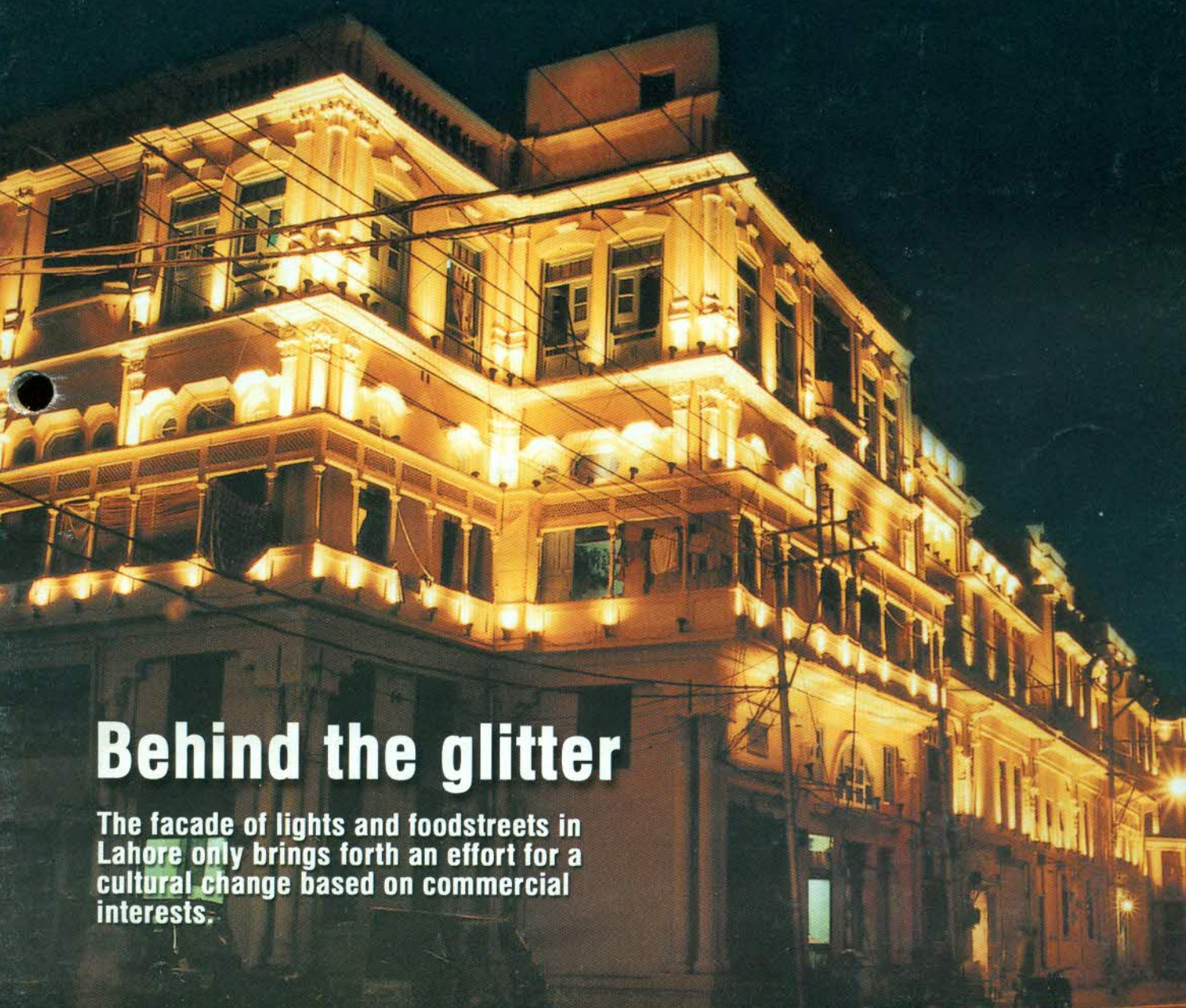


June/July 2003

CONSUMER *Wise*



Behind the glitter

The facade of lights and foodstreets in Lahore only brings forth an effort for a cultural change based on commercial interests.

Water is life. Don't exhaust it.

Save it for others.

Aiming at saving water and its rational consumption, the Water Project of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection works for reducing water related morbidity and mortality by advocating provision of clean drinking water; every eight seconds a child in developing countries dies of water borne illness.

Contact the project team at:

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The budget and the people

The budget is not going to change the disturbing ground realities of over 40 million people living below the poverty line and 80 million illiterates. Will this budget end the agony of the people? Will it ensure their welfare? If no allocation is made for living allowances for the unemployed educated citizens and if there is no protection from the state to the downtrodden, then the budget cannot serve any useful purpose. Reducing the customs duty on luxury vehicles is a shameful joke for the million of citizens who cannot afford to purchase even a bicycle.

Sarwar Khan
Karachi

According to official figures, the level of poverty has increased from 26.6 per cent in 1998-99 to 32.1 per cent in 2003. So the actual number of the people living in poverty has increased by over 11 millions, from 36 million to 47 million during the four years.

In order to reduce poverty, a sustained rise of six per cent in the GDP for many years is required. This is not currently in sight because of the low level of investment. Thus it is obvious that the claims of "economic recovery" and "take-off" made in the budget are based on very fragile foundations.

The government's policy framework has been anti-farmer throughout the past four years, which is directly responsible for an increase in rural poverty. Instead of protecting farmers from the effect of the subsidies, the government under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank has started taxing the agriculture sector by imposing 15 per cent GST on fertilisers and pesticides and raising the prices of electricity and diesel.

The level of unemployment has gone up in the last three years from 5.9 per cent in 1999 to 7.9 per cent in 2003. In order to solve the problem of unemployment, our leaders are often found in television programmes maintaining that education would eradicate all evils. This is a naive thinking because Sri Lanka with 100 per cent literacy has not been able to solve this problem. We must initiate a genuine and durable nation-building process by devising new participatory development strategies, which directly aim at the betterment of under-privileged Pakistan.

Abid Ali
Lahore

What to educate

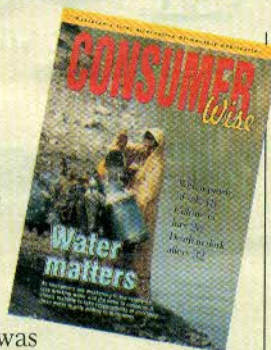
Your story on the promise of free education (Attractive but not effective - April/May) has again highlighted the fact that after 50 years we still do not know how to educate our children. The prospectus of a foreign university says that the pre-requisite for admission for a person who has studied under a Pakistani board was at least graduation, whereas anyone who has studied under an Indian board of education was eligible after intermediate.

The ministry of education ought to ponder over this problem. The following steps should be taken to overcome such difficulties:

- ◆ Privatisation of schools should be stopped.
- ◆ Highly qualified and experienced staff, devoted to teaching, should be appointed for schools and colleges and be paid fairly.
- ◆ If needed, the medium of instruction should be Urdu so that the students can understand better what they are being taught.

There is no harm in changing the medium of instruction to Urdu. Most advanced countries have an educational system in which the medium of instruction is their own native language, even at the university level.

Safwan Khan
Peshawar



No Tobacco Day

It is good that the 'No Tobacco Day' was observed on May 31, though it will not heal the wounds perpetrated by smoking, which is on the rise in the younger generation.

China has the world's 20 per cent population and 30 per cent of its people smoke. China is also the largest cigarette-producing country. Other countries do not lag behind and are promoting smoking.

Smoking does not motivate. It is a depressant. So smoking ads must be stopped all around and smoking should be prohibited in offices and homes. I have noticed that in many shops there is a notice saying, "Thank you for not smoking" but the owners themselves are puffing and polluting the inside air.

Maria Ahmed
Rawalpindi



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The facade of lights and foodstreets in Lahore only brings forth an effort for a cultural change based on commercial interests.

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Sweet catastrophe

300 containers of contaminated betel nuts are awaiting release at the Karachi port and add to the apparently harmless addiction of supari, pan masala, gutka, which has already made oral cancer second most common cancer in Pakistan.

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Private medical colleges - a mirage

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An aggressive media campaign has successfully put the fear of open milk in consumers' hearts. It has come to be associated with germs and diseases. Of course, the packed milk is the answer against germs and diseases.

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I was wrong

A former trade minister of the United Kingdom admits he was wrong in believing that developing countries should undertake trade liberalisation if they want to achieve development.

Losing Lahore

If you have not seen Lahore, you have seen nothing, goes the famous one-liner about the city known for its history and culture. Impulsively one would add to it: Lahore Lahore aye.

But the way things are changing in the city, time is not far when Lahorites would themselves yearn for the lost Lahore.

Nothing wrong with cashing in on the past for revenue, but those who want to give a new look to Lahore are forgetting or ignoring the preservation factor that is so vital in keeping the cities' character alive. Past may be another country, but it is not foreign. When it is changed or damaged, it highlights the follies of the present.

The planners also seem to be forgetting people in their drive of beautifying Lahore. Depriving people of their streets in the name of "foodstreet" only add to their sense of disassociation with the city.

Pitras Bukhari was prophetically worried about Lahore's whereabouts somewhere in the middle of the last century. He saw that the haphazard expansion would lead the city to nowhere. The planners were hardly worried about it. Still Lahore continued to live with history, tradition, and culture.

But all this is changing under the weight of commercial interest. Lahore's sense of accommodating and closeness is being replaced by entertainment, which comes for a price. You have the money, you are part of it. Otherwise you are out.

Lahore needs a strong civic initiative to bring some order to its chaotic outlook. Like any haphazard and huge city, it is infested by stifling congestion, power outages, water shortage, choked gutters, and the poverty in slums. People should always be the first priority in any development and beautification activity. If not the change would always be fake.

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ConsumerWise is bi-monthly publication of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection.

ConsumerWise brings forth consumer perspective on national, regional and global social and economic decision-making.

Acting as a watchdog on the state, the corporate sector and the market, it strives for policies and regulatory frameworks that could ensure protection of consumer rights and promotion of responsible consumer behaviors.

For further information on specific articles, please write to the editor.

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Behind the

The facade of lights and foodstreets in Lahore only brings forth an effort for a cultural change based on commercial interests.

ConsumerWise Report

Driven by commercial interests, Lahore is going through a sea change. On the face of it, the city's historical buildings are illuminated in the night, giving a festive look, and some of its streets are ready to offer foods of all kinds provided you have the money. This is the bright face of the city, promoted as the sign of better times.

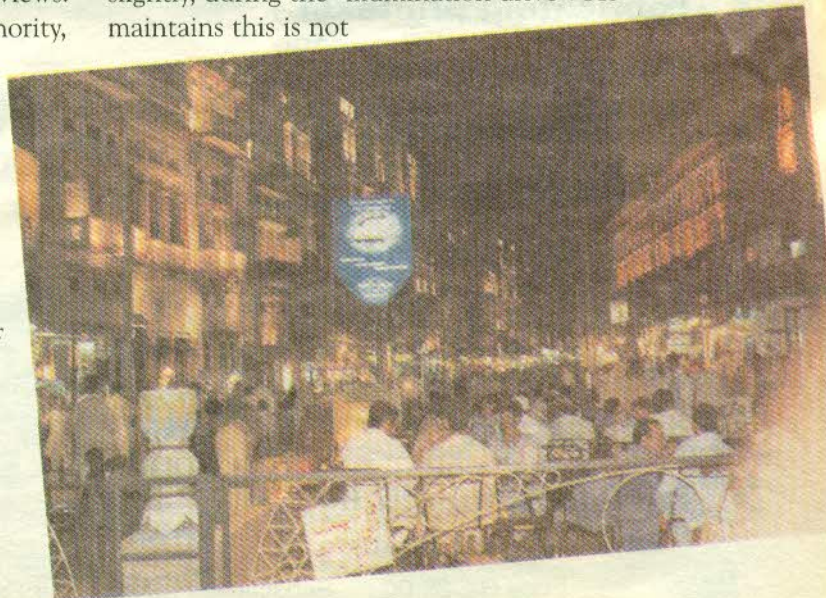
"The living form of our culture has not been presentable," Kamran Lashari, the man behind the change, said in one of his recent interviews. Heading the Parks and Horticultural Authority, Lashari thinks that Lahore's walled city is a "gold mine of tourism". He has been hailed as a person who is making Lahore "clean and beautiful".

But there is more to the glitter of Lahore than meets the eye. Though one may earn the tag of a joy killer, still the question is relevant: does the hullabaloo about "beautification" address problems of Lahore and its inhabitants?

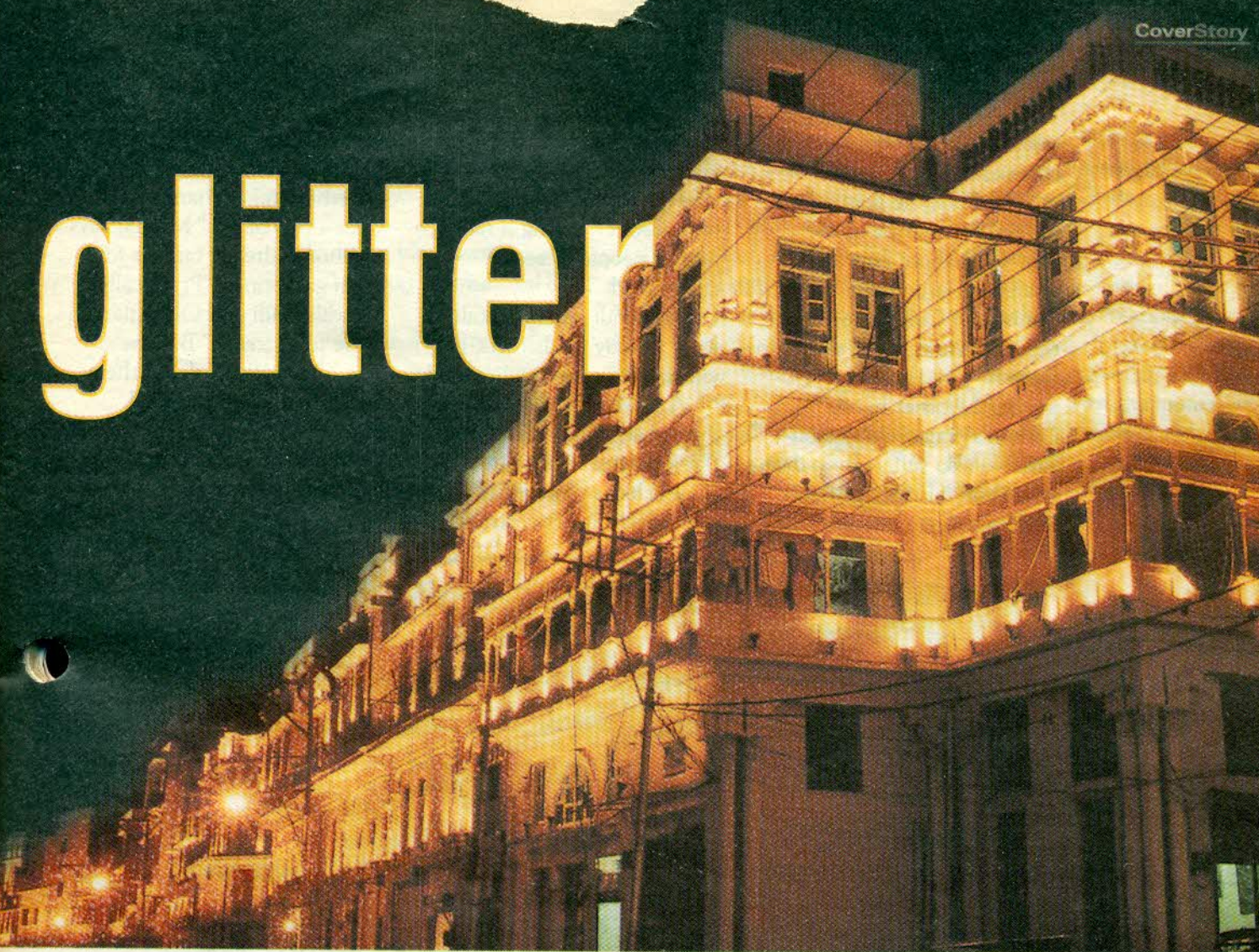
It hides away the problems of a huge city like Lahore. Pollution, unplanned spread of the city, a traffic system bordering on madness and its effects on people's

mental and physical health are lost in the glitter. With this comes the question of changing the character of Lahore as a historical and cultural city by exploiting every historical place for commercial use.

Shafqat Tanvir Mirza, a senior journalist, and an ardent supporter of Punjabi language and culture, wants preservation of cultural and historical heritage in its true form. He rues the fact the Badshahi mosque was damaged, even if slightly, during the "illumination drive". He maintains this is not



glitter



the full picture of Lahore, saying the city is much more than that.

Tanvir says reaction against illumination and the foodstreet is natural when one considers the ever-increasing poverty and other social problems in Pakistan, adding civic problems in other parts of Lahore persist.

"Instead of using brain, the use of executive order mostly leads to complications."

Even this false sense of prosperity has political repercussions. The glitter gives a false impression of prosperity and development that creates a sense of deprivation among other regional and ethnic groups.

Tanvir says veteran politician Wali Khan visited Lahore a few years ago. "He was perturbed to see the canal tastefully adorned with twinkling multi-colour lights, floats and said here (in Lahore) even canal is full of lights, but in NWFP scores of areas don't have electricity."

The PHA wants Lahore Fort, Shalimar Garden, and tombs of Noor Jahan and Jahangir under its control for "illumination, adoration, and beautification". But the federal government's Archaeology Department, which supervises these historical buildings, doesn't see it that way. It fears disfigurement of the historical

places, saying they would be used for commercial purposes.

"We want to protect the sanctity and originality of Mughal era and our department wouldn't let any organisation to damage or alter the characteristics of any place or building," says Director Archaeology, Lahore Region, Mohammad Arif.

However, the archaeology department allowed illumination of these four historical places. "We allowed only illumination, but not commercialisation of these sites because it can spoil the image of structures and disfigure them. We did not allow the PHA people to damage Lahore Fort and Shalimar Garden buildings during fixation of lights. We supervised the whole process by standing with the decorators and preserved the originality of the buildings." The regional director of archaeology adds the provincial authorities did not supervise the work at the Badshahi mosque, which led to holes in the stones of the mosque. He was surprised and shocked that the PHA left the illumination at the mercy of the contractor and his workers, who used chisels and hammers. Arif said the commercialisation of historical places was meaningless. "Nowhere in the world such

assets are being adorned and commercialised."

The PHA, he pointed out, wanted to organise music shows at Lahore Fort and Shalimar Garden, but the Ministry of Culture rejected the idea, viewing it a threat to these historical places.

On the other hand, Lashari's brainchild -- foodstreet -- also suffers from disinterest and mismanagement, leading to less number of visi-

tors after the initial excitement. But there are others who differ with Lashari's idea of foodstreet, saying it has robbed people of access to cheap food. They say Gowalmandi and Anarkali were already foodstreets, providing cheap but quality food.

Aziz Mazhar, a veteran journalist, is appreciative of the foodstreet idea, but maintains it lacks philosophy and real direction. "Foodstreet

means a social gathering -- Majlis -- where the people sit together and exchange views over a cup of tea." Mazhar says Lahore is already famous for such gatherings. "Practically Gowalmandi and Old Anarkali were foodstreets." But the PHA officially declared them food streets and the food prices went out of the common man's reach, he said.

One could easily have *Halwa Puri, Chanay, Haleem,*

End of tranquility

By Muhammad Asim Butt

Modernisation of the old is an old phenomenon. Every generation tries to change the past through its own "standards". But when these standards are applied without taking into account the antiquity factor, what comes out is more often than not comical.

The energetic Kamran Lashari, head of the Parks and Horticulture Authority, may be serious in beautifying the city of gardens, but there seems to be a serious problem with his aesthetics.

Take the example of Lawrence Garden (Bagh-e-Jinnah), one of the most beautiful, tranquil, and fascinating gardens of Pakistan. It was built during the days of the British Raj. The residence for the then governor was built later. It has mosques, libraries, shrines, a cricket ground, lawn tennis and badminton courts, and a vast variety of plants, some of them rare. There is also a big botanical garden attached to it.

The garden had been a source of inspiration for writers like N M Rashid, Nasir Kazmi, Bedi and others. Its privacy and tranquility helped writers to create some of the best Urdu literature.

Unfortunately the PHA is after this privacy and tranquility by holding festivals in the Lawrence Garden on occasions like Basant, Jahsan-e-Baharan, etc.

To attract more and more people to these events, the authority chooses the main grassy plots. To make matters worse, the authority allows the investors to fix their stalls on these plots, along with loudspeakers, heavy flashlights, huge gas stoves and other luggage.

Every time a festival ends, that particular part of the garden gives a gloomy and distressing look, with burnt grass and potholes filled with mud and oily leftovers.

Birds are a symbol of beauty. They add to the tranquility and calmness. When these elements are missing, birds just leave the place. Lawrence Garden is also famous for its variety of birds. But in addition to its other qualities which aesthetically give pleasure to visitors, birds are also facing the heat of the authority's "reforming activities".

