

Problems and prospects of health sector

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ALMOST all people including the common mass and the intellectuals are very much critical of the health sector of the country. They have different types of complaints, anxieties and tension about this sector. For instance, scarcity of hospitals, and the paucity of doctors and so on. There are no instruments. Though a few are available, they are not fit for use; lack of laboratories for test and no physical facilities, inaccurate results of medical tests and lacking of nursing facilities in the hospitals. Those criticisms are not baseless. For instance, a few months ago a photo-journalist caught in his camera that the cataract operation was being done by the unskilled workers like peon, guard, sweeper, nurse etc., in a government hospital in exchange only Tk.1,500. This kind of news is enough to prove the grave situation prevailing in the health management sector. The hesitation, doubt, curiosity and anxiety appear in the minds of almost all sorts of intellectual people including the common people as to how to tackle the anarchy and mismanagement of the health services of the vast country.

Why are so hesitation, doubt and anxiety about the health sector? Where is the solution of the health problem? Bangladesh, peopled with 14 crores and 40 lacs, is the 9th largest country of the world in respect of population. It measures 1, 47,570 square kilometers and 950 people live in each kilometer. There are 63 district hospitals, 17 medical college hospitals and 38 specialized hospitals in the country. There are 12,500 government appointed doctors in the country. There are 11,500 people under each doctor, which is not acceptable anywhere in the world. There are ten government appointed doctors in each upazila and 38 specialized

hospitals and 12,500 government appointed doctors in the country. Eleven thousand five hundred 11,500 people per physician are too much to accept. If the average population in each upazila is one lac and 51 thousand, there is only one doctor against fifteen thousand and one hundred people. If the Dhaka city and the local towns are excluded, the picture of the ratio between the population and the number of doctors in the villages is very much disappointing. Recently a news report had been published in a daily newspaper that only 18 per cent patients can receive standard treatment and the remaining 82 per cent patients are deprived of the opportunity of standard treatment. These remaining miserable patients have to depend on the quacks, herbal, homeopath and village doctors who lack sufficient level of education, training, and proper knowledge to treat the patients. Recently the government has declared that six thousand more doctors will be appointed in addition to the appointed twelve thousands doctors. To what extent may the development in the proportionate ratio of the population and the doctors be with this appointment? With this proposed appointment, the total number of the doctors will stand at 18,500 for the whole population of 14 crores and 40 lacs. So 7,784 people will come under the services of each doctor. It means that there is no possibility of any remarkable development in the health sector with the appointment of 6,000 more doctors. If the treatment of 5,000 people is brought under one doctor, it needs 30,000 more doctors against 12,000 appointed ones, which is by no means possible for the government. It may be stated again that the absolute and instant solution in the field of education and health services, is by no means entirely possible in a populated country having 14 crores and 40

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lacs people. Regarding this matter, hesitation, anxiety, absurd thought and too much concern for the demand among the intellectuals and common people are beyond the question. Such doubtful concepts are not supposed to harbor which are not realistic. A clear explanation of these is given below. A clear concept is necessary how to think about the welfare of the health sector applying prudence and intelligence instead of doubtful concept. It has been stated above that in respect of population Bangladesh is the 9th largest country in the world. Here nine hundred fifty people live in each square kilometre. According to the concept of thumb-rule, when a country is peopled with more than 10 crores, it is identified as a large country. For instance, Russia, China, India, America, Indonesia, Japan, Bangladesh and Pakistan are such kind of countries. The remaining countries fall under the categories of medium and small. The small and medium sized countries are England, Germany, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia etc. It is possible to bear the entire responsibilities of the health sector in the small and medium sized countries through the government initiative. But it is not possible for the government alone to shoulder the entire responsibilities of the health sector of large country like Bangladesh or India. Whereas the government conducts the entire health service in a thinly populated communist country like North Korea and Cuba. In comparison with the population Srilanka being to some extent a developing country, the govern-



Poor condition of a hospital in Dhaka

ment shoulders the entire responsibilities of its health service. The same question arises again and again to whom the responsibilities of the health and service sectors fall in Bangladesh. Majority of the people including the intellectuals believe that the government alone will some how shoulder the responsibilities of the health related matters of the nation. Because the culture which has been going-on is that the government will bear the responsibilities of health service historically, socially and religiously. Besides, health denotes physical health,

mental health, family health and above all social and national health. So it is not possible for a government to keep itself aloof from shouldering these great responsibilities. But it is possible for the government of big countries including Bangladesh alone to take the whole responsibilities? The common people and the intellectuals should think over it.

