

Citizens' Committee to Save CRP

Advanced Centre, 176 Gulshan Avenue, Dhaka

An Appeal

Unholy and conspiratorial activities at CRP for some time, designed to change the very character of this hospital and rehabilitation centre for the poor, including the recent dismissal of Ms. Valerie Taylor, its founder-trustee from the position of Coordinator, by a letter of the Acting Chairman of the Trustee Board has shocked the nation and attracted attention of the national press and the media.

CRP is synonymous with Valerie who has given her life time to its establishment and rise to its present position as a prime centre for the treatment and rehabilitation for the poorest of the poor in this country. Indigenous technology evolved by the centre has attracted attention of the medical community abroad and foreign physical therapists and other experts have regularly come here to volunteer free service and also to learn from the experience of the Centre. Being charitable in character, the Centre has sought and received generous assistance in cash and kind from such organizations as the British HC in Bangladesh, Norad, Danida, CIDA, US-DOL, Nijera Kori, Friends of CRP-UK and the Kadoorie Trust of Hong Kong.

Citizens Committee: Citizens such as ourselves who have taken an interest in the activities of the Centre have been alarmed by a “silent coup” staged by a slim majority of the Trustees ever since the induction in the Board in January, 2005 of Mr. Shafi Sami and Ms. Leena Alam at the suggestion of Friends of CRP-UK (FRCP-UK). We have waited patiently for things to improve, but instead of improving, it appears, the last nail is being hammered on to the coffin. To put it mildly, it is really an issue of perception and attitude. The named individuals and their two other cronies in the Trustee Board, have sought to convert the Centre into a commercial organization charging high fees and in the process, promote themselves and their financial interests. In the pursuit of their design, they have ruthlessly dismissed a number of dedicated employees and raised the salary

and emoluments of their hand picked staff. The very character of CRP as a totally non-profit organization dedicated as a place of last resort for the poor fated to suffer a long, tragic life after a traumatic accident, is about to be lost. The Citizens' Committee to Save CRP seeks to bring out facts for public knowledge, to forge strong public opinion and to seek intervention of the Government as well as the donors so the character of the organization may be preserved and maintained.

The committee at this stage will only highlight a few of the irregularities and illegalities at CRP perpetrated by a section of the Trustee Board-

(1) Self-styled appointment of Mr. Shafi Sami as Managing trustee and CEO:

Immediately on joining the Trustee Board of CRP, Mr. Shafi Sami floated the idea of a Managing Trustee and the abolition of the post of Director of the Centre. Then, by a sudden resolution in the name of the Board which three other Trustees, namely, Ms Valerie Taylor, Mr Saidur Rahman and Mr. Mushtaq Ahmed strongly deny, he got the Acting chairman of the Board, Maj-Genl (Retd.) Nurul Huq to appoint him CEO of CRP. Thus without any advertisement or any other selection process and without a letter of appointment, Mr Shafi Sami calling himself the Managing Trustee, started also to act as the CEO of CRP. There is no provision in the Deed of Trust for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (TRP) drawn up in 1984 for the appointment of a Trustee in a salaried position. Notably, when the agenda of job description, terms and conditions including salary for the post of CEO was brought up in a meeting of the TRP Board in April, 2005, Mr. Shafi Sami effectively put off discussion to a later date. The reason for this was to come to light later on.

(2) The CEO's hefty salary: Surprisingly, Mr. Shafi Sami did not discuss or demand a salary for himself at any TRP meeting. It later transpired from the minutes of meeting of FRCP-UK dated 14 July, 2005 that he had secretly negotiated a hefty annual salary of Pound sterling 22,000 equivalent to Bangladesh taka 30.06 lac for himself. (On the contrary, Ms. Valerie Taylor draws a sum of Tk 7500/- only per month as subsistence allowance from CRP). This money was to be paid directly into his account without being channelled through CRP, as the (NGO)

laws in this country would dictate. It was pointed out to FRCP-UK that fixing the salary of a local staff of CRP amounted to interference in TRP's work and also that they (F-CRP) could not pay him directly from out of funds otherwise receivable by CRP. These protests yielded no result, the bond between F-CRP and Mr. Shafi Sami looked to be too strong.