The authority claims it is trying to highlight Lahore's traditional eloquence. But as these efforts are based on commercial interest, the authority is destroying the city's beauty.

Oxford Dictionary defines beauty as "a quality or combination of qualities -- in any person or object -- which delights the senses or mental faculties."

Is the authority trying to redefine the concept of beauty in the light of official standards based on commercialism? Is it trying to convince us that the garden has lost its beauty with the passage of time, and to end this process, it is eagerly reshaping its architecture?

The touch of antiquity is a part of Lahore's beauty. When you modernise it you lose it. When you cut the trees to widen the road and give an open look to the city, you do not bother about nature, and the loss to yourself and the coming generations.

Daal-Chawal by spending 15 to 20 rupees. Save *Halwa-Puri*, all other dishes have vanished. They have been replaced by costly dishes like *Karahi Gosht* (Rs280 per kg), *Harisa* (Rs180 per kg).

Before the foodstreet, the Old Anarkali was a hotspot for the students of Government College, Punjab University, Islamia College and employees of the government departments for an inexpensive but

Road, Lakshmin Chowk, Mayo Hospital Road and Railway Road are packed with people and traffic. The roads to the hospital, already affected by congested bazaars like Anarkali, Hall Road and Shah Alam Market, are choked when the Gowalmandi foodstreet opens.

Gowalmandi was one of the most congested areas of the city even before the opening of the street. The foodstreet has

shopkeepers. The shopkeeper said the authority had set up a committee comprising dignitaries of the area to run the foodstreet smoothly.

Things are also not different in the Old Anarkali foodstreet. "We are paying 6,000-8,000 rupees monthly rent to PHA along with the money we pay in graft," another shopkeeper told ConsumerWise. "We started business to earn money, but we are suffering losses because of high rent and declining number of customers," said Arshad, owner of a newly-established earthen decoration pots shop in Old Anarkali.

A fruit vendor said he was paying money to two persons daily -- Rs100 to the owner of the shop where he has his niche and Rs50 to extortionists.

Cities develop their characters over the years, but enforcing them to quickly adopt ways based on commercial interests leads to a fake sense of change, something Lahore is witnessing nowadays. It also hides the problems that are persisting for decades. If lights make the foodstreet a spectacle in the night, it also hides other streets, their residents and their problems.

The people of these houses, whose front balconies and main entrances open in the bazaar, are devoid of their right to get fresh air and look down into the street

tasty meal. They used to get a good meal for 15 to 25 rupees. But now the situation has changed altogether.

"Old Anarkali was a heaven for us. We used to have a meal in 15 rupees, but now the cheapest dish here costs more than 100 rupees," says Rashed Ali, a student of Islamia College.

If you visit the Gowalmandi foodstreet, you will find houses painted with bright colours on both sides of the bazaar giving a look of a doll's house.

The balconies, decorated with colourful paper sheets and other decorations, are closed, perhaps for good. The people of these houses, whose front balconies and main entrances open in the bazaar, are devoid of their right to get fresh air and look down into the street. The side streets, which open in the Gowalmandi bazaar, also remain close for most part of the day.

In the evenings due to rush of the visitors, the surrounding areas like Nisbat

added fuel to the fire.

"At the beginning Gowalmandi foodstreet witnessed an amazing crowd, but these days a decline is visible," says Abdul Ghafoor, who lives near Gowalmandi. "From the day one I am visiting this street every night, now only a few of the shops are doing good business."

A shopkeeper said high rent and demand for graft every month by "representatives" of a member of the committee set up by the PHA are making matters worse for



Zeeshan Ahmed, 18, was once a leading speaker in declamation contests in his school. Today he can hardly open his mouth. The young man gave into the sweet poison -- supari -- that is so common in Pakistan, especially in Karachi, and more worryingly considered harmless. Ahmed's supari habit led him to gutka, which contains betel nuts, tobacco, lime and catechu. A time came when he could not do without it.

However, there is no let up in the storm of sweet poison. At least 300 containers of contaminated betel nuts imported from Indonesia are waiting for release at Karachi port. Each container contains 27 tons of betel nuts.

The containers are barred from release under a court order. Earlier, another court ordered that the contaminated betel nuts should be crushed and used for making chipboard. However, a timely intervention by the Attorney General of Pakistan, Makhdoom Ali Khan, helped stopped the release.

According to the Helpline Trust and Pakistan Medical Association, if the 300 containers are released, over 8000 tons of these betel nuts, which have been declared unfit for human consumption, could end up in over 10 million packets of sweet supari.

"We have a disaster in the making and 30 per cent of our school going children will end up with oral or mouth cancer," says Hamid Maker of the Helpline Trust. "These packets would then end up in pan shops, school tuck shops and shops all over Pakistan and would be consumed by thousands of unsuspecting citizens, including chil-



Sweet catastrophe

300 containers of contaminated betel nuts are awaiting release at the Karachi port and add to the apparently harmless addiction of supari, pan masala, gutka, which has already made oral cancer second most common cancer in Pakistan.

ConsumerWise Report

dren, who would be exposed to the risk of catching mouth cancer," fears Maker.

Oral cancer is the second most common cancer in Pakistan and pan, chalia, gutka and sweet supari are the main cause.

According to a survey in September 2001, excessive use of sweet chalia, pan masala, gutka and manpuri caused mouth can-

cer among youth, one-fourth of whom were below 18 years of age.

The survey found that the cause of cancer in at least 425 patients was excessive use of gutka, pan masala and manpuri etc. One-fourth of the cancer patients was below 18 years of age, while the youngest was 10 years old. Out of 425 patients,

91 were unable to open their mouth freely. They could hardly open it a centimetre or so, making it impossible for the doctor to examine the inside of mouth.

Majority of people living in areas like Ramswami, Golimar, Pakistan Chowk, Landhi, Korangi and others are in the habit of consuming these dangerous items.

The Helpline Trust and PMA demand complete destruction of the contaminated betel nuts, saying it would play havoc with public health. They fear that once released, there is no guarantee that the consignment would not be used in the manufacture of food items, as no check was possible.

Doctors say betel nuts chewing is commonly considered a harmless habit, but its hazards are countless and last through

generations. It causes stiffness in the muscles and tissues of the mouth, and the tongue behaves as if made of rubber. These are symptoms of cancer, which has no remedy, and start of extensive control and treatment methods. Doctors estimate that using sweet supari for three years leads to early stages of mouth cancer.

The patient's mouth is forcefully opened with instruments and retained in this position with the help of wood or plastic strips to prevent further stricture.

On May 3 this year, PMA urged the Central Board of Revenue (CBR) to conduct a public inquiry into the import of infected betel nuts, terming the import "edible for mass destruction". The association had also requested examination of the cargo by World Health

Organisation (WHO).

The PMA letter to Riaz Ahmed Malik, CBR chairman, says the association's scientific committee, headed by Prof Serajuddin Syed, examined and found the imported betel nuts heavily infested by fungi (moulds). On microbiological examination, the committee found these betel nuts infested with a very nasty strain of fungus called *Aspergillus Flavus* which makes a chemical, aflatoxin. It is an established poison causing cancer of liver.

"If the betel nut is released, it would lead to health catastrophe," the letter said, calling for a "total destruction of this dangerous cargo". The letter was also sent to the president, prime minister, finance minister and senior provincial government officials. The PMA's Executive

Narcotic contamination

Presence of addictive elements in betel nut, gutka and saunf supari was established when 36 different samples of saunf supari of Pakistan and Indian origin were analysed at the Department of Chemistry, University of Karachi, for possible narcotic contamination in 2000. These samples mainly consisted of aniseed, betel nuts, chocolate-coated nuts, sugar-coated aniseed, dry fruits, gutka, etc. Some of these samples contained tobacco, colouring and flavouring agents.

The samples were carefully extracted with de-ionised water and distilled with methanol separately. Nineteen samples extracted with methanol and 10 samples extracted with water gave a positive identification of diacetyl morphine. Nine had low heroin content, which could not be extracted with water. Heroin was detected and identified with different tests.

Sixteen samples, extracted with water, also developed fungal growth within 48 hours, which shows poor hygienic conditions during the packing of these materials.

The need to carry out this analysis arose when in an attempt to stop the use of unfair means in examinations, a physical search of about 18,000 students, who appeared in various examinations conducted by the university during 1997, was carried out. It was observed that most of them were chewing saunf supari or similar materials of particular brands. It was inferred from these observations that this so-called saunf supari might contain certain addiction causing substances. When interviewed for their habit, some students accepted that once chewed, the person feels like taking more.

From these evidences it was thought worth studying the narcotic contents in these samples.

Some of these samples also contain dry fruits like peanut, almond, pistachio, etc. These ingredients may be present singly or in any combination and most often mixed and placed in paan, which is already coated with lime and acacia catechu extract. Traditionally these materials are taken in Indian sub-continent at leisure times or after food. All these combinations have no health value. Most of the packing of betel nuts, Saunf Supari, Pan Masala, gutka, etc did not carry the name of manufacturers nor their packing contained any registration number or the address of the company marketing them.

Ban them

- ◆ The government must take effective measures to prevent the manufacture and sale of gutka and sweet supari and ban its advertising on billboards and the electronic and print media.
- ◆ All sweet supari manufacturers packages must be forced to print a health warning on the package, together with the ingredients, name and address of manufacturer.
- ◆ The food and health inspectors must draw samples of sweet supari from the open market and send it for analysis on a regular basis.

Committee has already passed a resolution to impose a ban on betel nut, gutka and smoking as an important health initiative in Pakistan.

In April this year Islam Hussain advocate filed a case in the Sindh High Court, maintaining that the betel nut consignment from Indonesia was "spurious" and contains "poisonous matter". The petitioner contended the samples of the supari were sent by the customs authorities to A J Laboratories of the Karachi University. The laboratory report revealed the supari was poisonous. The petition said the Ministry of Finance asked the CBR to send the samples of the betel nuts for another laboratory test and if the report declares that the material is not injurious to human health, it should be released.

The petitioner pleaded that getting a favourable report from a laboratory is easy as a party pursuing the report may resort

to "illegal gratification" and get a report to its choice. Clearance of the consignment on the basis of laboratory report would be disastrous, particularly when a reliable laboratory like that of Karachi University had already declared the substance unfit for human consumption, the petition said.

However, officials of All Pakistan Betel Nut Importers and Merchants Association (APBNIMA) say that importers had submitted a PCSIR lab certificate with the customs' Appraisal Collectorate, stating that the betel nut was fit for human consumption.

Sardar Mohammad Sohail, chairman APBINMA, claims the same quality had been imported for the last many years and the collectorate had been releasing it without any hesitation.

Sohail says the seizure led to increase in prices of betel nuts from Rs120-Rs140 a kilogram from Rs27 a kilogram. He maintains that the seizure has nothing to do with contamination, terming it a ploy to benefit some other importers of betel nuts.

He also opposes ban on betel nut, adding that the

PMA's stance on banning the chalia, sweet supari and gutka carries no weight.

"Manufacturers have got ISO-9000 quality certificate regarding use of chemicals." The chemicals are not injurious to health as similar types of chemicals were also being used in producing fruit juices and soft drinks, Sohail argues.

He quoted a report of the HEJ Research Institute on microbiological analysis of betel nuts, which says: "The sample of betel nuts was found to have a low microbiological load, which is within the specific limit for food items."

Dr Qaiser Sajjad, an ENT specialist at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, says cancers of the mouth, oesophagus, larynx, liver and lungs might be attributed to the growing use of betel nut. He points out that in Karachi, some 122 brands of betel nut are sold under various names and consumed by an overwhelming number of children. "Gutka is lethal for consumers, but it is fast gaining popularity among youth. It is seen as one of the major sources of mouth and tongue cancers."

Indonesia dominates Pakistan betel nuts import

Pakistan imports bulk of its betel nuts from Indonesia, according to the Ministry of Commerce. Betel nut is also imported from Malaysia, Thailand, India, Afghanistan, Brunei, Burma, China, Dubai, Guatemala, Honduras, Iran, Japan, Macao, North Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Sri Lanka. A non-traditional import item, Pakistan imported 55,460,047 kilogram of betel nuts in 2001-2002, with 51,198,983 kilograms coming from Indonesia, followed by 1,853,890 kilograms coming from Thailand. Similarly in 2000-01, Indonesia's share in betel nuts import to Pakistan was 40,153,288 out of the total import -- 43,064,052 kilograms.

Health experts are concerned about Pakistan's unregulated and fast growing kidney transplant trade, where foreigners can buy kidneys from impoverished Pakistanis in contravention of established medical norms.

With more than a dozen hospitals across the country involved in this unscrupulous trade, Pakistan has become the new hub for people seeking kidney transplants from across the world. Transplants are a lucrative business for doctors, hospital staff and "fixers" who exploit the gullible and the needy.

In Mominpura village in central Punjab, nearly 80 per cent of the residents have sold one of their two kidneys. Only children, the old and the sick have been spared the scalpel. According to people involved in the kidney trade, besides Pakistan, China is the only country in the world where illegal and unrelated donor organs are transplanted. In China, kidneys are taken from prisoners on death row.

"Any transplant that is unrelated is unethical," believes Dr Anwar Naqvi, a senior surgeon at the

Institute of Urology and Transplant (SIUT) in Karachi.

Take 22-year-old Sumaira of Mandiala Wala village located 30 kilometres east of Lahore. She is no different from the hundreds of villagers here learning to live on one kidney.

In Sumaira's case the choice wasn't easy. She and her family could either stay in bondage for life to a brick kiln owner, or she could sell one of her kidneys and pay off the family's mounting debts.

Sumaira decided to donate. In January 2002, she was brought to a hospital by her parents. "There was a Maulvi in our area who took us to the hospital in return for a fee," says Sumaira's 25-year-old brother Mohammed Safdar.

The staff conducted pre-operative tests on Sumaira and she was sent home after signing an agreement with the hospital management to donate one of her kidneys. A month later, she was summoned by the hospital: a recipient had been identified. In the clandestine kidney market, if a kidney is sold to a local recipient, the donor gets \$1,600 but if sold to a foreigner, the payment is double.

As a goodwill gesture, the recipient is introduced to the donor before the transplant. But in Sumaira's case, her 32-year-old recipient, Thor Anderson, a property developer, born in Denmark and living in London, avoided meeting her due to the prevailing anti-West sentiment over the Iraq war.

Of the \$3,200, Sumaira's family used \$1,600 to repay loans. Over \$500 went to a broker, with \$250 spent on post-operative care. They were left with

\$750, a sum that didn't last long, considering Sumaira's large family. In the West, the vast majority of donor kidneys are taken from people killed in accidents. But as the number of patients has spiraled the world over, the transplant business in poor countries continues to expand.

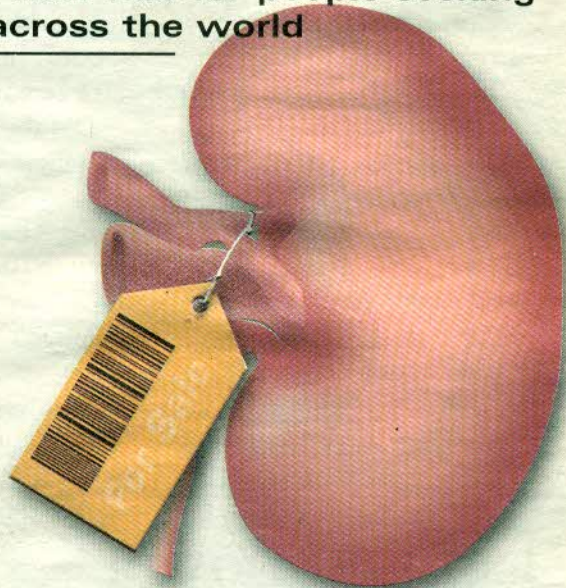
Also, in some countries, as in the UK, recipients have to know the "live" donors, and cannot pressure them. This makes legal transplants difficult in such countries. Patients, therefore, travel to poor countries where there are either no laws or no regulation.

Sadly, most people are no better off after the sale despite the risks. Sughra Begum sold her kidney for just \$1,300. Her husband, Muhammad Yar, had also donated his kidney four years ago to repay a loan from their landlord, but the middleman made off with the money.

That's when Sughra decided to sell her kidney. Though they managed to repay the landlord, the

Trading in kidney

Pakistan has become the new hub for people seeking kidney transplants from across the world



operation took a toll on her health. Due to her constant illness and her husband's critical condition, they were forced to take another loan and are back in their landlord's clutches.

According to data compiled by the Pakistani organisation, Postgraduate Doctors Middle East, in 2001 there were 1,244 kidney transplants, of which relatives donated 611, spouses 80 and unrelated donors 533.

SIUT's Naqvi dreads the future. "The very wealthy will end up as buyers of the organs being sold by the very poor. Such an unequal distribution of health benefits and burdens will be completely unjust," he says. -- Courtesy Women Feature Service

A wild goose chase



Complaint cells in public institutions are more of a facade to hide the inefficiency than to address the faulty services, highlighting the need for a consumer protection law in Pakistan.

By Amer Farooq

On the night of February 20 this year, seven students have to give up their rented house in F-6/1's lane 38 after sewage water found its way into their rooms as heavy rains choked the sewerage system.

The students took refuge with friends, relatives and in hotels. "The sewage water gave us no time to save anything. Our beds, books, computers and other things were gutted," Azfar Kamal, one of the students, nar-

rated the ordeal to ConsumerWise. "For the next three days, we waded through one-foot high sewage water to retrieve our things."

Did they contact any civic authority? They did. "We went to CDA's inquiry office in the sector. They simply told us to bring Rs7000." Why? "They said the money was needed for repairing the faulty sewerage line."

The way out suggested to the students by the Capital

Development Authority's officials was nothing out of the ordinary. Such cold responses from the civic authorities' inquiry cells are a routine. Most of the consumers know from their personal experiences that complaint cells are more of a façade to hide the inefficiency than to address the faulty services.

Kamal says for the next two months they lived with the stinking water. "Even during sunny days, after 10 a.m. sewage

Limited power

Established in 1983 through an ordinance, the Federal Ombudsman's office was "to diagnose, investigate, redress and rectify any injustice done to a person through maladministration". Though listening to the consumers' complaints for the last 20 years, the Ombudsman has limited original powers to ensure quick implementation of his "recommendations".

Brigadier Ahmed Saleem, director general Complaints, told ConsumerWise that the Ombudsman office can take up any case against "agencies" of the federal government. He said that application on a plain paper is enough for action by the federal ombudsman. "Now people can contact us on email, but later they have to provide necessary papers."

When asked if the federal ombudsman takes suo moto action, he said the ordinance provides for such an initiative. However, he did not have the number of cases where the federal ombudsman took action on his own.

Brigadier Saleem says the federal ombudsman does not take action from consumers' perspective, but added many of the complaints are consumer-specific.

water would start gathering around our house. Whenever we contacted the inquiry office, their answer was same, bring the money and they would repair it."

Almost all the public institutions dealing with people have set up complaint cells, advertised them extensively, promising early action on consumers' complaints. But in reality matters are not as smooth as they are made out to be.

Khawar Sarfraz, who had a garment's shop in Rawalpindi's Commercial Market, says his telephone was made one-way when he refused to pay the linesman the Rs50 "monthly".

"I refused him to pay Rs50 and that person deprived me of the telephone facility," Sarfraz said. "I have never delayed payment of my telephone bills. It was only because I did not pay Rs50 to the linesman." Sarfraz has to pay the usual price to get his telephone working.

After going through the exercise of dialing the complaint line -- 18 -- he visited the PTCL offices on a number of occasions to get his complaint addressed.

Sarfraz may be seething at the ordeal he had to go through, but Majeedur Rehman, public relations officer of the Islamabad Telecom Region which also includes Rawalpindi, has altogether different version to offer. "We have computerised fault management control system. When you dial 18, you are connected to this effective control system and your complaint is addressed in the shortest possible time."

Majeedur Rehman also refers to other help lines -- 106, 111-900-900 -- saying they are available round the clock. "Our aim is to provide consumers the best possible services," claims the PRO. The parity between the consumer's experience and the

claim of the officer speak for themselves. This is not only limited to the PTCL.

Ghulam Ali, a businessman from Chakwal, constantly complains about bloated power bills. He says he cannot go daily to the office of the Islamabad Electrical Supply Company. "And even if you decide to shut down the business and go to the IESCO office, you are asked to go from one table to another until you decide to return home." Facing other problems like fluctuating voltage, power outages and over billing, Ali had decided to live with these problems instead of seeking their redressal.

But Mian Zareef Gul, chief

commercial manager of the IESCO, says every complaint is registered and entered into the computer. "Later we contact the concerned sub divisional officer and contact the complainant and settle it down quickly."

Zareef claims that the "information technology" is helping them immensely to take care of the complaints. "We receive complaints through emails and we do take action on them."

