

FIGHT LEPROSY, FIGHT STIGMA

MD SAZEDUL ISLAM

Leprosy, a long term bacterial infection and one of the scariest diseases of the world, is completely curable with timely and proper treatment. However, due to lack of awareness, many leprosy victims become disabled for the rest of their lives. Due to stigma, superstition and severe consequences of the disease, leprosy is still considered as one of the major health problems in the developing and least developed countries like Bangladesh.

According to National Leprosy Elimination Programme (NLEP), there were 26,479 people from 1985 to 2015 in Bangladesh with physical deformity caused by this disease. Some 203,423 people were diagnosed as infected with leprosy in the country during the period. The data indicated that over ten percent affected people became disabled due to the disease each year.

Leprosy is a chronic infection caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae*. It is characterised by severe disfiguring skin sores and nerve damage in the arms and legs, says experts from Leprosy Mission International-Bangladesh (TLMI-B), an NGO working on leprosy.

According to TLMI-B experts, integrated health services can reduce the sufferings caused by leprosy. The integrated health services include five key areas of treating the disease—raising community awareness on leprosy, detecting new leprosy case, adequate supply of multi-drug therapy (MDT), ensuring leprosy complication management, and rehabilitation supports.

Raising awareness among victims, their relatives and neighbours is also a very important part of the integrated health services because, prevailing misconception and superstition regarding the disease has been hampering its eradication. The message has to be disseminated that the treated persons are no longer infectious. People should be informed about the symptoms of leprosy and the availability of treatment facilities.

Diagnosis and treatment of leprosy is available free of cost in Bangladesh. However, some parts of our country do not have the supply of MDT, a combination of drugs used for the treatment of leprosy. We have only three leprosy hospitals but those are not adequately equipped at all. In these hospitals, equipment and medicines



A 14th century painting depicts two leprosy patients denied entrance to town.

PHOTO COURTESY: WIKIPEDIA



A 26-year-old woman with leprosy lesions.

PHOTO COURTESY: WIKIPEDIA

There are examples of complete rehabilitation of leprosy patients through vocational trainings and microcredit programmes. To rehabilitate the patients, medical staff members also need to be familiar with the rehabilitation initiatives so that they can support the patients psychologically.

To ensure integrated medical services for leprosy patients, the major thrust of our efforts must focus on integrating leprosy treatment into the general health services. This will improve access to leprosy services and reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by persons affected by the disease.

Integrated services also mean day-to-day patient management; recording and reporting regularly about the patients' condition become the responsibility of general health staffs. It has become the major strategic component of the WHO's leprosy elimination strategy. The need for integration has been recognised in all the leprosy endemic countries.

The main challenge of Bangladesh to implement the strategy is the lack of expert and trained manpower. "If the government takes necessary steps to introduce the services at least all the medical college hospitals in the country, it would go a long way in reducing leprosy crisis. It would be better if the services are made available at district level general hospitals also," says Jiptha Boiragee, programme support coordinator of TLMI-B. We can get a leprosy-free country by defeating the disease if steps are taken in line with the integrated services.

The writer is a freelance journalist. He writes on health and development issues.

should be provided to do reconstructive surgery as many patients may suffer from amputations due to severe infection. On the other hand, multi-drug treatment sometimes produces adverse reactions in the patients' body which need be minimised by correct and timely treatment.

"ART DOES NOT EXIST ONLY TO ENTERTAIN, BUT ALSO TO CHALLENGE ONE TO THINK, TO PROVOKE, EVEN TO DISTURB, IN A CONSTANT SEARCH FOR TRUTH."

BARBRA STREISAND
Singer, Songwriter, Actor



PEARLS OF WISDOM

"HE WHO WORKS WITH HIS HANDS IS A LABORER. HE WHO WORKS WITH HIS HANDS AND HIS HEAD IS A CRAFTSMAN. HE WHO WORKS WITH HIS HANDS AND HIS HEAD AND HIS HEART IS AN ARTIST."