- (3) **Charge of Neglect, 'Divide and Rule':** Mr Shafi Sami, otherwise a competent person, could not give full time or attention to CRP's administrative needs. He must bear responsibility for his inability to hire out as many as 6 higher floors of CRP's impressive building in Mirpur, depriving the Centre of much needed income. This building built under supervision of highly qualified consultants, with the generous assistance of the Kadoorie Trust in Hong Kong uses the lower floors for patients attending from the metropolis and was designed the use income from rental of the upper floors to supplement expenses at the Mirpur Centre. Mr. Shafi Sami has privately spoken of certain irregularities in construction, but has visibly taken no steps beyond not renewing service contract of an 'accused' employee (Mr. Habib). In administration, he has unfortunately also followed a policy whereby he dismissed half a dozen trusted employees of CRP without due process, and created a coterie of his own, giving them high salaries.
- (4) **High Fees for Patients:** Gone are the days when a poor patient was admitted free of charge at the Centre. The poorest patient must now advance TK. 12000/- as seat rent for 2 months and buy himself a wheelchair before admission. Thus the philosophy of free treatment for the poor and payment by those able to do so- is no longer a theme at CRP, Savar. The reaction of the donors to this new arrangement is not quite evident yet.
- (5) **Dismissal of Valerie Taylor as Coordinator, CRP:** Mr Shafi Sami and Ms Leena Alam with the support of the Acting chair, Maj- Gen Nurul Huq and Mr Biswa Nath Chowdhury has controlled the TRP Board for some time by a majority of 1. Things have come to such a pass that the other 3 members have stopped attending meetings of the Trustee Board altogether. Under the organogram of CRP published 1997-98, Valerie Taylor acted as Coordinator

under the TRP Board, a largely ceremonial and yet very important position tasked with Promotion and Fund Raising. Valerie's name and clout acted very well in this task and was definitely in the interests of CRP. And yet the Acting chair in a letter dated 14 May, 2007 to Albert Mollah, Actg. CEO, cited some so-called decision of the Board reviewing a "revised organogram" of CRP that the coterie had published earlier even in the face of protestation by Valerie Taylor, to abolish the post of Coordinator. A strange, and unexplained, way to strip Valerie of her functional responsibility for the Centre!

The Citizens' Committee to Save the CRP's appeal to all concerned lies in the following-

(1)CRP's character as treatment and rehabilitation centre for the poorest of the poor must be restored. Realistic charges may however be realized from those able to pay, scaled on income of the patients/families

(2)The unilateral actions by the named 4 in the name of TRP Board must stop and congenial atmosphere created for smooth functioning of CRP. The entry into TRP Board by M/s Shafi Sami and Leena Alam must be investigated for their, or F-CRP, UK's, real objectives. Clearly, Mr Shafi Sami stands accused illegality in secretly receiving payment of salaries from UK without approval of the TRP Board. He is also accused of usurping executive powers to take control of CRP and bad faith in simultaneously serving two masters.

The Citizens'Committee calls upon him

to resign from the TRP Board forthwith and to cease to act as CEO of CRP for which post he holds no formal appointment. Ms Leena Alam being a Trustee of F-CRP, UK, a donor organization, cannot be a Trustee of TRP. Representative of no donor organization is on the TRP Board. We highly value F- CRP's contributions, and should they feel the need, they may second someone who will be accorded the status of an observer at CRP. We call upon Ms. Leena Alam to resign forthwith from the TRP Board. The two others on the Board particularly Maj-Genl (Retd) Dr. Nurul Huq are guilty of blatant collaboration

for motives they must explain satisfactorily, else leave the TRP Board.

(3) The NGO Affairs Bureau has responsibility to investigate activities at CRP for the past 2 years. In particular, it must look into the legality of F-CRP making clandestine payments to Mr. Shafi Sami rather than remitting them to CRP's account. We also ask the Charities Commission of UK to look into the matter. The Bureau should also see if the drastic changes in CRP's organogram in 2005-06 as also the change now effected concentrating all powers in the hands of the CEO of CRP is consistent with TRP's declared goals and functions and received their approval..