IESCO, whose consumers number in millions, has one each complaint cell in Chakwal, Taxila and Islamabad and two in Rawalpindi. Zareef says the complaint cell in Rawalpindi's Mareer Hasan received 1360 complaints in April 2003. "All

Need for a consumer protection law

Consumers need protection against hazardous products and services, misinformation, restrictive trade practices, fraud, etc. All these abound in Pakistan. The importance of Consumer Protection Law has assumed significance in the backdrop of liberalised economy and perpetual lowering of trade barriers.

Globalisation and its various instruments have posed new challenges for protecting consumers. Uninformed, non-assertive poor consumers are especially becoming more vulnerable.

Consumer protection is widely seen as a notion critical to mitigate the weaknesses and failures of the market and a confidence building measure in the market economy. Consumers' right to appropriate and prompt redress is the cornerstone of their protection and it is best ensured through promulgation of a Consumer Protection Law. Protecting consumer interest is protecting public interest.

Pakistan is not oblivious to this need. The enactment of Islamabad Consumer Protection Act 1995 and the NWFP Consumer Protection Law 1997, although non-operative and restrictive in scope, demonstrate sporadic efforts of the government to protect consumer rights.

Pakistan has a long way to go to protecting consumers who have remained helpless due to inherent inadequacies of system. The need for protecting consumer interest is established and developed in industrialised countries. Developing countries are now fast catching up. The development of "UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection" has spurred this trend. Many developing countries have now developed comprehensive consumer protection laws. India promulgated consumer protection law in 1986. Today every district in India has a special consumer court leading to a strong consumer movement. Apart from India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh also have well-developed consumer protection laws.

were addressed."

However, he was quick to add that new complaint cells are being opened, admitting the current five cells are not enough to meet the consumers' needs.

Rawal Khan Metla, director of CDA's Public Relations, says the authority receives complaints at its head office through a "Complaint Window". Then these complaints are sent to the respective directorates. When he was asked about inquiry offices in various sectors of Islamabad, he said Shahid Bukhari, chief complaint officer, is authorised to talk about it. However, the chief complaint officer remained elusive. Whenever contacted, he was either in a meeting or out of the office on official duty.

In Rawalpindi, things are not much different. The officials of Rawalpindi Cantonment Board, where apart from the military leadership, a sizeable civilian population has also settled down, also claim a comprehensive complaints cell system.

Ashraf Qureshi, RCB's public relations officer, says: "We have a central complaint cell at our head office. From 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. we have Suzukis prepared for mobile response. Our contact numbers are written in bold on these vehicles so that people have no difficulty in finding us."

Qureshi claimed that the central complaint cell addresses the complaint within 15 minutes. "The standard of our complaint response is up to European standards."

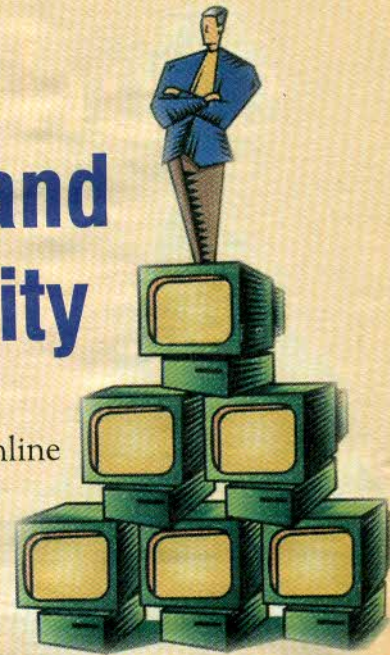
But Khalid Mehmood, a resident of Cantt area, refutes the claim, saying the response of the RCB complaint cell has nothing to do with European standards. "Streetlights were missing in our street. For this you don't need 15 minutes, you need 15 visits to the complaint cell to get the streetlights fixed." Mehmood says the complaint cell moves quickly only when the call is from the VIP localities.

But the biggest blot on the RCB is the garbage dumping ground in Misrial. For the last many years, the people living around the dump have contacted the RCB authorities and even approached the prime minister's office, but only the garbage is increasing.

The chasm between the officials' claims and the people's woes is appalling. The officials at the complaint cells are more interested in discouraging people from coming to them.

Though consumer courts are a norm in many countries, the idea is still in its infancy in Pakistan. Backing consumer courts in Pakistan, high court advocate Ch. Manzoor Hussain Jameel says at present cases are not classified as consumer cases.

Digital divide and inequality



The global online community has grown rapidly --- from about 16 million Internet users in 1995 to an estimated 304 million users in March 2000.

In 1998 more than 26 per cent of all people living in the United States were surfing the Internet, compared with 0.8 per cent of all people in Latin America and the Caribbean, 0.1 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 0.4 per cent in South Asia.

South Asia, with 23 per cent of the world's people, has less than one per cent of the world's Internet users.

The typical Internet user worldwide is male, under 35 years old, with a university education and high income, urban based and English speaking—a member of a very elite minority.

The assets of the 200 richest people are more than the combined income of 41 per cent of the world's people. A yearly contribution of 1 per cent of their wealth or \$8 billion could provide universal access to primary education for all.

Among 159 countries with available data, 50 had negative average annual growth in GNP per capita in 1990-98, and only four Sub-Saharan countries had minimum rate for doubling incomes in generation.

Stay cool



By Dr Haroon Ibrahim

Every year hot weather brings with it serious health problems. The body normally cools itself by sweating, but under some conditions, sweating is not enough. In such cases, body temperature rises rapidly, which may damage the brain or other vital organs.

Several factors affect the body's ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather. When the humidity is high, sweat will not evaporate quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly. Other conditions that can limit the ability to regulate temperature include old age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, poor circulation and sunburn.

Infants and children up to four years of age are sensitive to the effects of high temperatures and rely on others to regulate their environment and provide adequate liquids. Similarly people 65 years of age or older may not compensate for heat stress efficiently. They are less likely to sense and respond to changes in temperature. Overweight people may also be prone to illnesses during hot weather because of their tendency to retain more body heat.

Summertime activity must be balanced with measures that aid the body's cooling mechanisms and prevent heat-related illnesses.

Fluid intake: Increase your fluid intake - regardless of your activity level. During heavy exercise in a hot environment, drink 2 to 4 glasses (16 to 32 ounces) of cool fluids each hour. But if your doctor has prescribed a fluid-restricted diet or diuretics for you, ask your doc-

tor how much you should drink. During hot weather, you will need to drink more liquid than your thirst indicates. This is especially true for people 65 years of age and older who often have a decreased ability to respond to external temperature changes. Drinking plenty of liquids during exercise is important. However, avoid very cold beverages because they can cause stomach cramps. Avoid drinks containing alcohol because they will actually cause you to lose more fluid.

Replacing salt and minerals:

Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from the body, which are necessary for body and must be replaced. The easiest and safest way to replace salt and minerals is diet. Drink fruit juice or a sports beverage during exercise or any work in the heat. Do not take salt tablets unless directed by your doctor. If you are on a low-salt diet, ask your doctor before changing

what you eat or drink-especially before drinking a sports beverage.

Clothing: Choose lightweight, light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing. In the hot sun, a wide-brimmed hat provides shade and keeps the head cool. If hat is not available, use a turban, or simply cover your head with a cloth. Dress infants and young children in cool, loose clothing and shade their heads and faces with hats or an umbrella.

Schedule outdoor activities carefully: Try to plan your activities so that you are outdoors either before noon or in the evening. While outdoors, rest frequently in a shady area. Resting periodically will give your body's thermostat a chance to recover.

Monitor outdoor activity: If you are unaccustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, stop all activity, get into a cool area, or at least in the shade, and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak, or faint.

Food: Avoid hot foods and heavy meals. They add heat to your body.



On April 15, 2003, a Suzuki stopped at the Potohar gas station in Rawalpindi for a fill up. Nothing was unusual about the vehicle except that it had a local and unapproved gas cylinder. It failed to sustain the gas pressure and went off with a big bang, killing one person and injuring two others.

The fire was quickly controlled, fortunately for the residents living around the gas station.

The blast highlighted two dangers. The use of unsafe gas cylinders and the mushrooming of gas stations in residential areas in Rawalpindi.

"We took notice of these blasts and impounded all substandard cylinders," says Tariq Kiani, zila nazim of Rawalpindi. "We have imposed 144 in the city against the use of substandard gas cylinder in vehicles."

With petroleum prices touching new heights, the use of natural gas for vehicles has come as a welcome relief. But its misuse is turning it into a danger that has claimed five lives in Rawalpindi and Islamabad in April this year.

Natural gas is mixture of natural gases, of which methane is the most important one. Methane, extracted from wells or crude oil, is used for domestic, commercial and industrial purposes. Cheaper and having less hazardous chemicals, its use is being promoted throughout the world. It is kept in cylinders in compressed or liquid form.

The incidents of the gas cylinders' blast spurred traffic police and the motor vehicle examiner into action in which 70 rickshaws using Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) were impounded. The gas kits were taken off and the owners were fined Rs700 each. The vehicles

were returned to the owners but not the cylinders. Retaliating rickshaw drivers blocked Rawalpindi's Murree Road for some hours.

In 1985 the natural gas -- LPG and Fon -- was first used

as replacement of petroleum for vehicles. Its less price came as an attractive alternative for the people, especially transporters. Only a few outlets were available for gas, people would rise up early and stand in long

Deadly cylinders

A number of accidents involving vehicles fitted with substandard compressed natural gas kits underscore the need to put in place a quality control mechanism to govern this hazardous trade.

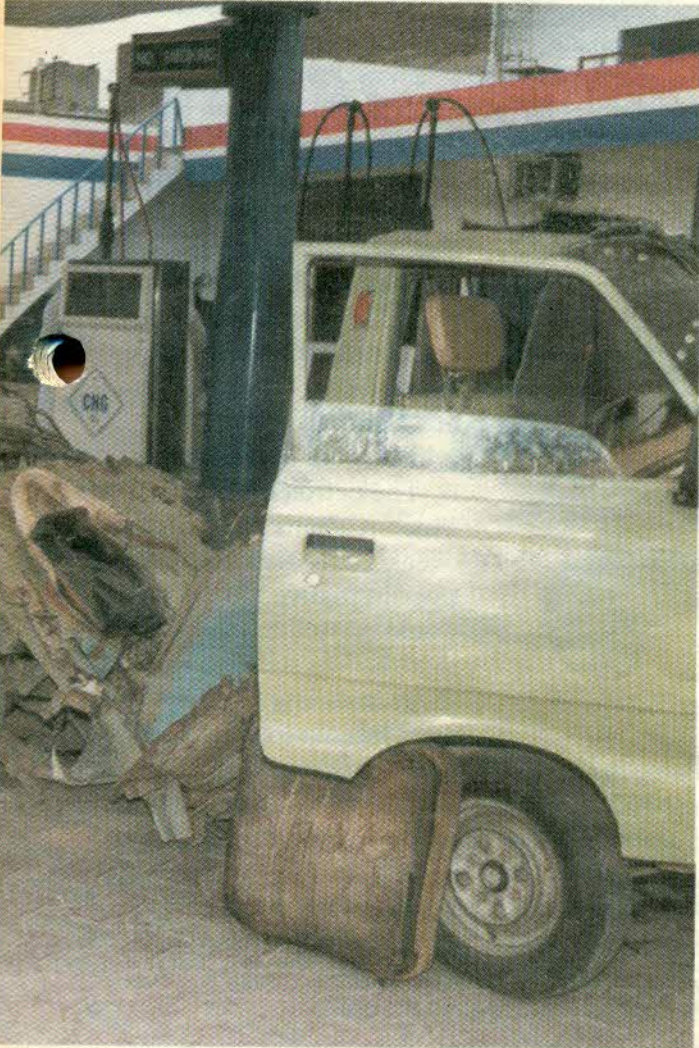
By Asim Nawaz



queues for a fill up. Those who had car but couldn't afford petrol were ready to sacrifice their sleep for an early morning wait for the gas that would keep their cars running.

But it is a story from the past. Today most of the cities are teeming with gas stations as their number has risen phenomenally in the past few years. The twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad have more than 80 stations where compressed natural gas is available.

At present Rawalpindi has 19500 cabs, rickshaws and Suzukis approved by the vehicle examiner, apart from 1500 cabs and 6000 rickshaws that are unregistered. At least 90 per cent of them are using compressed natural gas. It is estimated that around 35,000 people use them daily. These



No knowledge about CNG: vehicle examiner

"CNG is a new technology and we have no equipment to check it out," Imtiaz Ahmed Butt, motor vehicle examiner for Rawalpindi and Islamabad, told ConsumerWise. Butt, who has done mechanical specialisation in auto and diesel technology, wants refresher course for vehicle examiners, saying he has no experience of checking out the vehicle fitted with CNG kits. "We need to be updated about this new product." Butt backs the idea of awareness campaigns about gas cylinders.

"In the Motor Vehicle Act, there is no definition of oil and the definition of engine is that it should not give out noise and smoke. We only check these two things."

About gas kits in rickshaws, Butt said the kit is connected to the engine through a .5 centimeter pipe. "This fitting is not safe and there is a constant danger of leakage. This is especially true of LPG."

Butt says there should be control on sale of cylinders. "Local and foreign kits and cylinders are available in the market. Local kits and cylinders are inexpensive and naturally people buy them more. Of course, they are unaware of the dangers that come with them."

figures amply highlight the danger of substandard gas cylinders that people live with daily.

The intensity of the danger can be gauged from the fact that most of the Suzuki drivers in Rawalpindi's busy Raja Bazar

to leakage. Officials estimate that at least 4000 rickshaws in Rawalpindi are using LPG cylinders.

Experts says the wide use of gas cylinders has also created a "wrong impression" that they

The rickshaw owners prefer LPG cylinders for the obvious reason that they are cheaper than the CNG cylinders. Though there is no pressure in LPG cylinders, they are prone to leakage

do not know anything about the cylinders in their vehicles. Similarly they are also unaware of any precautionary measures.

The rickshaw owners prefer LPG cylinders for the obvious reason that they are cheaper than the CNG cylinders. Though there is no pressure in LPG cylinders, they are prone

are safe. On the contrary the gas cylinders need more care in their use.

Gujranwala has become centre of preparing gas cylinders locally. These cylinders are prepared with mild steel, which is unable to sustain the gas pressure. The imported gas cylinders, which are mostly

from Italy, are prepared with special alloy steel. The special alloy steel has the capability to sustain the gas pressure continuously.

"I will strongly advise transporters not to use substandard cylinders," says Raja Amir, sub-inspector police, adding that traffic police has no powers to check gas cylinders.

Al-Falah Development Organisation in Rawalpindi claims it has launched a programme to provide gas kits to rickshaw owners in collaboration with UNDP.

Rizwan Butt, president of National Federation of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, says the fault lies with the government, and not the rickshaw

fitted for Rs10000 to Rs12000.

Officials of Hydrocarbon Development Institute of Pakistan, the government organisation for checking gas cylinders, say imported cylinders are safe, adding that they are checked on much higher pressures. At present, Landi Renzo, DRC, Ragent and Tartrini cylinders are being imported.

HDIP has launched a campaign to check out the cylinders, as officials told ConsumerWise that more than 1000 cylinders have been checked. The approved cylinders now have a HDIP sticker. Officials say daily 50 cylinders are checked.

According to the HDIP officials, the locally-made cylinders have a clear link between them, as if two pieces have been joined together, unlike the imported ones which are in one whole piece.

"It would be much better if the owners of CNG cars daily check out the cylinder for leakage or the smell of the gas," says Basharat, who works in HDIP. "If there is a leakage or smell, turn off the valve and contact HDIP." He said fibre cylinders are much less in weight, adding that Italy's cylinders are best of the lot.

The petroleum ministry, which recommends switching over to CNG as a cost effective alternative to petrol, would do well to make sure that the kits supplied to workshops installing CNG systems meet internationally acceptable safety standards. The petroleum ministry and other authorities must also take urgent measures to make the public aware of the dangers of installing substandard CNG kits in their vehicles.

The petroleum ministry, which recommends switching over to CNG as a cost effective alternative to petrol, would do well to make sure that the kits supplied to workshops installing CNG systems meet internationally acceptable safety standards

However, Mohammad Ayub Khan, president of a rickshaw union, maintains that LPG gas kits seldom go off, though he admitted that leakage is a problem. "LPG kits are less dangerous and less expensive than

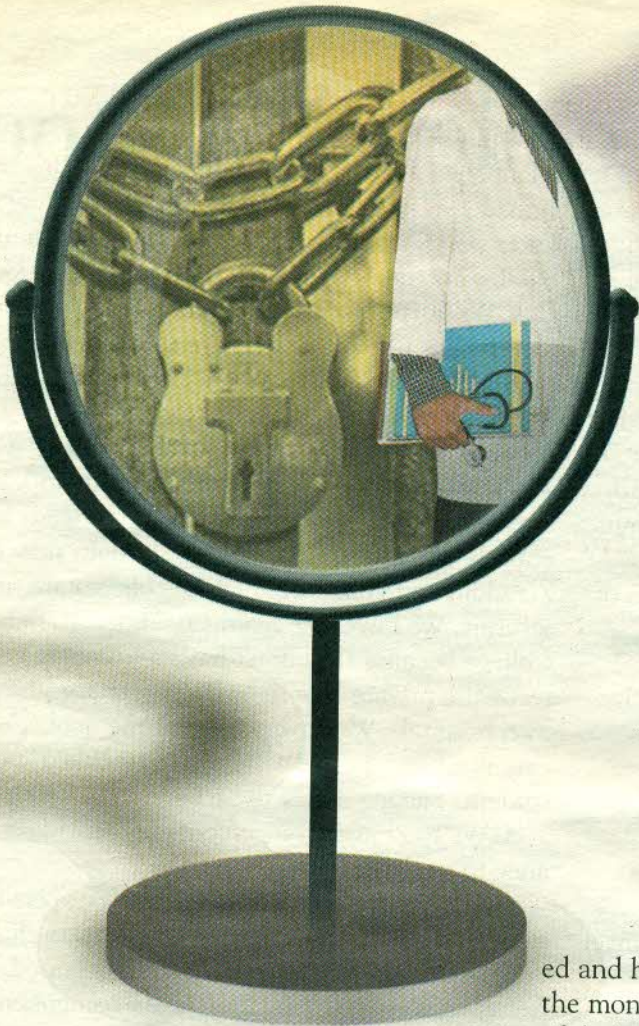
owners. He wants the government to tell people ins and outs of this "new technology". "In the first place the government should arrest those who are making substandard cylinders."

Two types of cylinders for



CNG kits." Khan says 100 rickshaw owners installed gas kits in their vehicles under a project financed by UNDP. "They are paying Rs1000 a month. If the government does not return the cylinders, what else they should do?"

CNG are available in the market - normal and fibre. They can cost around Rs10000 to Rs12000, and the whole kit is fitted for Rs20000 to Rs24000. The locally made gas cylinders cost around Rs6000 and the whole kit is



Private medical colleges - a mirage

Unregulated and unprepared, private medical colleges are only adding to the problems of students in Pakistan.

By Tariq Zia

When Kalsoom Ibad couldn't make it to a public medical college as her marks in the FSC were just short of the merit, she and her parents were extremely disappointed. Becoming doctor was a kind of a family aim. Not giving up on it, Kalsoom's parents decided that she should take admission in a private medical college.

It was an expensive decision. Kalsoom got admission in the Rajput Medical College after paying huge charges. Her parents thought heavy charges would be worth it if their daughter becomes a doctor.

Nearly a year after the admission, Kalsoom got the shock of her life. The college was closed without any intimation. The administration disappeared -- as if it never existed -- with the students' fees. Like Kalsoom and her parents, many others were dumbfound-

ed and hapless. It was not only the money they lost, the loss of their children's future disheartened them most.

This is one of the horrific examples of the private medical colleges mushrooming in Pakistan. A number of private medical colleges have been closed down for various reasons in the past few years, leaving students in the lurch.

In Pakistan, private sector entered the medical education 20 years ago. After two decades of free hand, private medical colleges have only succeeded in giving two distinct impressions -- their future is uncertain and they failed to live up to the standards of the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council.

In 1983 the first private medical institution -- Aga Khan University Medical College -- was set up. But the permission was marked by lack of planning for such a big decision -- something still missing today. No one knew under

which rules the private medical education would operate in Pakistan.

It was only in 1985 the then government thought that something should be done about it. Mehboobur Rehman, then deputy chairman of Planning Commission, headed a commission to look into medical education. However, instead of forming some parameters for medical education in public and private sectors, the commission only inferred that public resources cannot meet the demand for medical education in Pakistan. The commission did not touch the issue of rules for the private medical colleges.

In 1947 Pakistan had only King Edward and Dow medical colleges. In 1948, Fatima Jinnah Medical College was set up, followed by Liaquat Medical College in 1951. Today Pakistan has 24 medical colleges in the public sector, 18 of them are recognised by PMDC and the rest are provi-

'PMDC keeps colleges on toes'

Dr Sohail Kareem Hashmi, secretary Pakistan Medical and Dental Council, maintains the council is keeping a strict check on colleges to help improve medical education in Pakistan. He also denies that the council is only targeting private colleges.

CW: How medical colleges start working without PMDC's recognition?