FRANCIS OF ASSISI
Roman Catholic Friar and Preacher



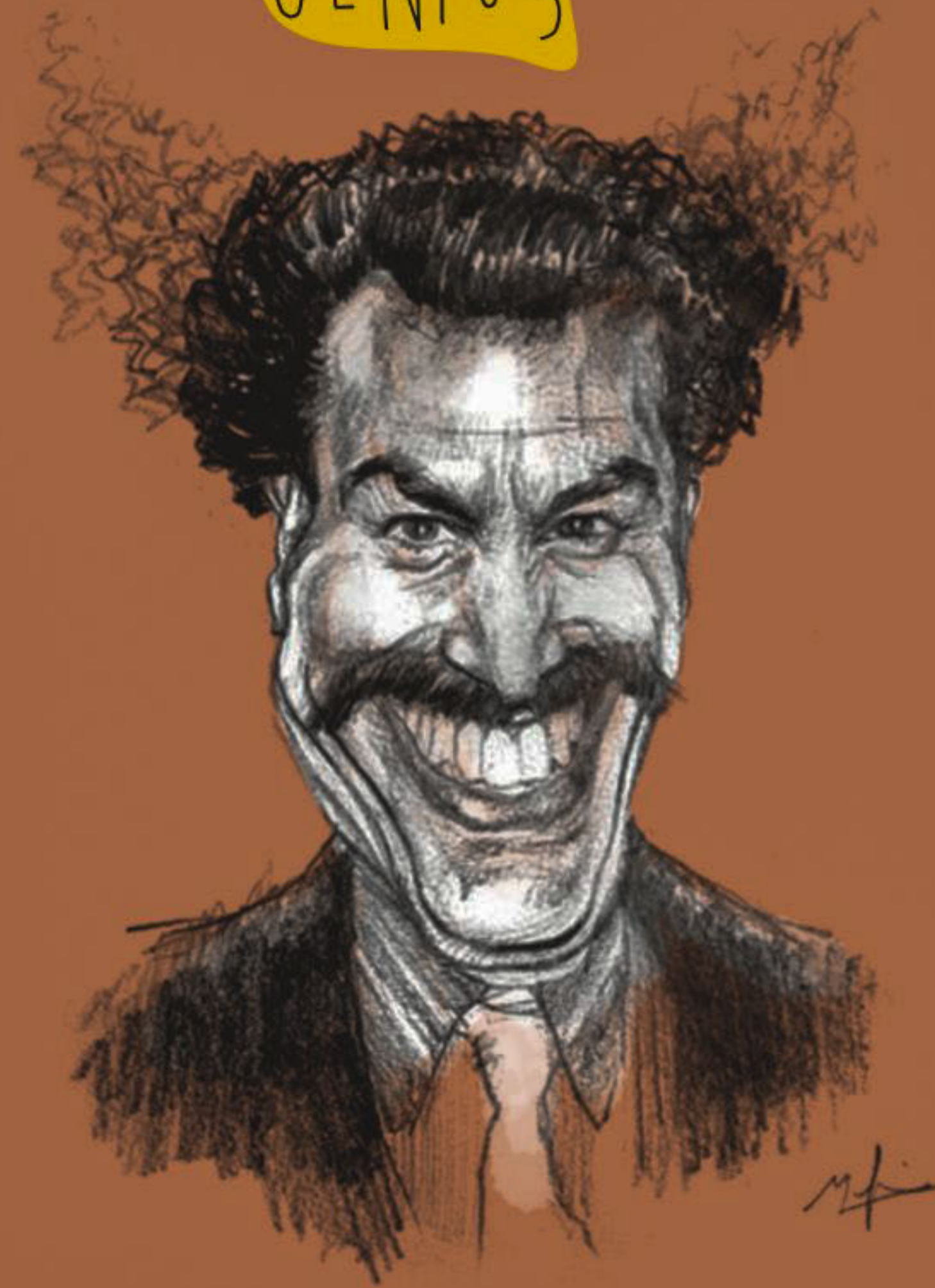
"IF WE, CITIZENS, DO NOT SUPPORT OUR ARTISTS, THEN WE SACRIFICE OUR IMAGINATION

ON THE ALTAR OF CRUDE REALITY AND WE END UP BELIEVING IN NOTHING AND HAVING WORTHLESS DREAMS."

YANN MARTEL
Spanish-born Canadian Author

AN APPLE A DAY

MAD GENIUS



SASHA BARON COHEN

(Born October 13, 1971)

This week's Mad Genius is General Aladeen himself. Sasha Baron Cohen is the English actor, comedian and screenwriter widely known for creating and portraying four fictional characters: Ali G, Borat Sagdiyev, Bruno Gehard and Admiral General Aladeen. Baron Cohen was named Best Newcomer at the 1999 British Comedy Awards for The 11 O'Clock Show, and since then, his work has been further recognised with two BAFTA Awards for Da Ali G Show, several Emmy nominations, a nomination for an Academy Award for Writing Adapted Screenplay, and a Golden Globe for Best Actor for his work in the feature film Borat. At the 2012 British Comedy Awards, he received the Outstanding Achievement Award, accepting the award while reprising his Ali G character. In 2013, he received the BAFTA Charlie Chaplin Britannia Award for Excellence in Comedy.

"Dictators are ludicrous characters, and, you know, in my career and in my life, I've always enjoyed sort of inhabiting these ludicrous, larger-than-life characters that somehow exist in the real world.

To single out a particular group and say we can't make a joke about them is almost a form of prejudice and it's kind of patronising.

I think if you come from a history of persecution you have to develop a sense of humour.

I think I think in the moment. So when I'm in character, I'm in character, and I'm obviously thinking about what's going on around me, but it's easier to do stuff when you're in character."

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA AND BRAINY QUOTES

STARSTORY
thestarmagazine@gmail.com

NO MORE STRANGERS

I always go for morning walks as a part of my exercise regime. Last week, after finishing my walk I met someone very interesting. As I was getting out of the park, I saw an old man sitting on a bench solving some word puzzles on a book. It seemed to me that he got stuck at one point and was talking to himself about the possibilities of his problem. I got closer to see what he was doing and as our eyes met, I smiled at him. He did not smile back, rather he called me closer and asked me to help him with the puzzle. He made it look like we knew each other for long. I happily joined him and helped him with a few word meanings. We solved them for half an hour and I promised him to do so the next day as well. For the past one week we are doing this little activity together and both of us are getting to learn many things from each other. Funny how the most random incidents can you bring you the fondest memories.

Riad Hasan
Uttara, Dhaka



OUTRAGEOUS!

Why do some landlords discriminate against anyone involved in music, when it comes to renting out their houses? In Bangladesh, housing discrimination is nothing uncommon, it is rampant especially when it comes to renting out residences to bachelors. We were looking for a place for my musician friend and two of his roommates. My friend, who is currently a student, sings and plays guitar. He also gives guitar lessons and this is how he earns money. But whenever this came up in the conversation with every landlord we went to, my friend and his roommates were denied. Finally someone agreed, but said to my friend that they won't be allowed to practice at home. He did not have any other options, so he agreed to that. I don't know why people judge others based on their professions.

Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury
Mirpur, Dhaka