(4) The sacking of a number of dedicated employees of CRP without due process must be enquired into and anyone proved to be unjustly removed should be re-instated.

Last but not least, in the interest of restoring the organization's repute both nationally and internationally, Ms. Valerie Taylor must be restored to her position as guide and coordinator of CRP's activities, apart from her position as a founder- Trustee of TRP. By quick, corrective actions as aforesaid, donor confidence in CRP must be restored and the institution saved. The Citizens' Committee fervently appeals to the Hon'ble Chief adviser, Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed for his kind intervention in this regard.

Engr. S M Anwar Hossain

Convener

Subsequent Follow Up:

We appreciate certain newspapers' action in putting up Mr. CM Shafi Sami's story while reporting the press conference of Tuesday 22 May, including the written statement, of the Citizens' Committee to Save CRP.

We like to affirm that the Citizens' Committee is protecting nobody but is anxious that CRP's position and status as a pro-poor, world class facility for the paralysed and otherwise physically disabled be preserved and maintained.

Even in the absence of Ms. Valerie Taylor from the country right now, we like to take Mr. Shafi Sami on his word that it was Valerie who approached him to come and join CRP's Trustee Board and help with its management. After all, this lady is a dedicated humanitarian and no management expert and indeed might have needed advice to run a large organization. This however does not explain Mr. Shafi Sami's act in becoming a 'managing' trustee and subsequently appointing himself CEO of the hospital (CRP), an executive job, by a "resolution" of the Board, which 3 of the Trustees, including Valerie Taylor, deny. His underhand contact with Friends of CRP(F-CRP), UK and negotiating and receiving a high salary for himself without knowledge of CRP's Trustee Board, also leaves much to be desired and exposes him to the charge that he was secretly serving F-CRP's agenda. His efforts to centralize power in himself and take full control is evident in the fact of a revised organogram published a year ago showing the managing trustee and CEO at the centre of all administration in CRP. And now he has sought to revise it further, deleting altogether the position of Coordinator, and all functions of Advisor/Coordinator, leaving Valerie in the ivory tower as an Advisor with no functions. We find no clash between the job of a CEO and that of the Coordinator entrusted with promotion and fund raising and find it shameful that Valerie should be eased out of her position as Advisor/Coordinator in this tricky manner.

Mr. Shafi Sami has not substantiated his charge of corruption at the Centre, particularly in building the Mirpur facility. He has not spoken of any one having been charged or punished in this regard in the last 2 years. We have come to learn that apart from a highly qualified consultant, there was a 4-member CRP committee tasked with overseeing construction of the Mirpur facility. While all the 4 members were jointly and severally responsible, Mr Shafi Sami as CEO rested merely with not renewing the service contract, not a punishment in our view, of one of them only. The 3 others remain untouched, salaries of each of them having been enhanced and two of them promoted to the rank of a Director in the meanwhile. The Citizens' Committee does not condone corruption and feel that bonafide actions apart, CRP should investigate and pursue charge of corruption against anybody.

CRP is an expression of Valerie's vision and her long and arduous labour. CRP without Valerie would be like Grameen Bank without Prof. Mohammad Yunus and BRAC without Fazle Hassan Abed. For reasons already explained, The Citizens' Committee reiterates that while Valerie must be restored to her position in full glory, others such as Mr. CM Shafi Sami, Ms. Leena Alam and Maj-Genl.(Retd) Nurul Huq responsible for the current stalemate in CRP, should go. If they do not resign voluntarily, the committee will appeal to and look upon the Hon'ble Chief Adviser, Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed to step in and arrange necessary investigation to save the institution.

Signatories- Engr. SM Anwar Hossain, Muhd Mobarak Ali Molla, Major-general (Retd.)

ATM Abdul Wahab, Akku Chowdhury and Golam Morshed.