SKH: We are not responsible for colleges opened without PMDC's NoC. Our duty is to maintain a minimum standard of medical education in Pakistan. Therefore we have complete and provisional stages of recognition. We also keep colleges under scrutiny. These stages help us to monitor the level of medical education in the country. We carry out routine and emergency checks. It keeps most of the colleges on toes.

CW: Recognition of Gomal and Saidu medical colleges was also discussed in the NWFP Assembly.

SKH: We want everyone to strictly follow rules. The two colleges you are talking about have been informed about various deficiencies. If they don't meet them, they would not get recognition. But if the NWFP government wants to run the two colleges, how can we stop it. Let me make it clear we will not register students if PMDC rules are not fulfilled.

CW: Colleges were closed down after getting recognition. Why they are recognised in the first place?

SKH: There are only two such instances. Rohra College in Karachi, which was affiliated with a government university, and the Margalla College in Islamabad. The two colleges were not even provisionally recognised. There is no example that we closed down a fully recognised medical college. About 90 to 100 students of the Margalla College would be accommodated in other colleges.

We suspend colleges just like government employees are suspended. We tell the college administration about the shortcomings like lack of teaching staff, absence of hospital etc.

In 1999 an ordinance was promulgated about setting up medical colleges, but before it could go to the National Assembly, the parliament was dissolved. Before that anyone could open a medical college. There was no need of an NoC, and we had so many medical colleges.

However, in 2001 we made rules and made NoC from the council compulsory for a new medical college. Before that the council would only see that the college would be able to meet the requirements of the first and second years. But things didn't turn out as we hoped. Most of the colleges didn't have hospitals.

Later we also made hospital compulsory from the day one for any new college.

CW: In the last 12 years only Aga Khan Medical College has been completely recognised.

SKH: What we can do if no other college meets our standards. The problem is that there is a gulf between what people say and what they do. We allow 100 seats but they will give admission to 150. For 150 students, teaching faculty and hospital needs are entirely different from that of 100. Right now, Baqai, Ziauddin and Hamdard medical colleges are under scrutiny. We have just again suspended Hamdard College because they don't have a hospital. We don't recognise private hospitals. Baqai College just got its own hospital. We have to ensure the quality of education. Otherwise we will have "half-baked" medical students passing out of these colleges.

CW: You have arrangements for providing guidance to students.

SKH: We are giving ads in the newspapers for this since 1996. We announced again and again that a number of medical colleges are not recognised. Our website has every information about recognised and unrecognised college. It is a big decision for students and parents and it should not be reached in hurry.

CW: It is said that the council often oversteps its authority and blames the private sector for everything?

SKH: PMDC was set up in 1962 under an act for registration of doctors. The act was amended in 1972 to bring in medical education into the council's ambit. The council was to monitor the quality of education the public medical colleges were imparting. Public and private medical colleges have went to court against the council, sometimes challenging its right to inspect or its power to recognise. Every time the court decision was in the council's favour. We are not targeting private medical colleges. The NWFP government has opened Gomal and Saidu medical colleges, we have given them notice and they have not been recognised. The Punjab government has opened three colleges -- Sialkot Medical College, Services Medical College in Lahore and Sheikh Zaid Medical College in Rahim Yar Khan. All these colleges have been issued notices. They would have to take NoC from the council to operate.

Let me give you an example. The president of Pakistan was to inaugurate the Sheikh Zaid Medical College in Lahore. It was approved by the Ministry of Health and the Cabinet Division. We informed the Presidency that the college did not have NoC from the council, therefore, it did not have any legal standing. Respecting the rules, the president did not inaugurate the college.

sionally recognised.

But only after 20 years, private sector has 22 colleges in Pakistan, 13 of them are provisionally recognised, and the rest are going through the process of examination. The list does not include the eight private medical colleges that have either been closed down or just disappeared with the students' money in the last few years.

During the first government of Pakistan People's Party under late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto,

be doctors. The group for clinical training comprised 8 to 10 students, but after the increase, it surged to 25 to 30 students. When senior doctors and experts pointed out that this bulging number is affecting the quality of education, the administration took a U-turn. Students' number was decreased by ten per cent annually for every new session.

In 1999 an entry test was introduced for admission in public and private medical colleges. It was based on the

In the 1990s, open merit policy was also adopted after a Supreme Court order. Apparently a good decision. But as most of the women prefer family life after marriage, female doctors seldom decide to continue as doctors. The result is that the country faces lack of lady health practitioners and the private and public hospitals are facing a shortage of junior doctors.

With this also came self-financing scheme in the public medical colleges. The reason was that it would help the colleges to meet some of their expenses. But it led to lesser opportunities for deserving students.

In contrast to these problems, private medical colleges come out as an attractive alternative, ever ready to accommodate students, provided they have the ability to sustain expenses. But the attractive alternative brought in more misery for the students.

In 1999, the issue of setting up private medical colleges reverberated in the National Assembly in the form of a bill. There was an iota of hope that some law would be made to monitor them. But before anything could be done, the Nawaz Sharif government was removed in a military coup.

At least eight private medical colleges have been closed down in Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Faisalabad and Rawalpindi. But the more worrying factor is that at present a number of private medical colleges are operating without full recognition from PMDC. If PMDC decides that some of them do not meet its standards, their students would be left empty handed.

Don't rush

Before deciding to join any private medical college, check its level of affiliation with the PMDC. At present only Aga Khan Medical College is the fully recognised private medical college. It is much better to take admission in provisionally recognised private medical colleges. The list of such colleges is available on the website - www.pmdc.org.pk.

- ◆ Remember that graduates from provisionally recognised colleges can register themselves with PMDC.
- ◆ After taking admission in a private medical college, confirm from the administration that your name has been registered with PMDC.
- ◆ On the invitation of the medical college, PMDC sends its team for examination. As a student you should be aware of the fact that the college has send the invitation to PMDC or not. If not, press the administration for it.
- ◆ The PMDC team points deficiencies in the college in writing. It is your right to be aware of the PMDC recommendations about the college.

it was decided that the country needs more medical colleges. The decision was apt. Pakistan was seeing a surge in students' desire to become doctor. Unfortunately the right decision lacked planning, which led to administrative problems.

Colleges were set up, but without proper space, qualified teachers, and equipment. Seats for medical students were increased from 250 to 350 and in some cases to 400. The increase badly affected the clinical training of the would-

marks in the FSC and the test itself. The successful students got admission in various medical colleges in the public sector. But the new mode of admission ran into trouble at the outset. The idea was to block those who allegedly got "outstanding marks" through unfair means by passing them through the entry test. But those who got good marks through dint of hard work argued the objective entry test negates their efforts of the past two years.

Who foots the healthcare bill?

By Dr Zafar Mirza

Healthcare in Pakistan, like many other low-income countries, is mainly financed directly by people themselves. This is despite the fact that basic healthcare is the constitutional right of the people and it is the state's responsibility to make such arrangements for healthcare provision so that people can have equitable and reliable access to health services.

Under article 38 of the constitution -- "Promotion of Social and Economic well-being of the People" -- the sub-article (d) reads: "(The State shall) provide basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief, for all such citizens, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race, as are temporarily unable to earn their livelihood on account of infirmity, sickness or unemployment."

Contrary to what the constitution provides for the sick citizens, out-of-pocket expenses make up almost 75 per cent of the total health expenses in the country, which also means that private health sector is dominant in healthcare provision. Yet the semantics about "national health policy", "health sector", and "health financing" are understood to be related to public health sector only.

Despite established market failures in healthcare, private sector is least regulated. It will not be wrong to say that it hardly emerges in national health policy thinking. In fact "market mania" is further nibbling at the public health sector in the name of "hospital autonomy", "user charges", "deregulation" etc.

The total health expenditure in Pakistan (public + private) is two to three per cent of the GDP. The government spends around one per cent and the private spending is three times the public spending.

In 25 years -- from 1970 to 1995 -- the average health expenditure as percentage of GDP averaged at mere 0.77 per cent with highest point achieved in the fiscal year 1986-87 when it became 1.14 per cent of the GDP. Total government expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP declined between 1991-92 and 1997-98 from 0.76 percent to 0.71 percent.

To bring these figures into a context it is pertinent to quote here a study of 12 Asian countries in which government expenditures as percentage of

their GDPs were compared in late 1980s. The countries included in this World Bank study by Charles C Griffin were Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The mean of this expense was 1.3 percent.

In other words the government expense on health in Pakistan by Asian standards was 0.6 points below the average and it was 4.3 points less than the recommended five per cent of the GDP to be spent on health by World Health Organisation.

The public health budget outlay for the fiscal year 2001-02 was 0.7 percent of the GNP. In real terms it amounts to Rs25.40 billion (\$438.03 million). The breakdown of this outlay is that Rs6.68 billion (\$115.31 million) are for development and Rs18.71 billion (\$322.70 million) are recurrent expenditures.

In real terms this allocation is 4.6 per cent more compared to the previous fiscal year. In 2000-01 the total health outlay was Rs24.28 billion (\$418.63 million).

In per capita terms Pakistan spent Rs174 on the healthcare of a citizen in 2001-02. The population in 2001-02 was approximately 146 million. In dollar terms it comes to abashedly low expenditure on healthcare -- three US dollars per person per year.

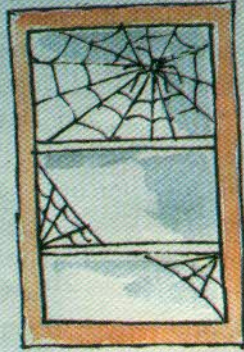
It will be useful to compare this expense with what developed countries are spending on their populations. Annual health expenditure in the established market economies in 1990 averaged \$1,675 per capita, in Asia it was \$60, and in sub-Saharan Africa it was \$6.

One-third of population in Pakistan - more than 48 million people -- subsists on one dollar a day and 65 per cent of the population lives in the rural areas. On the other hand 70 per cent of the total number of doctors in Pakistan are based in cities and provide medical attention to only 35 per cent of the population.

The state, despite healthcare being constitutional right, is only covering one-fourth of the population. This spending is also marred by extreme urban bias as a result of which people, especially poor, end up spending out of their shallow pockets on health products and services in the private sector which are least regulated, majority of which are unnecessary and many of which can be harmful.

Health demand being non-elastic, people spend money on themselves and their loved ones' sicknesses even if they have to sell their belongings. This kind of precious money if spent on unnecessary and harmful products and services then it is scandalous. And the situation, instead of improving, is deteriorating.

Essential Drugs



Yawning disparity

Over four billion people are enjoying access to essential drugs, but in Pakistan it is still a dream to be realised.

By Dr Zaeemul Haq

Globally the number of people with regular access to essential drugs was over four billion by 2002. It was just above two billion in 1977, according to World Health Organisation 2002 annual report on essential drugs.

But people of Pakistan are not among the privileged four billion. This is what has come up in a recent nationwide survey conducted by TheNetwork on availability of essential drugs in Pakistan. According to the survey, 115 brands of 32 generics from the National Essential Drug List previously reported to have availability problems were checked in the market -- only 34.95 per cent were found available.

Those termed short (available irregularly) were 23.13 per cent while 30.61 per cent were not available at all. This does not include the 11 per cent brands about which the pharmacy books say they exist as an alternative but the phar-

macy holders, responding to the survey, denied their existence. Count this figure and this takes the "not available" drugs to almost 40 per cent.

The WHO introduced the essential drugs' concept to uniformly improve their access, quality and rational use throughout the world. The year 2002 marked the 25th anniversary of the first WHO model list of essential medicines. In these 25 years, 156 countries, including Pakistan, have developed national or provincial essential drug lists.

At least 135 countries have turned the essential medicines' concept into clinical practice with national treatment guidelines and formulary manuals. More than 90 have introduced essential drugs concept into the curricula of medicine and pharmacy students.

Unfortunately Pakistan has neither inducted this concept into clinical practice in letter and spirit nor introduced it to the relevant curricula. While over 4 billion people are get-

ting this facility, it is available only for 35 per cent consumers in Pakistan.

These figures illustrate that merely having a list in place is not enough. A strong will is more important. Take the example of Bulgaria and Philippines. Bulgaria does not have an official national drug policy but provision of essential medicines is high on its priority. Availability of essential medicines is continually on the rise in Bulgaria since 1995. In the Philippines, on the other hand, availability of essential medicines has dropped after de-centralisation of health services. Prescription of medicines on the essential drugs list has also gone down. Another worrying indicator is that percentage of antibiotics prescribed has increased to more than 50 per cent in the Philippines.

Lack of determination for implementing the essential drugs' concept leads to irrational use of medicines, unfair financing, unreliable delivery systems, inadequate and incompetent regulatory mechanisms and high pricing of medicines. This brings in more suffering for the already sick and suffering poor consumer.

Comparison of the WHO report 2002 and TheNetwork's survey clearly reveals that when sound policies and guidelines are actively implemented, substantial improvements can be achieved in affordability, availability, quality, and rational use of drugs. Progress is usually phenomenal if the implementers have a strong political will and faith over the concepts they are implementing and results heartening if the plights of the poor are removed.

The 'b' w

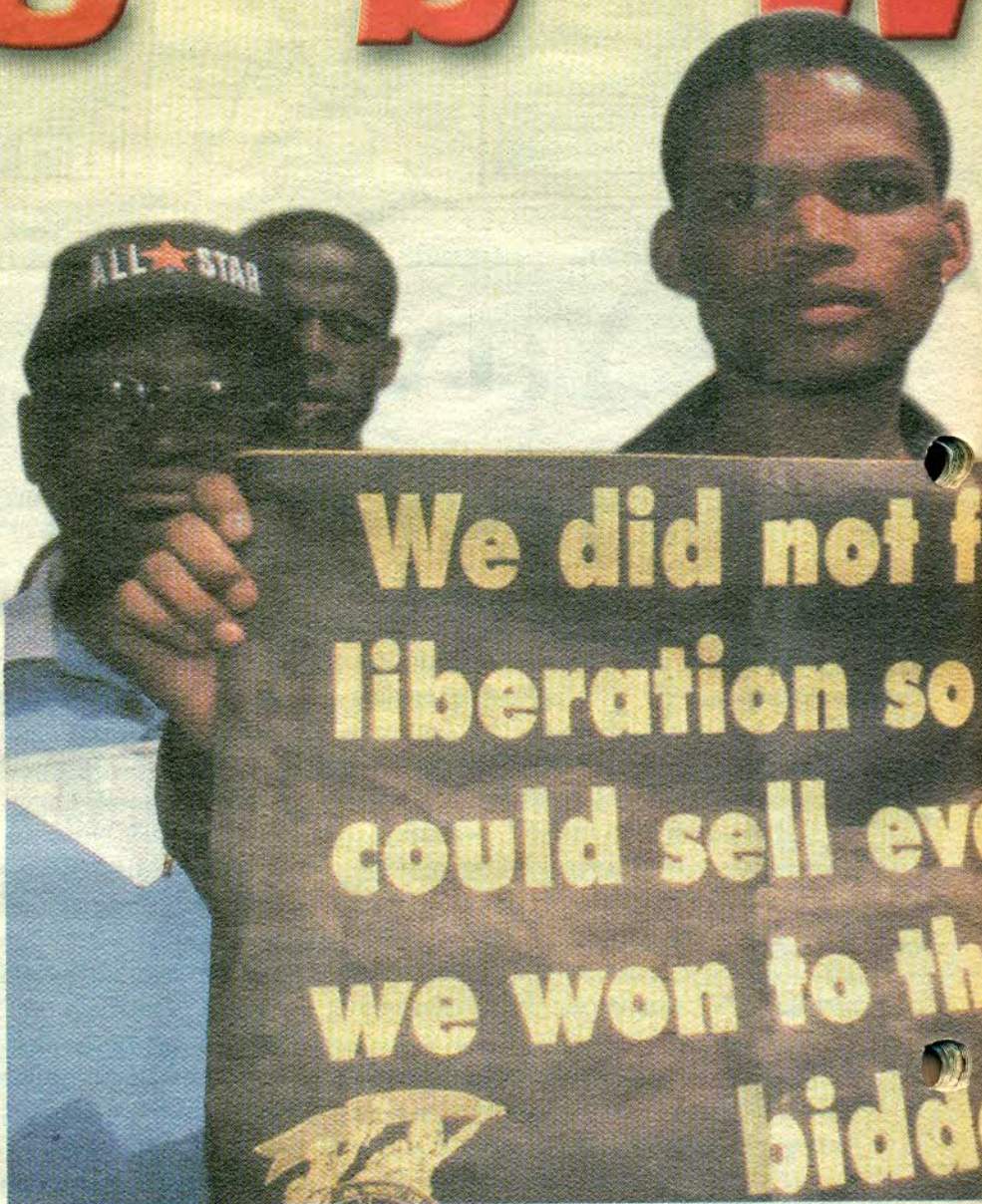
Bureaucracy drives us all crazy. But does that mean selling the family silver to the highest bidder?

By David Hall

When public services go wrong everyone notices. In some countries it means waiting months for a telephone. Elsewhere it may mean waiting years for a sewer connection. Often it means waiting too long for medical treatment. Usually, this is because of underfunding. But sometimes it's because of corruption and sometimes because of inefficiency - for example, when doctors or customs officials expect bribes, or when the payroll is bloated by political cronies of those in power.

So when Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and other free-market enthusiasts came along in the 1980s offering privatisation as a solution to bureaucratic ineptitude, their message fell on open ears. They promised to sweep away an inefficient public sector and replace it with efficient, dynamic, private companies. Driven by the engine of competition, the companies would cut costs and improve services. Above all they would listen to what their customers - that's us - wanted.

Market forces would be cost-effective and responsive in a way the public sector could never be.



Now we are all in that world and it looks different from the brochure.

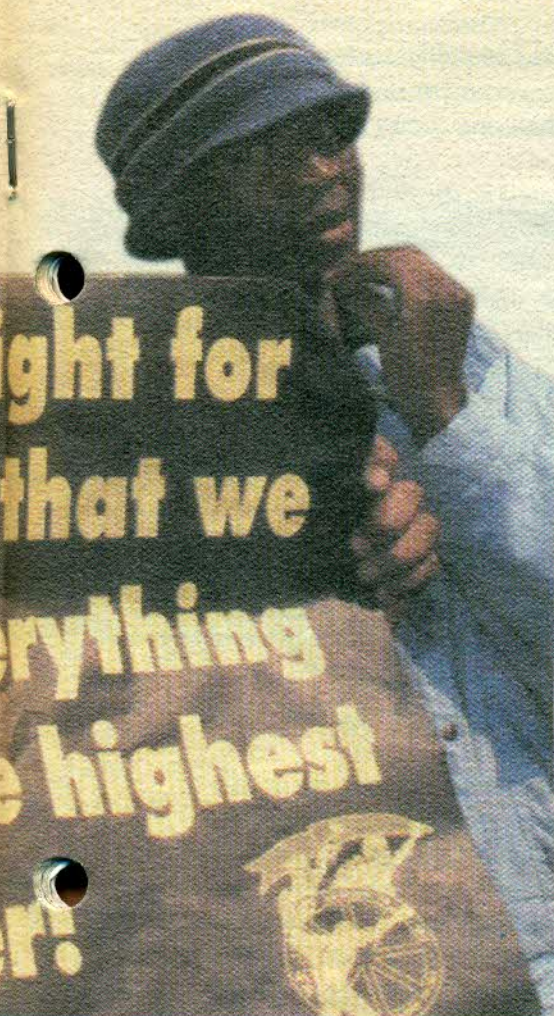
People in Britain wait on privatised stations for trains that are late, overcrowded and dangerous. People in California suffered months of blackouts and skyrocketing electricity prices while private power companies made a killing.

The Argentinean economy is a wreck - partly as a result of unsustainable profits extracted from pri-

vatized services. Do we just have to live with two discredited systems? Or does the public sector offer better prospects of efficient, accountable services than we've been told?

Let's deal with the mythology first. There have now been dozens of studies showing that private sector is not, by definition, more efficient than public sector. Some have concluded the private sector is more efficient. But most have concluded that that there is no

ord



public ownership turned out to be a plus in California's 2001 electricity crisis when Los Angeles residents escaped without the power cuts or price hikes suffered by their fellow Californians. LA's power was generated and distributed by city-owned utility.

The public sector may even be better at improving productivity. A review of the Thatcher government's privatised industries found that most of the improvements came before privatisation, not after. Where there was partial privatisation, as in refuse collection, services that stayed in the hands of local councils improved as much as privatised ones.

The Finnish economist Johan Willner recently concluded that political control through public ownership can lead to better economic results, especially in sectors which are "natural monopolies".

Improved reliability

Even in the poorest parts of Africa and Central America the public sector has shown it can deliver services efficiently. The water authority in Lilongwe, Malawi, reduced leakage to 17 per cent in the 1990s - a record that compares well with the performance of Thames Water in Britain in 2001. And in 1994 there was a successful restructuring of SANAA, the state-owned water company in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. They dramatically improved efficiency by introducing computers, decentralising the company's work and tightening up on overstaffing due to corruption. Leakage rates fell and the reliability of supply improved allowing the majority of the city's populations to receive piped water 24 hours a day.

