governments and the international humanitarian system."

Amongst other things, impact assessments at various levels were done. Major areas of disruption for host

may be in for a long period of forced displacement. This UN body's mandate is to help countries facing an influx of refugees. Apparently there are three categories: voluntary return or repatriation to home countries; resettlement to a third country; or integration into the host country.

As stated before, with the Syrian conflict increasingly looking "protracted," it is unclear when displaced Syrian citizens can return to their homeland. And with the economic downturn in the EU becoming a harsh reality, to what extent



PHOTO: AFP

With some four million Syrians displaced from their homeland since the beginning of the crisis in 2011, the UNHCR (UN's refugee agency) estimates that about 1.8 million have fled to Turkey, some 600,000 ended up in Jordan, and Lebanon, which has a population of four million, took in a million more. The rest are headed to Europe. European policymakers have much to ponder upon on September 14. A study by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs titled 'The Syrian displacement crisis and a Regional Development and Protection Programme: Mapping and

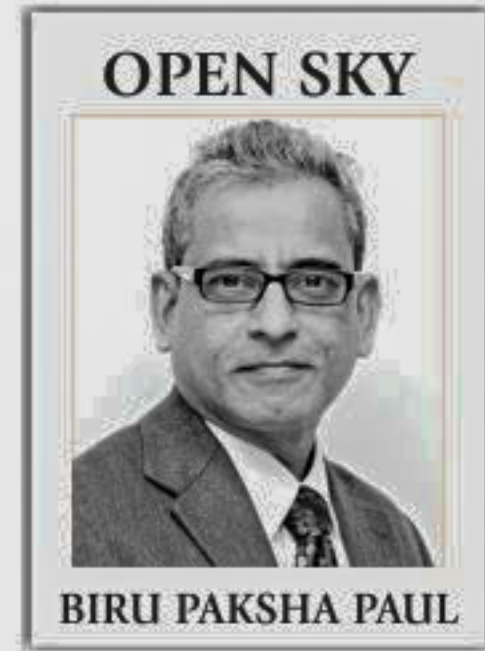
countries included public health services, sharp rise in housing rent, a crisis in the labour markets and fluctuation of market prices for basic commodities and food. At the time of preparing the report, it was probably not thought that the "neighbouring countries" would witness a major shift from the Middle East to mainland Europe.

With no real end in sight to the Syrian conflict, there is major risk of Syrian refugees falling under the category of a "protracted" conflict, which according to UNHCR's latest Global Trends Report, means that the displaced Syrian populace

host EU nations would be willing to accommodate "integration" in a politically-charged atmosphere is open to speculation. What is and should be at the forefront of European politicians' collective mindset is that the tens of thousands of Syrian civilians have to be accommodated on the grounds of compassion. They did not choose to endure a harrowing journey through hostile territory with their children and their old to be turned away at the gates of Europe because legislation dictates it so.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

# Stimulating the capital market



BIRJU PAKSHA PAUL

AFTER the boom and bust of the stock market in 2010-2011, the impression of the capital market has changed dramatically. Wrong concepts are responsible for impeding further developments in the share market.

However, in a growing economy such as ours, the role of the stock market must be revived to remain at the cutting edge of competition with other emerging nations. Just bank-led financing for development is inadequate and risky. A balanced diet of both the banking sector and the capital market is essential to ensure the rapid expansion of businesses and industry, thus leading to a healthy economy for Bangladesh.

The crash of 2010-2011 is responsible for three negative impacts: 1) abnormal gains for a few while enormous losses for many; 2) repulsion and negative image of the stock market and; 3) discouragement of foreign portfolio investment. On the other hand, at least two positive effects were achieved: 1) the market has corrected to reflect companies' potential to a great extent; and 2) excessive craziness for ballooning stock gains has plummeted. As a result, whatever growth we are recently witnessing in the stock market, is more resilient and linked with economic fundamentals. The collapse has left behind a lesson for us: if you are getting an abnormal rate of return, something wrong lies inside the stock. We need to consider this abnormal growth as a bubble developing phase. The bubble will burst soon and you need to sell the stock before you thrash your fortune.