It is by no means possible for a densely populated country alone to bear the great responsibilities of health service. We have to realize this bitter reality. Bangladesh is not a communist

country politically. The combination of communism and capitalism may not be the political philosophy. In reality, the poverty stricken Bangladesh is a capitalist government based on the political features, religious culture and economy. It means that Bangladesh government does not own exclusively all the assets and the properties, economic wealth, different production based centers including agriculture as well as industries. Besides, the government does not own exclusively any service sectors either including education and health sectors. The government, whenever desires, cannot solve all sorts of social problems for the lack of economic wealth and capability.

The government conducts the affairs of state with the help of limited income. The tax income source of the Bangladesh government is very negligible. That means the poor suffer everywhere. Why are we poor? Out of 14 crores and 40 lac people only 7 lac people pay tax which is only 0.5 per cent in comparison with the total population. If the government has to take the entire responsibilities of the service sectors, it needs much more money in the budget, which is not possible for the government alone to bear. That is in real perspective the government has been bearing only about 25 per cent expenditure in the health service sector. Whereas the hospitals, clinics in the private sector, doctors, nurses and the management of the private hospitals and the concerned infrastructure facilities have been bearing the remaining about 70 per cent health responsibilities. The government cannot take the total responsibilities of the health

sector. The government is considering to hand over our large portion of health sector to the private sector by enacting law with a view to rendering better health service. Bangladesh government has declared the hospital industry under the Board of Industries as a profitable health industry to encourage the foreign investment in the health sector. The objective is to create an environment of profitable health sector by giving various types of facilities to both the foreign and local investors for the purpose encouraging long term huge investment. The invested foreign capital can be returned to them with easy terms. This is the reality based applicable environment of a big country like Bangladesh. We some common people without understanding the reality only cry at the top of our voice. Saying that, health as well as disease is a commodity which is being sold and bought profitably in the private hospitals in the name of treatment. We do not think it is right. Rather, being addicted to criticism, we keep on criticising the health service as commodity forgetting its necessity and reality.

We are also confused about standard health service. It has been stated before that 18 per cent population receive standard treatment whereas more than 80 per cent of the population are deprived of standard treatment. Actually we are receiving such level of health service as we deserve according to our socio-economic condition and ability. To dream of being a millionaire lying in a rag is merely a day-dream.

Our health service, its scope and qualities have to be developed through government initiative. Gradually the ratio of patients and physicians will have to be brought in favour of health service by increasing the number of trained doctors. The monetary expenditure in health sector for admission of the patients, buying

surgical appliances, medicine and their proper management, etc., preparing service minded-doctors, nurses and health workers and the culture of enriching the related matters including their quality and standard have to be created to the health sector. Side by side, encouraging the private sectors, more hospitals, health clinics, private medical colleges, nursing colleges have to be established with easy terms and conditions. We, being intellectuals, have to think about the reality applying our intelligence for solving the health problem. We have to consider the reality too. For instance, we have to realize that under the capitalist governmental infrastructure, there is no any scope of fixation the price of any commodity including the medical fees. The doors are open to us we have our own choice whether it is a hospital or it is a doctor. To create more alternatives, more hospitals and health clinics have to be set up, more doctors have to be produced, the local and the foreign investments have to be increased and through all those the health sector has to be enriched. Then through the full competition in the health sector, though privately, proper treatment with low expenses will be expected. If it is possible to be successful in implementing this method, the amount of fees in the government and the private hospitals and clinics will come near about equal and it will be affordable for all classes of patients. Then the less solvent patients too will be able to get treatment from the private hospitals and for having been developed the standard of treatment even the well to do patients will neither hesitate nor express disinterest to receive treatment from the government hospitals. □

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