In Honduras the trade union at the water utility took a central role in the restructuring, whereas in the private sector the first step towards efficiency is usually to cut jobs. Public-service workers are a vital source of expertise and com-

mitment and authorities in some countries are beginning to recognise these strengths.

In developing countries the most pressing need is to extend the public services as widely as possible but many people are too poor to be profitable customers. Here public utilities have a built-in advantage -- because they take the risk for the sake of the country and because they don't have to maximise profits for shareholders,

In Sao Paulo the public water company SABESP extended water to an extra 940,000 households and sewer pipes to an extra 787,000 households in the space of four years, an increase of 25 per cent in both cases. At the same time it turned around a financial deficit and maintained employment.

Cross-subsidy is crucial to this process - otherwise the poor will never be connected to services they can't afford. This subsidy has to come from other people - either through taxes or by charging the wealthy more for the service they receive. Privatisation supporters claim cross-subsidies are wasteful and counter to good business sense. But in Buenos Aires the newly privatised water company found the only way it could afford to connect the shanty towns was by imposing a special "solidarity charge" on middle-class consumers. The company also had to rely on the municipality to provide the pipes and the poor themselves to provide their labour free.

For services like public transport some level of subsidy is usually necessary for the service to function at all. So privatisation doesn't get rid of subsidies, it just changes who receives them. The private companies now running the British railways rely on public subsidies - Vivendi's rail subsidiary Connex successfully demanded another \$86 million from the government in December 2002 to continue running the trains. The

significant difference.

If we look at water services, public companies in the Netherlands, Japan and the US look to be more than private water companies in France and England. Electricity is another area where private provision doesn't seem to help.

An exhaustive comparison of public and private electricity companies worldwide by researcher Michael Pollitt found that ownership makes little difference. In fact

Pakistan's decade of privatisation

Money from privatisation in Pakistan is too small to make any dent in retiring foreign debts or reduce poverty.

ConsumerWise Report

In Pakistan privatisation started on January 22, 1991 when the Privatisation Commission was set up. Initially the commission's role was confined to privatisation of industrial units only. In 1993 its purview was extended to power, oil, gas, telecommunications, banks, insurance, transport, aviation, railways, ports and shipping.

From January 1991 to March 2003, the commission has privatised 128 public sector entities, generating Rs94.17 billion. Seemingly this huge amount which the government says would be used for "debt retirement" and "poverty reduction" becomes very small when one comes to know that it is only three per cent of the government's entire debt.

In foreign exchange this amount becomes \$1.62 billion (if calculated at the dollar-rupee exchange rate of Rs58). The yearly average income of privatisation from 1991 to 2003 comes to around 147 million dollars.

How the government is going to reduce the foreign debt with this small earning from the privatisation? The annual growth of foreign debt is over one billion dollars a year.

Above all, how it would go into reducing poverty in Pakistan. According to a recent World Bank report, people living below poverty line in Pakistan are 47 million, up from 33 million a couple of years ago. Despite the decision of spending 10 per cent of the privatisation proceeds on poverty reduction projects, the number of Pakistanis living below poverty line has only increased.

The privatisation programme will hardly generate money to make a considerable dent in the foreign debt and reducing poverty even if every public unit is privatised.

The International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the Asian Development Bank are the "driving force" behind privatisation in Pakistan. From 1991 to 2001, frequent political upheavals kept the privatisation process slow. But from 2001 onwards, it gathered momentum.

As donors want to retrieve the loans, privatisation brings in downsizing and golden handshakes - in other words asking employees to leave -- and ending subsidies. In Pakistan also, most of the state-owned units had been heavily downsized before or after privatisation.

The "rightsizing" of major banks has led to more than 25,000 jobs cut. The management of Habib Bank, National Bank, and the United Bank initiated downsizing programme before privatisation. Before its sell-out to an Abu-Dhabi based consortium, more than 10,000 employees of the UBL were sent home under the golden handshake scheme.

But those who continue to hold onto their jobs are also not safe. Initially these employees' salaries and perks were safe for a year under a restriction from the government. A year after the privatisation, they were at the disposal of the buyer. But now this condition has also been lifted to "expedite the privatisation programme".

The proponents of privatisation say it brings in competition, efficiency and eventually cut in prices. However, exactly the opposite happens. In Pakistan, prices of ghee, cement and electricity went up soon after the privatisation of public industries producing ghee, cement and electricity. It also led to monopoly of the private sector.

The privatisation process would further trigger price rise and jobs cut in Pakistan as the government has accepted the donors' demand of increasing the prices of gas to make this sector lucrative for the future buyers. According to the Privatisation Commission's annual report 2002, the government wants complete gas price deregulation and phasing out of subsidy in the next four years, starting from fiscal year 2002-3 and overcoming the resistance of the vested interest groups against the privatisation (the commission is referring to the unions' opposition).

The report says the government also wants to be "realistic in the amount of proceeds that can be obtained from the transactions; in some instances, those opposed to privatisation inflate expectations of likely proceeds with the intention of raising controversy and undermining the process."

difference is that the subsidy has to keep Vivendi shareholders happy, too.

Efficiency is not enough in the public service. State-owned agencies must also be open to scrutiny and responsive to the needs of the public - the owners. Where government services have declined into remote bureaucracies or corrupt machines for rewarding cronies there is bound to be cynicism and mistrust. But this is neither universal nor inevitable.



There are places where participation and transparency are central features of local government - and the outstanding examples are in developing countries. In Porto Alegre, Brazil, the municipality has adopted a system of "participatory budgeting" in which over 14,000 people take part each year. There has been far greater transparency - detailed information is made available to the council on request.

As a result of direct citizen input, resources have been redirected to small infrastructure projects in poor neighbourhoods. The idea of citizens helping to set local budgets was developed by the Workers Party, whose leader Lula is now Brazil's president. Participatory budgeting is also being tested in other municipalities where the Workers

Party has been elected.

Citizen involvement

A similar system has been developed in the southern Indian state of Kerala. It is based on directing funds for services to local village councils (panchayats). The councils are then required to draw up spending plans through a series of public assemblies which are heavily publicised. All elected councillors are given three days of training and are supported in their duties by a cadre of volunteer professionals. Kerala has a strong tradition of literacy and political activity which may be more important in involving people than more diffuse notions of "civil society". The danger of corruption is dealt with by ensuring that all documents and decisions are open to public scrutiny. This works at the most basic level - for example the public now knows what hours a local doctor for the state-funded health service is paid to work.

Openness can be a key part of transforming a public authority too. In Maharashtra, India, the regulatory commission responsible for setting electricity prices decided to have statewide hearings about a proposed price rise of 18 per cent. Community groups got intensely involved, demanding a wealth of detailed information.

Eventually, the electricity authority admitted errors in its own data. Over a period of six months the regulator, the electricity board, and the public worked to set a new price increase of 6.5 per cent, instead of the original 18 per cent.

There is one final advantage that public sector operators have over private companies - they can't pack up and

leave when the going gets tough. Last year the US energy company, AES, walked away from its operations in Orissa, one of the poorest states in India, because it couldn't make enough profit. The world's leading water transnational, Suez, gave up running the water services for half of Manila because it could not cover its debts and still make a profit. And the British firm, National Express, recently walked away from its contract in Victoria, Australia - leaving the local bus company with a \$55-million debt.

These are not accidents. They happen because private sector operators are obliged to maximise shareholder return. When it becomes unprofitable to stay, the private companies have to go.

But while the private sector often can't afford to carry on running a service, the public sector cannot afford not to. So the public sector can and must do better and it needs the framework to do so. Adequate funding is always crucial so services for all who need them are supported by contributions from those best able to pay.


Accountability to local people is vital - through vigorous public participation, complete transparency and accessibility of information.

There also needs to be a management system which uses workers' knowledge instead of distrusting their organisation.

These are serious, perpetual challenges for the public sector. But they are challenges which cannot be ignored.

Courtesy NI

(David Hall is director of the Public Services International Research Unit at the University of Greenwich, London.)



Unsafe path

Married women in Pakistan are opting for unsafe abortions to get rid of unwanted pregnancies - a situation that calls for immediate attention.

By Nadym Ekbal

Samina's husband told her early on that he wanted to have only two children. But Samina (not her real name) says he was never "cooperative" when it came to using contraceptives. She got pregnant more than twice. The only reason they still have just two children, she says, is that she has somehow managed to get her eight unwanted pregnancies terminated, all through "unsafe methods". Should she get pregnant again, the 45-year-old Samina figures she will just have to go through one of these procedures again.

Abortion is illegal in Pakistan unless it is performed to save the mother's life. But many women are unaware that it is against the law to have an abortion. What they do know, though, is that cultural and religious norms prohibit the practice, which is why they resort to clandestine - and often risky - procedures to have one.

World Health Organisation defines unsafe abortion as a procedure of terminating an unwanted pregnancy either by a person lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimum medical standards, or both.

It also says that aside from death, the other possible consequences of unsafe abortions are infertility and other severe gynecological problems such as pelvic inflammatory disease, bleeding and infection.

Unlike western countries where most abortions occur among unmarried adolescents, in Pakistan it is estimated that 91.5 per cent of the total induced abortions are performed on married women. About nine per cent of those who have abortions in the country die during the process.

According to women rights activists, some methods used in the illegal abortions involve "instruments" like knitting needles, coat hangers, and metal rods, as well as materials like potash and gunpowder.

Activists have repeatedly argued that abortions need not occur under high-risk conditions if only the government made it legal at least in the first 120 days of pregnancy.

But they also concede that many women may not even have to consider abortion at all if only they have enough knowledge about family planning, as well as access to contraceptives.

In the Pakistan Reproductive Health and Family Planning Survey (PRHFPS), conducted in 2001 by the National Institute of Population Studies, only 28 per cent of the married women respondents said they were practicing some form of contraception. This included so-called traditional methods like

withdrawal, which was third among the most popular family planning practices among the respondents.

Interestingly 42 per cent of the married women respondents said they wanted to limit their family size to what they had at the time of the survey, and another 19 per cent said they wanted two-year space between having children.

Experts say the unmet need for family planning in Pakistan remains large.

Pakistan is acknowledged to have been one of the first countries to implement a family planning programme. It has

tions under unsafe conditions had been using some contraceptives, but got pregnant.

"We have to increase the contraceptive prevalence rate and the awareness about their (proper) use. That limited information is available is obvious from the fact that in 76 per cent of unsafe abortions, husbands accompany their wives, meaning contraceptives are not reliable," says an Islamabad-based gynecologist Dr Sarah Jamil,

Dr Salma Khan, another gynecologist, observes husbands are part of the problem. She says while they exercise

About nine per cent of those who have abortions in the country die during the process

Family Welfare Centres set up nationwide to help disseminate information about family planning methods.

These centres also counsel walk-ins and provide contraceptives. Yet the country's population is still increasing at a steep annual rate of 2.3 to 3 per cent. This means each year, a figure roughly equal to the population of New Zealand, is added to this nation's total number of people.

Officials, however, say knowledge regarding contraceptives increased from 78 per cent of the adult population in 1991 to 96 per cent in 2001. The contraceptive prevalence rate also went up during the same period, but it increased only by 30 per cent.

It is also telling that "Seeking Help for Abortion", a 1999 study by the Baqai Medical University, found that 59.1 per cent of women who admitted to having abor-

"veto power" in determining the size of their family, they do little else, and expect their wives to take care of actually limiting the number of children they will have. This, remarks Khan, is "unfair to women".

There are obviously no statistics available about how many illegal abortions are being performed in Pakistan every year. But according to a survey by the Aga Khan Hospital, the abortion rate among its married women respondents who belonged to poor families was 25.5 per cent per 1,000.

Shirkat Gah, a non-government organisation, believes Pakistan has a "high rate" of unsafe abortion, which it says is a direct consequence of denying women reproductive autonomy, unmet contraceptive needs, and legal ambiguities about the subject. ◆



Milk shift

An aggressive media campaign has successfully put the fear of open milk in consumers' hearts. It has come to be associated with germs and disease. On the other hand, packed milk has been presented as 'attractive and healthy' substitute

By M Idrees Khan

How would you react to a scene on the television screen that shows a milkman amid unclean surroundings and, to make matters worse, dips his hands in the milk he is going to supply to consumers. Add to it the scene when he wipes off his perspiring forehead or arms, some of it falls into the milk! Disgusting, isn't it.



Then comes the attractive alternative - the packed milk. You are told that it is gathered from the best farms and pasteurised on scientific lines under the glow of good-look-

ing experts, and it reaches you packed and carries no germs.

The difference is so obvious that next time you would take a long hard look at the open milk supplied to your home and may decide in the end that it is better to spend more for having "safe milk". There is no question about the validity of the packed milk. It was so obvious in the "advertisement".

But if you examine the "ad" trying to change your years old habits, you will come to understand that it is much more than a multinational's concern for your health.

Home-based milk industry has become the first causality of globalisation in Pakistan. On the one hand is the aggressive media campaign against open milk and on the other administrations of big cities are determined to cleanse cities of milkmen, cows and buffaloes.

Milk and wheat is a basic food element in rural Pakistan. The per capita availability of milk in Pakistan is 375 gram, which is more than any Asian country. Of the world's milk production, Pakistan's share is 4.5 per cent.

The aggressive media campaign has successfully put the fear of open milk in consumers' hearts. It has come to be associated with germs and diseases.

"We have four buffaloes but even in our home packed milk is used. It is all due to the marketing that is making us believe that packed milk is safe," says Tariq Iqbal, a journalist, who belongs to Shorkot. Iqbal brushes aside the claims that the packed milk's preparation is marked by cleanliness. "That is what we are shown in the ad. Otherwise things are not that clean."

Milkmen have been asked to get out of the cities, saying buffaloes disrupt traffic, their

According to an estimate, around 2500 to 3000 milkmen and their families were affected by displacement. The fodder industry also suffered

refuse is hazardous for human health and one of the reasons for pollution. In Lahore, Karachi, and Rawalpindi milkmen have to leave their houses and move outside the cities. They went to Supreme Court but lost the case.

According to an estimate, around 2500 to 3000 milkmen



and their families were affected by displacement. The fodder industry also suffered.

Local administrations promise suitable place for the milkmen and their animals - in other words Gawala Colony. But once they are out

Punjab chief minister, but nothing has been done. "Only promises are made that our problems would be solved."

When asked about allegations of pollution and traffic hurdles, Ahmed maintains does it mean that milkmen community is an outcast. "If you want us to live outside the city, at least provide us some place. We want a colony like the one in Karachi where we should have water, electricity and gas. We also want a veterinary hospital in the colony." Ahmed, however, says it would be much better if milkmen are allowed to work in cities.

Aftab Ahmed Chohan, chief officer of Rawalpindi's Tehsil Municipal administration, says the demand for the colony of milkmen is not easy to meet. "We cannot do anything on our own. It needs huge amount of money, which we don't have. We need complete cooperation from the

district, firmly believes that buffaloes' fresh milk is much better than the packed milk. "The packed milk reaches you after going through various temperatures and pasteurisation process. It is bound to lose freshness." Hussain says packed milk is no alternative to fresh open milk. "When you take into account the use of preservatives in the packed milk, there is no doubt in my mind that open fresh milk is the best."

Consumers, however, are divided over the use of packed or open milk. Islamabad's Junaid Khattak complains of adulteration in the open milk. "I asked a milkman to provide pure milk, he said when he didn't have it, how could he provide it to me." But Tehmina Bibi of the Bangash Colony in Rawlapindi prefers open milk. "At least you know it is milk. I am never sure about a pack that is on the shop's shelf for the last one week that it contains milk. Above all packed milk is expensive."

"They would pester us so much and create so many hurdles that we would finally give up this business. Then consumers would have no other option but to buy the packed milk"

of the cities, they are forgotten.

"It was a conspiracy against milkmen," says Chaudhry Nazir Ahmed, president of Rawalpindi's milkmen union. "They would pester us so much and create so many hurdles that we would finally give up this business. Then consumers would have no other option but to buy the packed milk."

Ahmed says a request was sent to the prime minister and they have met with the

provincial government." However, Chohan sympathises with the milkmen and vows he would do anything in his capacity for their welfare.

Another officer, on condition of anonymity, says the administration has no plans to do anything for milkmen. "They never considered it a problem. Milkmen were beaten and put behind bars just to see that they move out of the cities."

Dr Sujjar Hussain, chief medical officer of Rawalpindi





Fabricating prints

By Fatima Iqbal

With summer at its peak, markets are flooded with lawns of all types and brands. Quality varies with prices and the brands available but what probably is shocking for customers and designers is the amount of counterfeit lawn prints on sale. There are stacks of fake prints in some of Lahore and Karachi's renowned retail shops.

Mainly retail shops encourage businesses of shady textile mills for hogging on profits and the market share by imitating the registered prints of designer lawn in poor quality. Consumers at such shopping arcades are easily led into buying low quality fake lawns for as little as Rs35 per metre.

This year Lala Classics and Taskeen Lawn have copied the prints of Yabsir Waheed and

DS Mausummery and have the nerve to go about flaunting the designs in colourful brochures and posters.

This is just not the fate of these two designer houses, but giant textile mills such as Gul Ahmed and Al-Karam Textile's designs are also being strewn off. Much to the chagrin of the designers and owners, the trend has been on the increase, with four to five textile mills churning out fake prints every year.

There are stacks of fake prints in some of Lahore and Karachi's renowned retail shops

"We did notify these mills and warned them against copying our designs. But before we knew there were few others already in the market with our

replicas," says Huma Ahmad, co-proprietor and designer of DS Mausummery

According to these designers, they need a common platform to raise voice against these violations. Reason for not moving the court, mentioned by Huma, could be to refrain from legal complications and the lack of trust in the law enforcing authorities. Famous brands, for purposes of reputation, usually avoid fanning the issue, thereby giving copiers a leeway.

More than half of the Gul Ahmed and Al-Karam prints have been ripped off. The retailers attract consumers to these fake versions available at one-third the price of the original.

"Definitely, we want to put an end to this malpractice," says Shehnaz, marketing director of Gul Ahmed Textiles. "Our

firm is ready to join hands to drive out these fake mills from the scene."

Shehnaz refers to a case where the mill owner had set up a factory in Faisalabad, supplied some of the popular designs already in the market. After making some quick money and carefully dodging the tax collectors, he rolled up his unit in just three months and disappeared. "We always pay our taxes and give our customers quality for their

price."

After a team went to investigate, they found Saleem Fabrics in Liberty Market selling fake prints of Gul Ahmed

and Al-Karam. Similarly fabric shops in DHA, Lahore, have exact prints of Yabsir Waheed and DS Mausumery under the label Lala Fabrics and Taskeen Lawn.

Though these temporary mills tarnish the reputé of major firms, they hardly put a dent on their monetary turnover because quality conscious consumers go for renowned brands. Usually emerging designers who are in the business for five years or so face the brunt.

While big firms produce in bulk, designer houses painstakingly work on limited prints before they are finally launched into the market. They are known for their exclusivity in designs and that being at stake, they run into losses.

"As the cliché 'the biggest compliment is to be copied' holds great sentimental value, the mere fact that a designer's creation can get copied, and sold, so blatantly in this country is morally disgusting," Khurram Butt, director sales at Yabsir Waheed, writes in his survey report

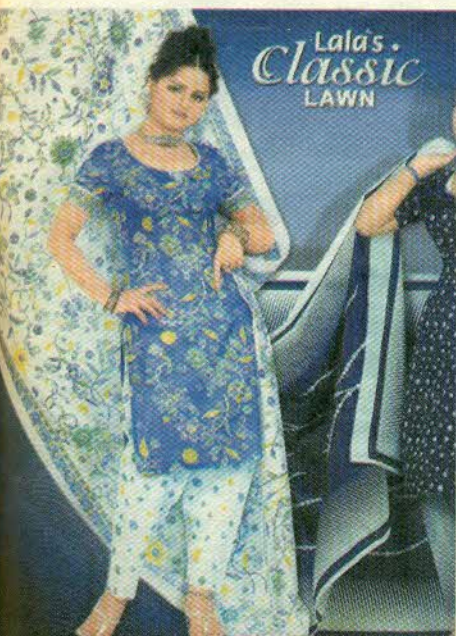
"What's revolting is the fact that 'reputed' fabric retailers flout all rules and take pride in selling their fakes. While the fake prints obviously create discontent amongst genuine customers who nonetheless continue to patronise the original, however, this alone is no consolation to the heartburn, mental anguish and loss of potential sales that the original product manufacturer has to suffer.

"Sad as the truth is, all designer brands that create a large fan following are besieged by cheap spin-offs at one point or the other. At the moment we are in consultation with our legal counsel on the best course of action against the unscrupulous manufacturers as well as fabric retailers."

According to Pakistan's copyright ordinance, Advocate Ali Asim Sayed explains it takes three long years to register a brand and when a case of intellectual

property copyright violation is registered, there are two remedies depending on the nature of the case - civil or criminal.

"Once the evidence is established, all those involved from the manufacturers to the retailers can be sued and the unit is sealed."