The question of how to judge a normal rate of return has always been hard to answer even in an efficient market. The 2010-2011 crash

warranted a greater role of regulators who should investigate whether huge manipulation is going on inside a stock that has skyrocketed of late. There must be something suspicious about the traders of the company. Even an erudite person like Alan Greenspan, the longest serving chair of the US Federal Reserve, went wrong in assessing the Wall Street in the mid-2010s. He claimed that US economic fundamentals were sound. Later on, he tried to justify his blunder in a testimony to the US Congress by arguing that the American collapse was a once-in-a-century credit tsunami. While Greenspan can afford going wrong, our shareholders cannot. Hence, we need to develop stricter rules and punish the wrongdoers to protect our shareholders, thereby developing a healthy capital market.

The best way to create the most congenial climate for the stock market is to create an ambience of transparency and governance, and secondly, to ensure a uniform and consolidated low interest regime. If the risk-free deposit rate is greater than or even closer to the rate of return from the risky stock market, dreaming for a healthy capital market is sheer absurdity.

A sensible person will never go to the stock market for a 12 percent return, if he can easily earn similar returns from national saving certificates or *sanchaypatra*, which is 100 percent risk free. The risk premium is derived by deducting the risk free rates from returns on risky assets such as stocks. A high risk premium above 10 percent is needed to attract investors toward the stock market. The earlier volatility in the Dhaka Stock Index (DSI) has set the stage for expecting higher risk premiums in Bangladesh. The DSI peaked almost close to 9000 and then cascaded down to 2600 within a short time, torpedoing stockholders' confidence and creating enough justification for expecting high risk premiums in the future. Since we have little control over stock market returns, the only way to stimulate the capital market is to lower all sorts of deposit rates. Before doing this, we

need to first reduce the huge disparity among deposit rates.

The reverse repo rate is 5.25 percent, which is essentially commercial banks' deposit rate with the central bank. The average deposit rate available for customers in the banking system is about 7 percent. But the *sanchaypatra* rate is close to 12 percent. This type of yawning disparity does not reflect a notion of uniformity or consolidation in the deposit rate structure. This fatty band of deposit rates is detrimental to the growth of the stock market. The upper line of the band has already made stock market investments unattractive.

The risk free rate (12 percent) plus risk premium (say, 10 percent) requires well above 20 percent rate returns from the stock market. And this ambitious rate of return is hard to achieve. A potential stock buyer will naturally be discouraged to make his foray into the capital market. Not considering this threshold effect of the deposit rate on the survival of stocks exposes our conscientious ignorance to the capital market.

The central bank has been successful in motivating commercial banks to reduce all sorts of interest rates. Combating inflation by the central bank has paved the way for interest rates to slide. Inflation would have been much lower had the government adjusted our domestic fuel prices to the incredibly low global oil prices. A lower inflation would give a lower deposit rate, which would again invigorate the stock market.

Despite imperfections, we must do our best to empower the stock market. Neglecting this market will be self-defeating. It will eventually slow down the pace of growth in manufacturing and services. The rational mindset in an emerging economy should vouch that the stock market is our responsibility and we all need to take care of it with integrity and by adopting the best practices from around the world.

The writer is chief economist of Bangladesh Bank.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Don't hike gas and electricity prices