Tobacco Free Home



Tobacco-Free Homes

Dear Parents

Second hand smoke is as hazardous as active smoking but at times even more damaging as it involves infants and children who are involuntarily exposed to it. Being in their growing years the effects are more drastic and damaging. We as adults and parents have a responsibility towards them. If we recognize the hazards of smoking then it becomes even more imperative to save these children from hazards of passive smoking. One of the ways of doing this is not to smoke in places where children are present especially our homes.

If you feel concerned about the hazards of passive smoking, please stop smoking in covered areas, especially your home and sign the attached certificate declaring your home tobacco free. This declaration implies that nobody in your house smokes or uses tobacco in a closed environment. You might choose to continue using tobacco products including cigarettes but would ensure that it is not done within your house thus saving your loved ones from the hazards of passive smoking.

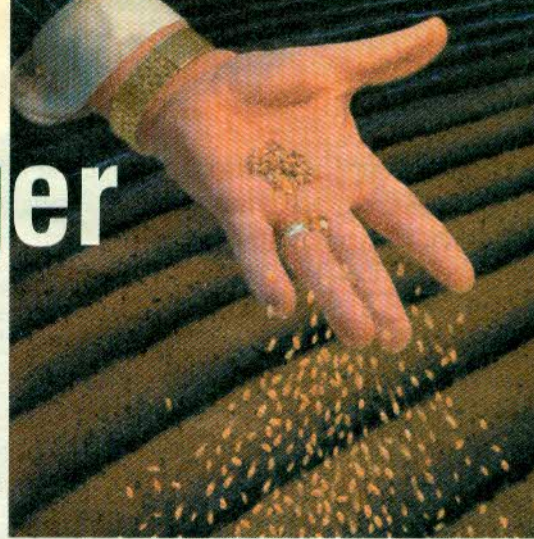
Your signatures are only a moral obligation on your part agreeing not to smoke in your home.

If you participate in this activity ask your child to deposit the certificate with his/her school office from where these shall be collected. Your children would be entitled to souvenirs declaring your home 'Tobacco Free'.

The School taking part in the activity shall also receive shields announcing them partners of the Tobacco Free Initiative - Pakistan.


The Network
 for Consumer Protection

Producing hunger



GM crops will not feed the world and could pose a considerable threat to poor farmers, warns a new report launched by ActionAid in London.

"GM Crops - Going Against the Grain" examines biotech companies' claims that genetically modified (GM) crops can tackle world hunger.

The report reveals that at best GM crops are irrelevant to poor farmers, at worst they threaten to push them deeper into debt, making them more reliant on expensive seeds and chemicals and unable to save seed from one harvest to the next.

"The UK public should not be duped into accepting GM in the name of developing countries. GM does not provide a magic bullet solution to world hunger. What poor people really need is access to land, water, better roads to get their crops to market, education and credit schemes," said Matthew Lockwood, ActionAid's head of policy.

Using evidence from ActionAid campaigns in

Asia, Africa and Latin America, the report takes a balanced look at the impact of GM crops

in developing countries. It concludes that rather than alleviating world hunger, the new technology is likely to exacerbate food insecurity, leading to more hungry people not less.

Key findings from report:

- ◆ GM seeds are far more suited to the needs of large-scale commercial farmers rather than poor farmers.
- ◆ GM expansion is driven by corporate profit not the needs of poor people.
- ◆ Four multinationals - Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer CropScience and DuPont - control most of the GM seed market. By linking their chemicals to seeds via

Monsanto to own soyabean!

The verdict is out. Monsanto will now own soyabean seeds. After a legal battle that lasted nine years, the European Patent Office (EPO) on May 6 upheld the European Patent No. 301,749, granted in March 1994. It provides the seed multinational Monsanto exclusive monopoly over all forms of genetically engineered soybean varieties and seeds - irrespective of the genes used or the transformation technique employed.

Monsanto will now have complete control over soyabean research and development. Since much of the research now is through the applications of biotechnology and genetic engineering techniques, Monsanto alone will have the exclusive right to evolve genetically engineered soybeans. The company that has a monopoly over the crop seed will eventually end up controlling the entire soyabean production chain. Unless an appeal is filed against the patent, the company's monopoly, to begin with, will remain unchallenged in Europe.

With the EPO granting an absurd patent, which defies all laws of common sense, the process to seek control and monopoly over other major crops is not far away. While Monsanto has enough reasons to rejoice over an undemocratic and unethical ruling, which buries in the process a lot of technical details and complexities, the "broad-spectrum"

patent may trigger the beginning of the collapse of the patenting regime. Thanks to EPO, it may now be relatively easy for the masses to understand the grave implications.

Not only the civil society, the soyabean patent is sure to infuriate agricultural scientists as well as the policymakers in the developing countries. Multinationals like Syngenta and Pioneer Hi-Bred are also agitated over the patent.

At the same time, it raises serious questions over the validity of the sui generis legislations that a number of developing countries are formulating to protect the rights of the researchers and farmers. The sui generis laws being framed under the Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) regime is merely a strategy to allow developing countries a breathing time while the seed multinationals tighten their private control over public property. Scientists agree that the impact of such broad patents will become a grave impediment to the ability of developing country researchers to access new crop improvement technologies to breed new crops for their regions. This restricts access to suitable seeds for different agro-climatic regions thereby impacting food security as well as creating environmental hazards.

At the same time, it throws up a plethora of questions relating not only to future of science and technology, but

GM technologies, these corporations have extended markets for their herbicides and pesticides.

- ◆ Farmers are not allowed to trade or save GM seed from one harvest to the next. "Terminator technology" is also being developed that produces sterile seeds.
- ◆ There is no consistent evidence GM crops yield more and require fewer chemicals. In one study, Monsanto's GM soya had 6% lower yields than non-GM soya and 11% less than high-yielding non-GM soya.
- ◆ Insecticide use on GM cotton has fallen in some locations, but these gains may be short-lived. Chemical use on herbicide-resistant GM crops has sometimes gone up rather than down.

In Pakistan, ActionAid has investigated how poor farmers have been enticed by the hype surrounding GM to buy expensive "miracle" cotton seeds. The results have been disappointing, with many farmers losing most of their crops and facing ruin.

The report recommends that there should be no further commercialisation of GM crops until more research has been carried out on their impacts, especially in poor countries. Also, poor countries and their farmers must have the right to open public

debates before they decide whether to go ahead with GM crops.

Key GM statistics:

In 2002 GM crops covered 58 million hectares worldwide - an area two and a half times the size of the UK.

Only 1% of GM research is aimed at crops used by poor farmers.

The US biotech industry spends \$250 million a year promoting GM.

A small range of useful looking GM crops aimed at the poor are being researched but they stand only a 1 in 250 chance of making it into farmers fields.

The four corporations that control most of the GM seed market had a combined turnover from agrochemicals and seeds of \$21.6 billion in 2001.

91% of all GM crops grown worldwide in 2001 were from Monsanto seeds.

"We know there is more than enough food in the world to feed everyone. What is causing world hunger is poverty and inequality. Money would be far better spent tackling these problems than poured into GM technology," said Adriano Campolina Soares from ActionAid Brazil.

also initiate an inquiry into the very relevance of such a faulty patenting regime

The broad-spectrum patent on soyabean was actually granted to Agracetus, a wholly owned subsidiary of W R Grace (of the neem patent fame). Challenging this "absurd" patent, Monsanto had then provided "unambiguous evidence" saying that the genetic engineering process described in the patent was insufficient to allow scientists to replicate the procedure - a necessary criterion for patenting.

Meanwhile, Monsanto bought over Agracetus and thereby the patent claim. It then began aggressively defending the patent saying it was necessary for crop improvement.

The complete turnaround by Monsanto is clearly a pointer to the fact that patents have nothing to do with research and innovation. Patents are only linked to commerce - a reality that scientists and policymakers have deliberately ignored in an effort to promote and protect the economic interests of the multinational corporations.

The tragedy with modern science is the diminishing public sector funding as a result of which scientists have moved on to defend the commercial interest of the private companies, which protects their livelihoods. "Good science" has therefore been replaced by "sound science", a new terminology that the industry feels comfortable with.

Broad-spectrum patents also make a mockery of the multinational's claim over making the genome sequences

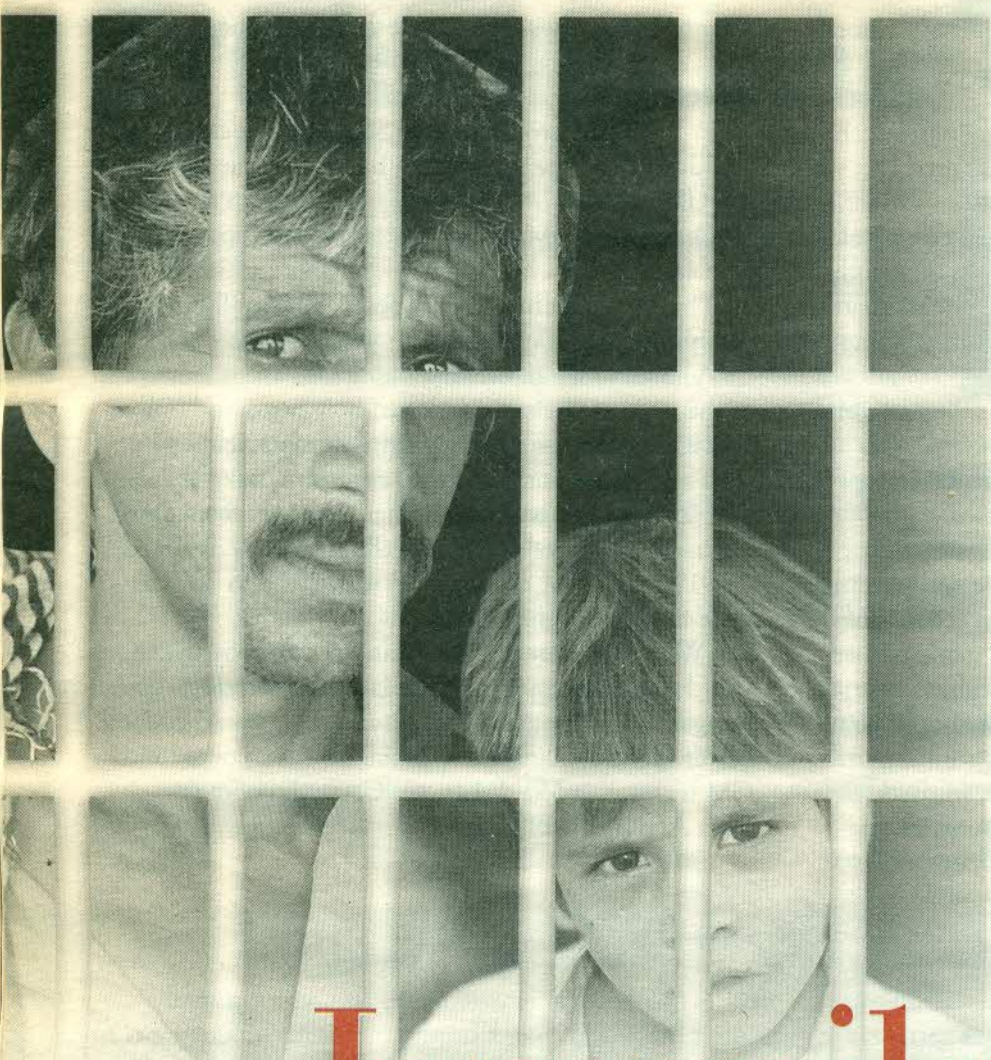
freely available to scientists. Monsanto, for instance, has already mapped the rice genome, and has repeatedly assured the world that it has no intention of seeking control over the mapped genes and sequences.

Syngenta, which too has mapped the rice genome, has already gone back on its words. In any case, what is the purpose of making the genomes available for public use when the companies are seeking exclusive control over the transgenic plants?

Isn't it merely a public relations exercise that an eagerly pliable media plays up in an effort to seek more advertisement revenue?

Devinder Sharma is a New Delhi-based food and trade policy analyst.





Juvenile injustice

By
Nadym
Ekbal

For citizens ignorance of law is not an excuse in the court of law. But it seems to be an excuse for the police. Muhammad Abid, 33, a police constable for the last 15 years, does not know that a three-year old law has fixed the age of a child as a person below 18 years and not 14 as he thinks.

Although Abid has some sketchy information about the

existence of such a law, he says it has yet to be fully implemented. Muhammad Saeed, another 27-year old constable with nine years experience, says the police have yet to get any orientation on the law. The police ignorance about laws made to protect rights of the children is creating hardships for them.

The 2002 report of the independent Human Rights

Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) says the failure to implement the Juvenile Justice System Ordinance (JJSO) of 2000 meant that over 4,500 juveniles remained behind bars in prisons across Pakistan.

"Over 3,000 of these were

The police ignorance about laws made to protect rights of the children is creating hardships for them

under trial prisoners, including at least 40 girls, although JJSO prohibited their detention," says the "State of Human Rights in 2002" report.

Acknowledging a person under 18 years of age as child, the ordinance provides special care for children in Pakistan's justice system.

The law has barred death penalty and handcuffs except in special cases, for the children. It has asked for separation of juveniles from adults in jails; setting up of exclusive juvenile courts; offence carrying ten years punishment is bailable for children under 15 years of age and has prohibited publication of juvenile court's proceedings to defame the child.

Sajjad Khan, assistant director of the government's National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD), told ConsumerWise that the law has been notified in the form of rules to the four provinces.

"But the problem is that infrastructure like separate jails, courtrooms are required for its full implementation. The government has been making plans to build at least

one borstal school at every of total 25 administrative divisions of the country within next 2-3 years."

On ignorance of the law-enforcing agencies' personnel and judiciary about the ordinance, he said training manuals have been prepared and soon the judges and police officers would undergo training.

Pakistan became party to the UN's Convention on the

Rights of Children (CRC) in 1990 when NCCWD was established to monitor the convention's implementation.

Anees Jillani, executive coordinator of Society for the Protection of Rights of Children (SPARC), an NGO, told ConsumerWise that although the law is being implemented in usual slow bureaucratic style, its spirit is yet to be enforced.

"Like during trial," he said, "the law stipulates provision of a lawyer to a child accused on state expense and that a child's trial be conducted separately from adult. Also the trial should not be held in open court. But all these are being violated."

He said, "there are only four children jails in the country. But all are in the eastern provinces of Punjab and

No improvement in child rights: report

The Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC) warns that the situation of children in Pakistan is not improving in its "The state of Pakistan's children 2002".

"As far as child-labour programmes are concerned, there is not much effort from the government, and children are still suffering," says SPARC head Anees Jilani. Children make up half of Pakistan's population of 140 million.

SPARC's report says much work was still needed to protect vulnerable youngsters. Education and enrolment rates remained unchanged, Jilani said.

Moreover, "the number of children out of school is increasing, which is going to have devastating effects on the future of the country too".

Although prevalence is not high in Pakistan, aid agencies have warned of the increasing threat of AIDS spreading across the country, putting children who are being sexually abused at even greater risk.

With shocking statistics on the number of child deaths under the age of five (103 in every 1,000 live births), Jilani said curable diseases such as hepatitis were still big child killers.

According to the SPARC, one of the most under-acknowledged problems was that of juvenile justice, with hundreds of children languishing in jails. "If you go to the North West Frontier Province and Balochistan, children are behind bars without any legal help," he said. "There should be separate centres where children are held, and they should be kept away from adults to prevent them from being abused," Jilani said. He stressed that corporal punishment was becoming an increasingly prevalent issue. "There have been a number of children who have committed suicide after being punished at school," he noted, calling on the government to take more action.

"We have the resources, but the political will is not there and, under the new government, over the past six months, the ministers have not made any progress on the rights of a child."

However, Steve Ashby, programme director for Save The Children, UK, says at least the level of debate on children's rights was much more sophisticated than in previous years under different leadership. "There is better awareness now, but implementation is a key area where their programmes fall down."

Material for the annual report was gathered by SPARC following a review of government and press reports, and field visits.

But the government rejects claims that it is not doing enough. "There are some indications in various reports that the implementation from the government side is nonexistent. But if you look at the cases of children in prison in 1997 - 4,000 - and compare it to the 2,300 cases last year, you can see that there is a decrease," says Muhammad Hassan Mangi, director of National Commission for Child Welfare and Development. Mangi maintained that positive progress was being made. "We have established the non-formal education system in the Punjab to stop child labour, and work is being done to get children into schools."

Sindh." While remaining two western provinces of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan bordering Afghanistan have none.

Both the provinces are lagging behind in the implementation of law. Media reports emanating from Peshawar city in September last year found a lower judicial magistrate going beyond his powers by fining three juveniles for watching an obscene movie inside a video-centre.

Under the law, only a special juvenile court is empowered to deal with the cases involving children.

Although the counsel for the three teenagers, all

sentences of over 350 juvenile prisoners in Punjab jails into life imprisonment but this directive has yet to be implemented by jail authorities. They argue that most of these children are above 18 years of age and their medical examination is awaited to determine the exact age.

Pakistan has a large population of children. Children under 15 years of age are 41.8 per cent of the 145 million people in the country. While children under 18 consists over half of this population.

In the absence of separate jails for children they are either kept with adults or in separate cells. But the child

missing in Pakistan's criminal and juvenile justice system, says SPARC's "The State of Pakistan's Children -2002".

"As a result," it said, "it is not an anomaly to come across children being tortured and ill treated in police custody, in order to obtain confessions; given sentences, which disregard the key principles of juvenile justice: rehabilitation and the primacy of the well-being of the child; subjected to degrading and inhuman conditions in prison and denied due process that should guarantee them fair trials."

There is no exact data available about child detainees but it is estimated that the bulk of 3,387 juvenile prisoners are in the 29 prisons in Punjab. Of the 379 convicted, majority are accused of serious crimes ranging from murder (802), attempted murder (174), dacoity (280), theft (305), unnatural offenses (147), sex offenses (219) to drug related charges (240).

In NWFP, there were a total of 723 prisoners in the juvenile cells of the 21 prisons. Out of this, 635 were under-trial. Of the convicted one was condemned to death. In Sindh there were a total of 624 juveniles under-trial prisoners, and another 23 convicted juveniles. In Balochistan there were 47 under-trial and seven convicted juvenile prisoners in 10 jails.

SPARC pleads that roughly over 90 per cent child detainees are still under trial who should ideally be released on bail. But because the majority of the prisoners are poor, they lack sureties to bail them out.

In the absence of separate jails for children they are either kept with adults or in separate cells. But the child rights activists say not only the jails are overcrowded but also in most of the cases children are sexually exploited there

between 15 and 17 years of age, raised the point of their age, the magistrate fined them 1,000 rupees each.

Not only this but the police official also brought the boys to the court in handcuffs. When he was told about the violation, he reportedly said, "They are not our guests. They are accused and nobody has informed us to treat them leniently."

But this is not the only violation. Sahil, a public interest organisation working on child sexual abuse, reported that the last year 33 police officers were involved in sexual assault against children.

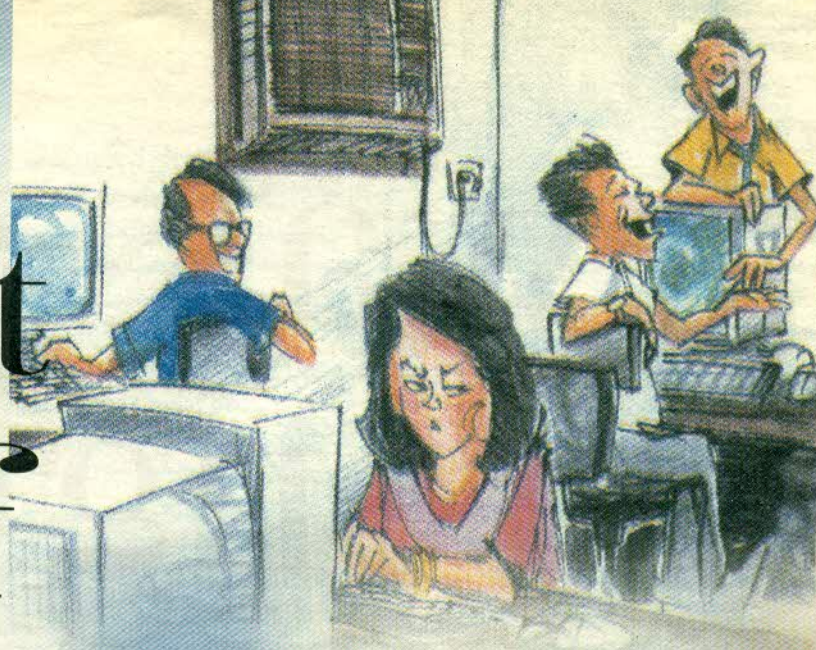
In December 2001, the HRCP notes, the president ordered conversion of death

rights activists say not only the jails are overcrowded but also in most of the cases children are sexually exploited there.

According to Inspector General Prisons of Sindh, in September 2000, more than 50 children were rescued from the Hyderabad prison alone, who were regularly sexually abused by adult criminals. An inquiry was ordered but results have never been made public.

"The UN's CRC postulate that the treatment of a child in conflict with the law should primarily attempt the child's reintegration into society and encourage him to play a constructive role in that environment, this approach is

Worst off



The total workforce in Pakistan today stands at 40 million, of whom 37 million are employed, under a definition of working for at least one hour per day. However, of this figure, a staggering 31.6 million are men and only five million are women, according to official statistics.

A global report released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on equality at work shows that women are still being discriminated against in the workplace worldwide, with Pakistan having one of the lowest rates in the world for female participation in the workforce.

"Pakistan is one of the worst countries in terms of the number of women employed, and there is a huge gap in gender in the employment sector," says Aliya Khan, adviser to the ILO on labour issues in Pakistan.

The total workforce in Pakistan today stands at 40 million, of whom 37 million are employed, under a definition of working for at least one hour per day. However, of this figure, a staggering 31.6 million are men and only five million are women, according to official statistics.

"These figures are astounding, and [that] goes to show how much work needs to be done in [the task of] involving more women," she added. Khan explained that there were a number of reasons for such a small number of women in the workforce.

"Most women are working in the informal sector, which is not recognised or accounted for when surveys are carried out," she said. Of those who were visible, 73 per cent were working in the agricultural sector.

Pakistan has signed Convention 111 on the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation, and the equal remuneration convention, but those working for women's rights say much more needs to be done.

Commenting on the report, entitled "Time for equality work", and the status of women at work in Pakistan, Misbah Tahir from the Aurat Foundation, a leading NGO promoting women's rights, said although some positive progress had been made over the past few years, much more remained to be achieved.

"Women are continuing to suffer in the workplace. They are still lower paid than men, and are completely abused in some cases," she said. "These women are yet to receive the credit they deserve," she stressed.

According to a survey by the NGO, some 77 per cent of women in employment country-wide are in the informal sector, where jobs are often badly paid, with no legal protection, and poor working conditions.

Tahir pointed out that although these women workers were contributing significantly to the national economy, they were generally unrepresented in national development agendas.

But the government officials for women's development boast that there are more women entering higher professions in Pakistan today than ever before. "This is the first time ever that we have seen such a large number of women in the decision-making process, with 60 women sitting in the Senate, and this shows the government's commitment to involving more women in all aspects of life," says Parveen Qadir Agha, secretary Ministry of Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education. - IRIN

I was wrong

A former trade minister of the United Kingdom admits he was wrong in believing that developing countries should undertake trade liberalisation if they want to achieve development.

By Stephen Byers

In November 1999, during the World Trade Organisation ministerial conference in Seattle, I watched from my hotel room as thousands demonstrated against the evils of globalisation.

Anarchists clad in black marched alongside grandmothers dressed as turtles and steelworkers from Philadelphia. They saw international trade as a threat - to their jobs, the environment or simply as part of a capitalist conspiracy.

As leader of the delegation from the United Kingdom, I was convinced that the expansion of world trade had the potential to bring major benefits to developing countries and would be one of the key means by which world poverty would be tackled.

In order to achieve this, I believed that developing countries would need to embrace trade liberalisation. This would mean opening up their own domestic markets to international competition. The thinking behind this approach

being that the discipline of the market would resolve problems of under performance, a strong economy would emerge and that, as a result, the poor would benefit.

This still remains the position of major international bodies like the IMF and World Bank and is reflected in the system of incentives and penalties which they incorporate in their loan agreements with developing countries.

But my mind has changed.

I now believe that this approach is wrong and misguided. Since leaving the cabinet a year ago, I've had the opportunity to see at first hand the consequences of trade policy. No longer sit-



ting in the air-conditioned offices of fellow government ministers I have, instead, been meeting farmers and communities at the sharp end.

It is this experience that has led me to the conclusion that full trade liberalisation is not the way forward. A different approach is needed: one which recognises the importance of managing trade with the objective of achieving development goals.

No one should doubt the hugely significant role that international trade could play in tackling poverty. In terms of income, trade has the potential to be far more important than aid or debt relief for developing countries.

For example, an increase in

Africa's share of world exports by just 1% could generate around £43m - five times the total amount of aid received by African countries.

This has led President Museveni of Uganda to say: "Africa does need development assistance, just as it needs debt relief from its crushing international debt burden. But aid and debt relief can only go so far. We are asking for the opportunity to compete, to sell our goods in western markets. In short, we want to trade our way out of poverty."

The World Bank estimates that reform of the international trade rules could take 300 million people out of poverty. Reform is essential because, to put it bluntly, the rules of international trade are rigged against the poorest countries.

Rich nations may be prepared to open up their own markets, but still keep in place massive subsidies. The quid pro quo for doing this is that developing countries open up their domestic markets. These are then vulnerable to heavily subsidised exports from the developed world.

The course of international trade since 1945 shows that an

unfettered global market can fail the poor and that full trade liberalisation brings huge risks and rarely provides the desired outcome. It is more often the case that developing countries which have successfully expanded their economies are those that have been prepared to put in place measures to protect industries while they gain strength and give communities the time to diversify into new areas.

This is not intervention for the sake of it or to prop up failing enterprises, but part of a transitional phase to create strong businesses that can compete on equal terms in the global marketplace without the need for continued protection.

Just look at some examples. Taiwan and South Korea are often held out as being good illustrations of the benefits of trade liberalisation. In fact, they built their international trading strength on the foundations of government subsidies and heavy investment in infrastructure and skills development while being protected from competition by overseas firms.

In more recent years, those countries which have been able to reduce levels of poverty by increasing economic growth - like China, Vietnam, India and Mozambique - have all had high levels of intervention as part of an overall policy of strengthening domestic sectors.

On the other hand, there are an increasing number of countries in which full-scale trade liberalisation has been applied and then failed to deliver economic growth while allowing domestic markets to be dominated by imports. This often has devastating effects.

Zambia and Ghana are both examples of countries in which the opening up of markets has led to sudden falls in rates of growth with sectors being unable to compete with foreign goods. Even in those countries that have experienced overall economic growth as a result of trade liberalisation, poverty has not necessarily been

reduced.

In Mexico during the first half of the 1990s there was economic growth, yet the number of people living below the poverty line increased by 14 million in the 10 years from the mid-1980s. This was due to the fact that the benefits of a more open market all went to the large commercial operators, with the small concerns being squeezed out.

The evidence shows that the benefits that would flow from increased international trade will not materialise if markets are simply left alone. When this happens, liberalisation is used by the rich and powerful international players to make quick gains from short-term investments.

The role of the IMF and World Bank is also of concern. The conditions placed on their loans often force countries into rapid liberalisation, with scant regard to the impact on the poor. The way forward is through a regime of managed trade in which markets are slowly opened up and trade policy levers like subsidies and tariffs are used to help achieve development goals.

The IMF and World Bank should recognise that questions of trade liberalisation are the responsibility of the WTO where they can be considered in the overall context of achieving poverty reduction and that it is therefore inappropriate to include trade liberalisation as part of a loan agreement.

This represents a departure from the current orthodoxy. It will be opposed by multinational companies who see rich and easy pickings in the markets of the developing world. But such a change would benefit the world's poorest people and that's why it should happen.

Stephen Byers, a former UK trade and industry secretary, was a cabinet member from 1998 to 2002.

...PORATE ELITE...
...OF DEMOCRACY!
...KS
...ALIEN
...WORLD!
...CES
...ATION

Imagine you woke up one morning and turned on the TV news and learned that terrorists had contaminated the food supply and drinking water, and even violated the bodies of children with toxic chemicals throughout the society.

Further reports from the government revealed the entire population was carrying these chemical poisons in their bodies, like ticking time bombs.

Imagine the panic that would ensue in the public, imagine the outrage and fear and righteous indignation. Imagine the anger at the government for failing to protect people from these terrorists.

Now let us return to reality. And the reality is

By Gary Cohen

that the chemical terrorists have already struck into the homeland. They have already breached all the security measures that have been put in place at great expense since September 11th. It is the chemical industry that has invaded our food, our air, our water and our bodies.

What is the truth about the chemical weapons threat to our people that you will not see on the evening news. The truth is that the chemical industry has trespassed into our bodies and our children's bodies. There are more than 100 toxic chemicals in all of our bodies. Many of these chemicals are linked to cancer, birth defects, learning disabilities, immune suppression and a host of other diseases. Every child born today is already loaded with dioxin and other chemicals, inherited from mother's toxic body bur-

den.

What's more, the entire regulatory and legal framework built up around toxic chemicals is based on a lie. These regulations ignore the cumulative and interactive effects of the toxic soup of chemicals in our bodies, in our food, in our air, and water and consumer products.

The truth about how we live is that the chemical industry and the industries that rely on their products are conducting a vast, uncontrolled chemical experiment on the entire human population without our informed consent and mostly without our knowledge. This kind of experimentation was outlawed by the Nuremberg Convention after Nazis and the German chemical industry conducted chemical experiments in concentration camps during World War II. Yet the industry continues to expose us to

Toxic trespass

thousands of dangerous chemicals on daily basis.

What is the response of the industry to this global chemical experiment? First the chemical industry is trying to normalise the harm caused by chemicals. It argues these chemical exposures are small and do not add up to any health effects. In the United States today, one in three women and one in two men will get cancer in their lifetime. Is it normal to get cancer? A few years ago the American Cancer Society ran an ad featuring a number of well dressed women on a page with the headline, "What do these women have in common?" The answer, as you read the ad, is that all these women have cancer, but they look great. Just because you have cancer doesn't mean you to look like it.

In the past few years a new consulting business

has grown up around cancer. It consists of public relations spin doctors that manage a company when the firm's CEO announces he has cancer. The goal of the public relations campaign is to convince employees and investors that even though the CEO has cancer, he is still firmly in charge of the company ship. So it is critical to show the boss looking well and fit. It is important to make this sensitive announcement once the stock market has closed for the day so the company's stock does not plunge.

The chemical industry has also created an entire pseudo science of comparative risk assessment, championed in industry funded centres at Harvard University and elsewhere, that are designed to normalise the harm posed by toxic chemicals by comparing this harm to other risks we take in our daily lives, like driving a car. In this way, the chemical industry decides for us that these poisons pose "acceptable risks", all the time denying the fact that it is possible and profitable to make safer products in our society without using dangerous chemicals.

The industry is also hiding the truth. Under the guise of homeland security, the chemical industry is attempting to strip away the public's right to know about the chemicals in our bodies, in our air and food and water. It is working over time to take away citizen suit provisions which enable citizens to obtain internal documents about the cover ups and manipulation of science and regulations that the chemical industry specialises in.

And the industry is trying to quite literally burn the evidence of its wasteful and hazardous production in hundreds of incinerators around the world. The companies send their toxic chemicals to incinerators and burn their liability. In the meantime, the toxic air emissions travel thousands of miles, enter the environment and food chain and eventually build up in our bodies, while the toxic ash then gets sent to a dump to contaminate our groundwater. Incinerators are industrial society's technological fix to its addiction to toxic chemicals.

It is helpful to see the petrochemical economy as an addiction model. The petro-chemical corporations are the pushers. Like other drug addictions, the industry starts with its addiction to oil, then moves on to more dangerous stuff, like toxic chemical production. The same companies that are deep into oil extraction, and in whose name the Iraq war is being fought, are also deep into toxic chemical production, companies like Exxon, Shell, Chevron. Companies like Dow, BASF, Monsanto don't produce oil but they take the oil and make thousands of chemicals that invade our lives.

Below the chemical pushers are the user industries like automotive, healthcare, electronics, military, cosmetics, construction, etc. These industry sectors

are addicted to using toxic chemicals but are being weaned from their addiction slowly. If you can show the electronics industry they can make computers without lead and flame retardant that wind up in women's breasts, they will do it if we exert enough pressure. There are many other examples of companies that are breaking free of their chemical addiction and producing safer products.

The waste industry is at the bottom of the addiction model. These are the bottom feeders, the incinerator companies, the dumpsite owners, and all the other waste schemers that show up in low-income communities around the globe, pushing toxic waste as a form of economic development. These waste companies are like drug dealers on the street corner that tell young teenage boys the best way out of poverty is to sell drugs. But instead of crack they are selling incinerators.

When we begin to talk about designing products and systems without toxic waste, when we talk about the viability of making goods with clean production, we engage in a revolutionary act. Then we raise issues about the basic control of materials and resources in our society. What kind of materials? Who controls them? Who benefits? Who loses? And, critically important, who makes these decisions.

I want to leave you with one final image. A few years ago I had the chance to visit Bhopal, the scene of Union Carbide's catastrophic chemical disaster that killed twenty thousand people and injured a half million others. Bhopal has been called the Hiroshima of the chemical industry. When I walked through the rusting ruins of Carbide's abandoned pesticide factory, everything looks as if they ran away yesterday, even though more than eighteen years have passed that fateful night when the company gassed an entire city. The facility is hideous and rotting; piles of toxic waste lay in piles and seep into the groundwater, the control room remains cluttered and chaotic. It is a powerful scene of one of the worst corporate crimes against humanity in the 20th century.

Yet in the middle of this scene of devastation and toxic contamination a tulsi tree has grown up. In India the tulsi tree is a sacred tree. It represents the divine healing power of creation and is used for many medicinal purposes by people throughout India. All across India people grow tulsi trees in their home gardens. It connects them to the Earth and to God.

Let our movement be like this tulsi tree in Bhopal which rises hopeful and proud out of the toxic ashes, proclaiming the regeneration of the Earth and our defense of the sacredness of life.

This is an extract from speech of Gary Cohen, executive director, Environmental Health Fund, at the Global Anti-Incinerator (GAIA) global meeting in Penang, Malaysia.

No compensation

World is moving against tobacco industry, making it pay through litigation for presenting cigarettes as a harmless social norm. Unfortunately this front is silent in Pakistan.

By Dr Ehsan Latif

Wars and conflicts manifest themselves in the battlefields with guns blazing. Yet there are other wars. Wars in which the enemy slithers past the well thought out defenses in the guise of harbingers of prosperity and destroy the very core of what any country endeavors to build -- a healthy nation with a prosperous future.

For some it may be hard to imagine tobacco such an enemy. Despite being recognised as a leading cause of disabling diseases and premature deaths it continues to dominate the economies of developing countries including Pakistan. It continues to be legally available and tends to kill when used exactly as intended. Backed by a multibillion-dollar industry, it has enshrined itself into our societies making its use a norm and portrayed as "socially acceptable".

The need in tobacco control efforts is not only to increase awareness but also to expose the industry that has, in collusion with people who matter, ensnared our children into this habit, making them their unwilling customers for the rest of their lives.

According to an estimate, Pakistan earns approximately Rs216,000 for every life lost to tobacco. Is this the economic argument we have been hammered with, both by the tobacco industry and the official quarters?

In the past decade the awareness programmes aimed at smokers have increased their sensitisation towards health effects but we continue to see these smokers smoke their lives away. Under the influence of the addictive nature of tobacco they seem to be helpless against the people who have put an economic label on their lives.

Dr Shehzad, who lost his father to smoking, recalls the pain and agony of losing a parent early in life. "He (father) was a chain smoker and had tried many a times to give up smoking yet was unable to do so. He suffered his first heart attack at

the age of 38. My mother took over the responsibility of our education and now I feel that despite his premature death, I am extremely lucky to survive and complete my education but what about those who are not so lucky."

A government which allocates only 0.8 per cent of its total annual budget (current spending on health for 2003-4 is Rs4.37 billion) to all forms of healthcare and slightly more on education can hardly justify revenues it collects from the tobacco industry.

While it can be

I stronger

Hollywood legend Kirk Douglas narrates his victory over smoking.

My father, a Russian peasant, came to the United States in 1910. Like all of his pals, he smoked. It's hard for me to picture my father without a cigarette in his mouth. After many years of smoking, my father was told by his doctor that he would die of cancer if he did not stop smoking. So he quit cold turkey.

Here's how he did it: He always carried one cigarette in the breast pocket of his shirt. When he felt the urge to smoke, he'd take the cigarette out and look at it fiercely. With a growl, he would say, in his Russian accent, "Who's stronger? You -- me?" He would glare at the cigarette: "I stronger." And he'd put the cigarette back in his pocket. He did that for a few years, but it was too late. He died of cancer at age 70.

During my college years, my Navy service during World War II, and my years as an actor on Broadway I never smoked. Then Hollywood beckoned, and I answered.

My first picture was "The Strange Loves of Martha Ivers," with Barbara Stanwyck and Van Herun, in 1946. I was intimidated, but proud to be playing the

argued that funds are not available for health, the government has not fulfilled its duty in finding other sources for it. Some of these sources can be additional taxes on all tobacco products, removing subsidies from tobacco agriculture, and holding tobacco industry liable for the harm it costs and recover costs incurred by the state on healthcare of people suffering from the tobacco use hazards.

The state machinery in the developed world is actively finding ways to hold the tobacco industry responsible for the harm it has done to the health of their people and have filed cases to recover the costs incurred due to the nature of tobacco and its use.

On November 16, 1998, the attorneys general of most states of the United States and the major US tobacco companies agreed to settle more than 40 pending lawsuits brought by states against the tobacco industry. In exchange for dropping their lawsuits and agreeing not to sue in the future, the states are to receive billions of dollars in payments from the tobacco companies and the companies will restrict their marketing activities and establish new efforts to curb tobacco consumption.

The settlement agreement calls for financial payments to the states, creation of a national foundation to develop an antismoking advertising and education programme, and the establishment of certain advertising restrictions to benefit public health.

The tobacco industry has known the addictive

nature of nicotine for the last four decades and has targeted the developing countries.

The history of lawsuits against the tobacco giants has been weak with almost no case brought to courts for compensation and liability in Pakistan. While the lawyers in the US and other developed countries have used the scientific evidence linking tobacco to the ailments it causes, the same rationale has not been used in Pakistan.

Sporadic cases citing the need to ban tobacco advertising on electronic media and asking Pakistan Television to stop airing tobacco ads have not met with success with higher courts, which have reversed decisions in favour of complainants like the Pakistan Chest Society.

There are 634 internal documents available online containing reference to Pakistan and the tobacco industry. These documents provide an insight to the working of the tobacco industry in Pakistan and can be used by the legal minds to develop cases against the tobacco industry. The role of the state should not stop at only recognising tobacco as a harmful product, it should also extend to providing people relief for the miseries they have gone through.

It is time to reel in the tobacco industry and to take the bold initiative of filing PILs against an industry that has always tried to hide behind tobacco growers and has put its interests over anything else.

of Miss Stanwyck's husband. I arrived at the set, excited, to do my first scene with her. But I had only a few lines when the director, Lewis Stone, stopped the action and said, "Kirk, you should be smoking a cigarette in this scene." "I don't smoke," I replied timidly.

"Easy to learn," he said, and had the prop man hand me a cigarette. I continued with the scene, lighting and smoking my first cigarette. Suddenly I began to feel sick to my stomach and dizzy. "Cut," yelled the director. "What's the matter with you, Kirk? You're fainting." I rushed to my trailer to throw up.

But Milestone was right. It's easy to learn to smoke. I was smoking two to three packs a day. At that time everyone smoked, and the cigarette was the movie prop. Many actors have trouble with their hands. Should they put them in their pockets? Should they put them behind their back? Do they hold them at their sides? The cigarette answered the question. You take one out of the pack, you tap it, you inhale deep. Then you exhale. If you are nervous, you can learn to blow smoke rings. You can play with a cigarette. You can tap the ashes into an ashtray, and put it out gently in the ashtray or fiercely whatever the scene requires. Paul Henreid had a worldwide hit in 1942 lighting two cigarettes at once

in "Now, Voyager."

When I became famous, tobacco companies supplied me with cartons of cigarettes every month. One day in 1950 was in my den, smoking as usual. I exhaled and through the smoke I saw a picture of my father on my desk. I thought of him on his deathbed. I stubbed out the cigarette in the ashtray.

I took one cigarette from the pack and threw the rest in the wastebasket. I held up the cigarette and studied it. My father's words came to me: "Who's stronger? You - me?" "I stronger." I put the cigarette in my shirt pocket and never smoked again.

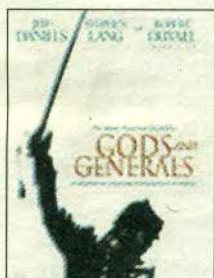
Hollywood started me smoking literally putting a cigarette in my hand. Who knows how many moviegoers have started smoking because of what they have seen on the screen? Too many movies glorify young people smoking.

It doesn't have to be this way. I have done at least 50 pictures where I avoided smoking. In one film, "The Brotherhood," I played a Mafia character and chewed on a cigar. In a scene from a film I just did, "The Illusion," when offered a cigarette, I say: "I don't smoke. I have cancer."

That's not true for me, thank goodness. But it is true, like my father, I know I'm stronger than a cigarette.



Transparent propaganda



A prequel of Gettysburg (1993), *Gods and Generals*, directed by Ronald F Maxwell, is a semi-docudrama that tries to ape the novel (and film) *Gone with the Wind* but succeeds only in providing nearly four hours of

transparent propaganda.