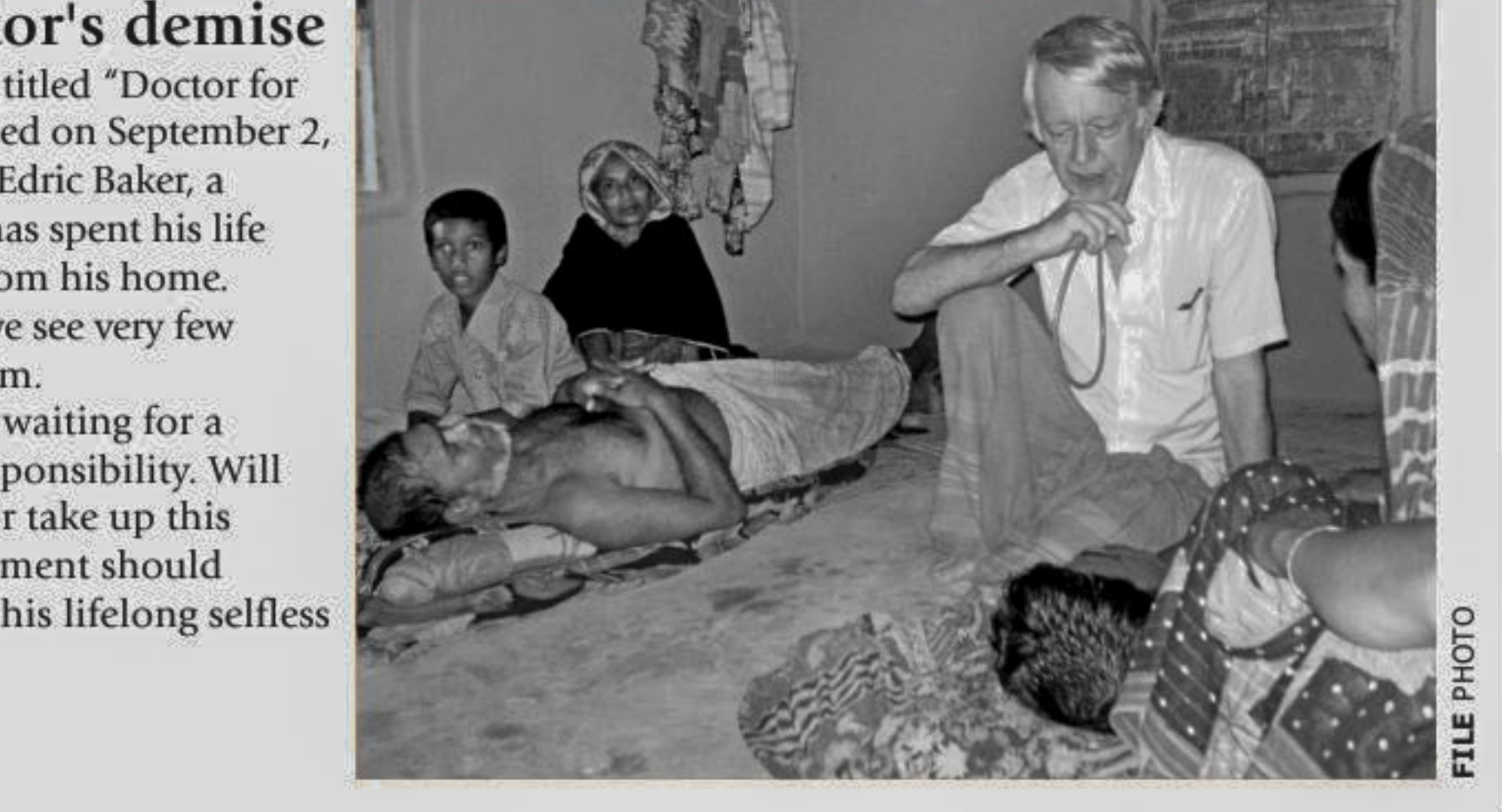
Ignoring people's protests, the government went ahead and raised the price of gas and electricity from September 1, 2015. This move of the government is most unjust as BPC and Titas are making a huge profit, particularly as the cost of power generation has gone down considerably.

Industrialists, political parties and common people are protesting this move of the government. The price hike must immediately be withdrawn because it will increase the cost of production and affect the country's export business. In fact, we are living in a very strange country where the price of everything goes up except people's lives!  
Nur Jahan  
Chittagong

### A dedicated doctor's demise

TDS's last page news report titled "Doctor for the poor no more", published on September 2, depicts the greatness of Dr. Edric Baker, a humanitarian doctor who has spent his life serving the poor far away from his home. Nowadays in Bangladesh, we see very few dedicated physicians like him.

Before his death, he was waiting for a successor to take on his responsibility. Will any dedicated young doctor take up this noble venture? Our government should publicly recognise him for his lifelong selfless service to the poor.  
S. A. Mansoor  
Dhaka



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