Based on the 1996 novel by Jeffrey M Shaara, the docudrama part of the film begins with General Robert E Lee (played by Robert Duvall). Through an intermediary, an obviously maladroit move, President Abraham Lincoln offers Lee the command of the Union army.

Two days earlier, with the "cotton states" already having seceded from the Union, Lincoln requested the Virginia state government to supply troops to put down the insurrection.

On the day when Lee receives the offer, the Virginia House of Delegates in Richmond begins debate on Lincoln's request, which is rejected out of hand in favor of secession. Lincoln's prior deci-

sion to mobilise a military force rather than seeking diplomacy is criticised for so escalating tensions that Virginians believe that their only recourse is to defend their homeland.

Lee declines, saying that his loyalty to Virginia is higher than to the United States. In the next part of the film, we see the mobilisation of Virginia's troops, especially those at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI).

The nondocumentary part of the film is rife with propaganda. In addition to the anti-Lincoln portrait already noted, Southerners are depicted as more affectionate, more cultured, more genteel, more intelligent, more religious, and more sensitive than Northerners. The boldest disinformation relates to the relations between the races; a Northerner who vents anti-"darkie" prejudice is corrected by Lt Col Chamberlain, his anti-slave commander, while house slaves in Virginia are effusively loyal to their collegial masters.

Moreover, while the story concedes that some in the North were fighting to free the slaves, the South believes that the real motive is for the North to make money, in part by subjugating the South economically. (After all, the North was competing with England to buy cotton from the South.) *Gods and Generals* is the first in a trilogy, so we now await the third film.

Head of state



Colin Powell is undoubtedly the only African American today who can gain his party's nomination for president. He can credibly run a campaign about real problems with commonsense solutions, and he may have an excellent chance of winning.

A Hollywood screenplay in which a black might be elected president would be a welcome sequel to Jonathan Lynn's *The Distinguished Gentleman* (1992) in which Congressman Johnson (played by Eddie Murphy) might parlay his exposure of how Washington works into an effective campaign for president. Insofar as the *Head of State* may be seen as that sequel, the result is extremely disappointing, carried to a level of vulgarity that defeats the possibility that the public will realise that there is an alternative to politics as usual.

The plot hangs on a silly premise, namely, that one

party's candidates for president and vice president die in separate airplanes that crash each other only weeks to go before the 2004 presidential election.

Among the issues that could have been raised with some seriousness are the fact that too many Americans lack healthcare insurance and work two jobs to stay afloat, the money spent on the war on drugs goes down a rathole, public education is underfinanced, foreign policy is unilateralist, and in general that poor people derive little benefit from government compared to the rich. With a more coherent screenplay, Eddie Murphy could have made *Head of State* into a major challenge of the political status quo. Writer-director Rock instead demonstrates his ignorance of political realities by settling for infrequent cheap laughs (not even cheap shots), stereotypic politicians and their advisers, and a promise that a *Head of State II* may feature a president as an utter fool. As in the case of *Bulworth* (1998), directed by Warren Beatty, the flippant approach of *Head of State* to serious political issues buries the possibility that members of the public will realise what they must do to save American democracy from extinction.



Marooned in Iraq (Gomgashtei dar Aragh)

Directed by Bahman Ghobadi, the film is perhaps an Iranian counterpart of Saving Private Ryan. Mirza has been summoned by his estranged fourth spouse, Hanareh, presumably from a place in Iran's Kurdistan at the border with Iraq.

A consummate singer, she has been entertaining refugees streaming out of Iraq due to the chemical warfare conducted by Saddam Hussein against the Kurds in the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991. As a good husband, Mirza proceeds to the northwest corner of Iran with his sons Audeh and Barat; all three men and Hanareh are renowned musicians.

While the three travel to the snowbound north, they hear of a litany of atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein against the Kurds.

When Mirza reaches Raman, the village where Hanareh is supposed to reside, he discovers that the town no longer exists; indeed, the Kurds are discovering mass graves.

The residents have either been shot, captured, or have fled. Because of the use of chemicals, the few surviving women are disfigured and unable to produce milk for their infants. One of the women is Hanareh, but she refuses to identify herself to Mirza, and her voice has been so damaged by the chemical warfare that Mirza cannot recognise her. Instead, she gives Mirza her son so that he can care for him. Hanareh, in short, called for Mirza to take a long and perilous trip to give her son a chance to live.

The obvious contrast between the caring Iranians in the film and the evidence of brutality of the Saddam Hussein may appear to be an exercise in propaganda, but political aspects are in the background. The foreground of the plot is about a husband who dutifully responds to a call of distress from a wife whom he has not seen in the twenty-three years since she decided to abandon him and live in Iraq's Kurdistan as wife of another man, Seyed, who in turn he learns toward the end was yet another victim of Saddam Hussein.

At the same time, the film can be seen as a plea for better treatment of the Kurds. Based on the fact that Iran provided a safe haven to many Iraqi refugees for more than a decade, Marooned in Iraq also explains why Iran will have a great deal of popularity in post-Saddam Iraq. Indeed, Marooned in Iraq is the first movie to open in "new" Baghdad.

The Political Film Society has nominated Marooned in Iraq as best film exposé of 2003.

Disembodied soul

This is an awesome achievement. The entire film -- Russian Ark -- is a roving unbroken 90-minute take of the choreographed movement of thousands of actors around St Petersburg's Hermitage art museum -- once the Winter Palace, residence of the tsars. It's the most complex shot in the history of cinema, made possible by high-definition video cameras recording onto a prototype hard disk.

But so what? What does the staggering technique contribute to the film? Although the case is huge, there are only two significant characters -- and the camera is one of them. The camera's view is the gaze of a disembodied soul, invisible and inaudible to everyone, and so unable to speak or interact with anyone -- apart from the ever present "Marquis", a cynical 19th century French diplomat, his (and our) chaperone through time. The soul throughout is an alienated voyeur, his camera eye reducing the action to spectacle.

Sokurov's film ostensibly celebrates high culture and Russia's cultural tradition. We see its patrons -- Peter the Great, Catherine ditto, Tsars Nicholas I and II. We see some of the great paintings, hear the music and orchestras they brought to Russia. It's all sophisticated, detached and sometimes rather eerie.

Yet the film is worth staying with -- to the haunting finale. After the last great palace ball in 1913, as guests crowd the exits the camera tracks down a cold, dark, draughty side corridor to a window overlooking the river Neva. For the first time there are no people in shot, and -- again a first -- the camera halts. Nothing, but for the mist rising off the river, moves, a chilling image of intense loneliness, it points up the social void in every scene, the distress and loneliness of being never involved, never acknowledged. Russian Ark is high art pining for community.



Reclaiming storytelling



Now that the world's only superpower has resurrected brazen land-grab imperialism, a searching examination of colonialism from the perspective of the colonised is nothing if not timely. In *Home and Exile*, the

great Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe examines the way imperial powers construct myths about their right to rule and appropriate the stories of those they dispossess.

In spare, precise prose Achebe mixes elements of autobiography and family history, folk tales and literary theory to produce an overview of the development of an indigenous African literature. He shows how colonialism was not merely a physical occupation of Africa but also an invasion of a cultural worldview; what he calls, "the colonisation of one people's story by another". To attain freedom, Africans need not only to gain political self-determination but also to "take back their own narrative" and tell their own truths

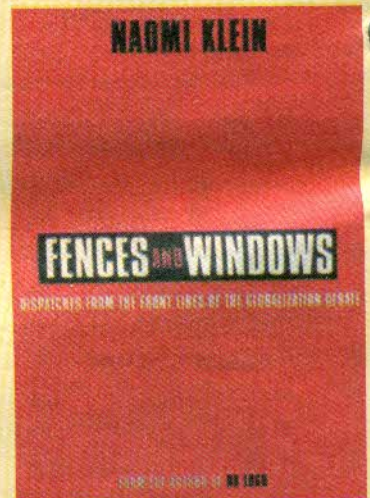
in their own fashion.

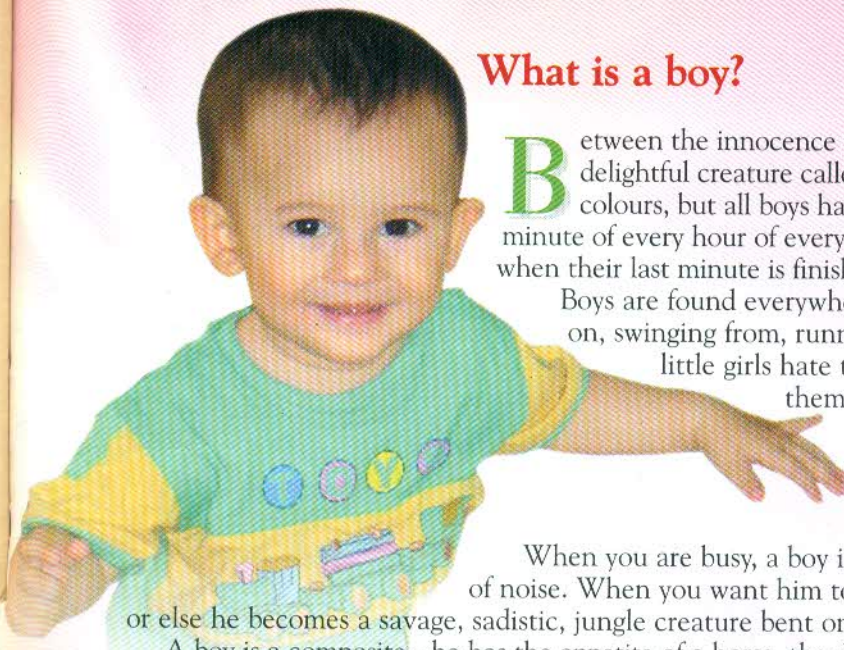
Drawing on examples from such writers as Ama Ata Aidoo, Amos Tutuola and Nadine Gordimer as well his own experiences on the publication of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe underlines the importance of authentic home grown storytelling as a fundamental political tool in Africa's struggles to free itself of the colonial yoke. He quotes the proverb: "Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter."

This is a subtle and multi-faceted book that amply repays the close reading it requires while reminding us of the continuing relevance and power of literature.

Anti-globalisation portrait

Over the past two years, Naomi Klein has been writing a weekly column in Canada's leading newspaper, the *Toronto Globe & Mail* (syndicated worldwide recently, in the *Guardian* in the UK). She has now, by selecting, rewriting and rearranging these columns, prepared what amounts to a first-hand historical record of the gradual rise to prominence of the anti-global-corporatism movement, and of its most notable successes and its failures. It has a truly international scope, covering everything from the Zapatistas' rebellion in Mexico to the Social Centres in Italy, from the biggest peaceful protest demos since the 1960s to the gassings and shootings at Genoa. Naomi analyses developments in local democracy, in law enforcement, in privatisation laws, in capital migrations, in union behaviour, in marketing, in summity. She gets close to the suited summits -- the WTO, the G8, the IMF, NAFTA. She looks at bioterrorism, pollution, hypocrisy, fear and confusion. It is a portrait, or rather the underlying negative, of the planet's torrid time between the Seattle summit and the world-changing events of 11 September 2001. It makes for dramatic, immediate, indispensable history writing, and reading.





What is a boy?

Between the innocence of babyhood and the dignity of manhood we find a delightful creature called a boy. Boys come in assorted sizes, weights and colours, but all boys have the same creed: to enjoy every second of every minute of every hour of every day and to protest with noise (their only weapon) when their last minute is finished and the adult packs them off to bed at night.

Boys are found everywhere - on top of, underneath, inside of, climbing on, swinging from, running around, or jumping to. Mothers love them, little girls hate them, older sisters and elder brothers tolerate them, adults ignore them, and Heaven protects them.

A boy is truth with dirt on his face, beauty with a cut on its finger, wisdom with bubble gum in its hair, and the hope of the future with a frog in its pocket.

When you are busy, a boy is an inconsiderate, bothersome, intruding jangle of noise. When you want him to make a good impression, his brain turns to jelly or else he becomes a savage, sadistic, jungle creature bent on destroying the world and himself with it.

A boy is a composite - he has the appetite of a horse, the digestion of a sword-swallower, the energy of a pocket-sized atomic bomb, the curiosity of a cat, the lungs of a dictator, the shyness of a violet, the audacity of a steel trap, the enthusiasm of a firecracker, and when he makes something, he has 5 thumbs on each hand.

Nobody else is so early to rise, or so late to sleep. Nobody else gets so much fun out of trees, dogs, and breezes. Nobody else can cram into one pocket a rusty knife, a half-eaten apple, 3 feet of string, 6 coins, several spiders, a chink of unknown substance, a box of matches and countless other treasures.

A boy is a magical creature -- you can lock him out of your workshop, but you can't lock him out of your heart. You can get him out of you study, but you can't get him out of you mind, so you might as well give up. He is you captor, your jailer, your boss, and your master - a freck-led-faced, pint-sized, cat-chasing, bundle of noise.

But when you come home at night with only shattered pieces of your hopes and dreams, he can mend them like new with two magic words, "Hi, Dad!"

Love for children

Children today are tyrants. They contradict their parents, gobble their food, and tyrannise their teachers. -- Socrates (470-399 BC).

What is a girl?

Little girls are the nicest things that can happen to people. They are born with a bit of angelshine about them, and though it wears thin sometimes, there is always enough left to lasso your heart - even when they are sitting in the mud, or crying temperamental tears, or parading up the street in Mother's best clothes. A little girl can be sweeter (and "badder") oftener than anyone else in the world. She can jitter around, and stomp, and make funny noises that frazzle your nerves, yet when just you open your mouth, she stands there demure with that special look in her eyes.

A girl is innocence playing in the mud, beauty standing on its head, and motherhood dragging a doll by the feet...

God borrows from many creatures to make a little girl. He uses the song of a bird, the stubbornness of a mule, the antics of a monkey, the slyness of a grasshopper, the curiosity of a cat, the speed of a gazelle, the slyness of a fox, the softness of a kitten, and to top it all off, He adds the mysterious mind of a woman.

She is loudest when you are thinking, the prettiest

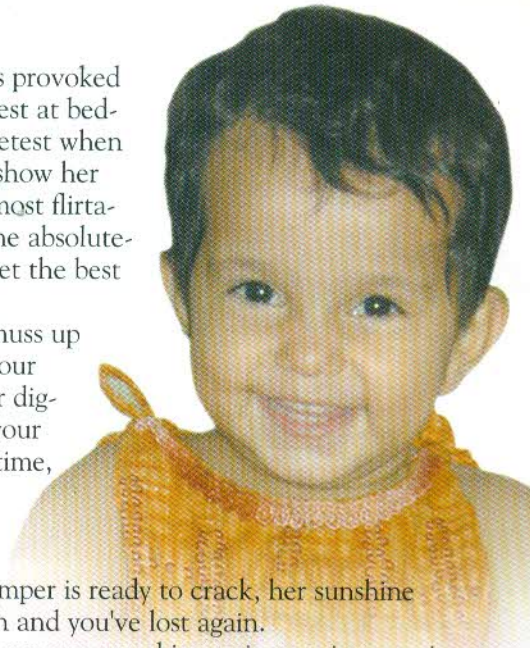
when she has provoked you, the busiest at bedtime, the quietest when you want to show her off, and the most flirtatious when she absolutely must not get the best of you again.

She can muss up your home, your hair, and your dignity - spend your money, your time, and your patience - and just

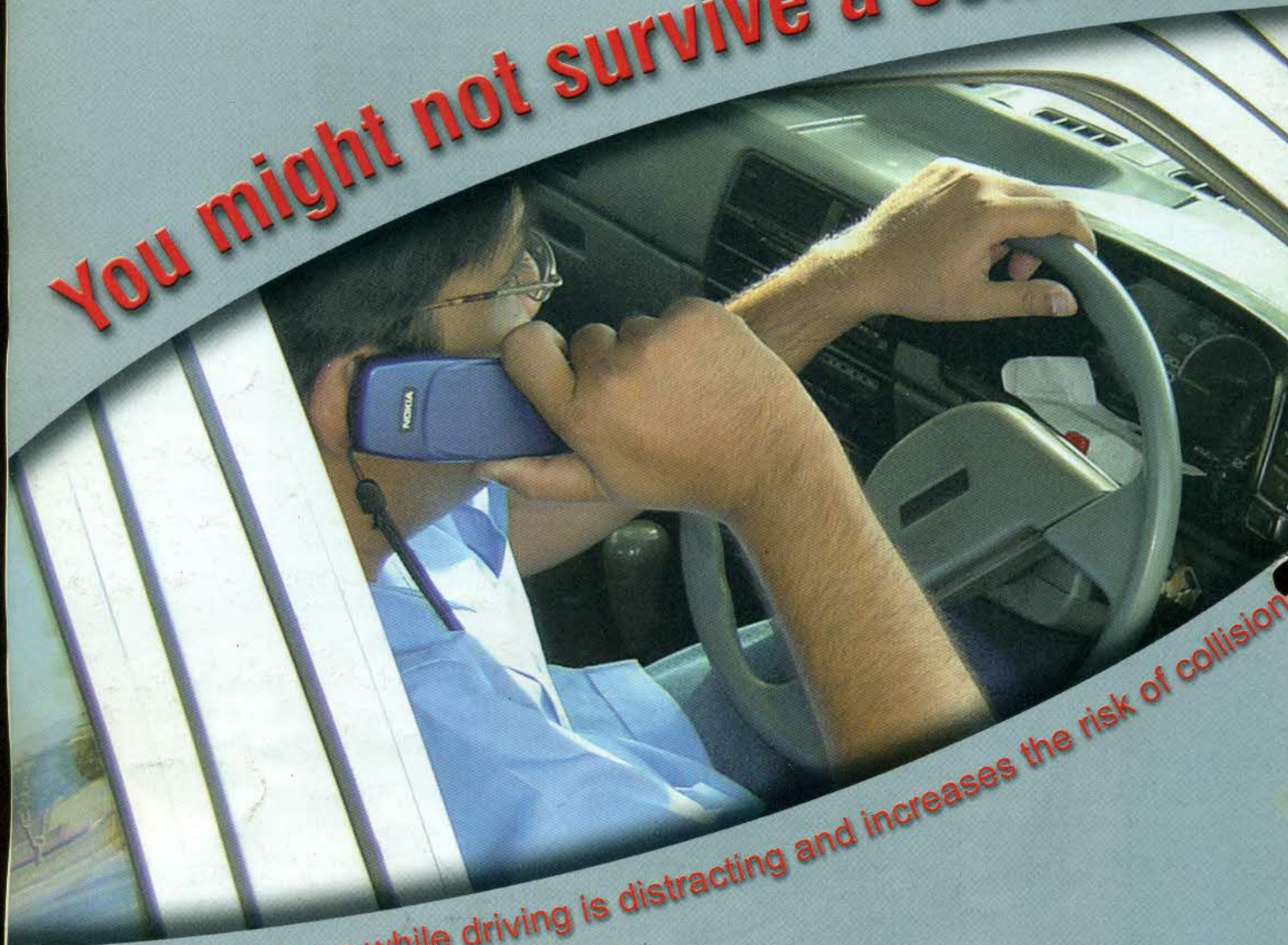
when your temper is ready to crack, her sunshine peeks through and you've lost again.

Yes, she is a nerve-wracking nuisance, just a noisy bundle of mischief. But when your dreams tumble down and the world is a mess -- when it seems you are pretty much of a fool after all -- she can make you a king when she climbs on your knee and whispers, "I love you best of all!"

By Alan Beck



You might not survive a collision!



Using cell phones while driving is distracting and increases the risk of collision

To avoid collisions arising from the use of cell phones:

- ◆ Turn the phone off before you start driving. Let callers leave a message.
- ◆ If there are passengers in the vehicle, let one of them take or make the call. If you're expecting an important call, let someone else drive.
- ◆ If you have to make or receive a call, look for a safe opportunity to pull over and park.

If for some reason you have no alternative but to use a cellular phone while driving, here are some tips

- ◆ Use only a speakerphone or a hands-free phone. Make sure you put on the hands-free accessories before you start driving. But be aware: hands-free is not risk-free.
- ◆ If you must use a hand-held phone, place it where it will be readily accessible. Trying to retrieve a phone from a briefcase, handbag or pocket can be especially dangerous.
- ◆ Don't answer the phone until you have checked that it is safe to do so.
- ◆ Use speed dial options. If you know you will need to call an unprogrammed number, dial the number before starting off and send the call at your convenience.
- ◆ Driving and talking on a phone at the same time is difficult. Don't make it worse by trying to read or take notes. Do pull over and stop.
- ◆ Keep calls short and factual. Emotional or thought-provoking conversations are distracting. Recent research suggests that decisions made while driving and talking on a cell phone are not always good decisions.
- ◆ It's good etiquette to ask a caller to hold until you can park, or to say you'll return the call as soon as it's safe to do so.
- ◆ Stay in the lane where driving may be less demanding.
- ◆ When reporting an emergency situation from a cell phone, pull over and ensure you are not in the flow of traffic. If you must keep driving, remember your primary concern is to avoid causing another emergency.