

Promotion backlog

A serious setback to bureaucracy

THE government seems patently indecisive about filling up posts falling vacant with officers going on retirement. And, ironically, there is a promotion backlog on a big scale. Combinedly, these are having a crippling effect on the administration as a whole.

At least 60 officers with the rank of joint secretary and above have been made officers on special duty. They are virtually non-functional at a time when 44 posts of joint secretary are lying vacant. The abundance of OSDs and vacant posts does point to the magnitude of indecisiveness at the highest level.

As if this was not enough, around 25 high officials appointed on contract are now running some of the most important ministries. Again, a vacuum will be created when their contracts will have expired.

The officers, who are not getting promotion carry the stigma of incompetence and political bias. Obviously, the allegations do not fall in the same category. While incompetence is something that the government has to consider before promoting an officer, political bias is a limitation, which actually depends to a great extent on how it is interpreted, or what its precise meaning is to the men at the helm.

The bureaucracy, the strength of which lies in strict adherence to rules and regulations, will be weakened if the decision-makers themselves deviate from rules. They should not forget that promotion is an incentive without which the officers are bound to feel demoralised.

So, the government has to take a broader view of the issue and evolve ways and means for keeping the wheels of bureaucracy moving. It has to come to terms with the truth that the top positions in the administration cannot remain empty for an indefinite period of time, and also that the officers eligible for promotion must get it. Of course, merit and performance should be the criterion, but then there must not be any further delay in handling a matter upon which hinges the smooth running of the engine of administration.

Needless to say, political slant in the bureaucracy makes it lose neutrality and objectivity which are indispensable marks of good administration. In a bid to remedy 'past politicisation' the incumbent government should not replace it by another brand of political bias.

Mahathir's convincing swipe

Iraq war could engender more terrorism

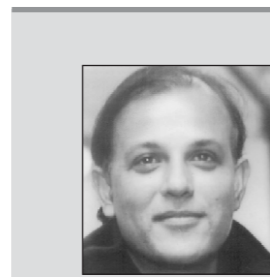
MALAYSIAN Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's accusation that Western nations are targeting Muslims rather than weapons of mass destruction has a convincing ring to it. The United States and its allies have passed over North Korea's open admission of its nuclear programme with "mild admonishment". Whereas, in case of Iraq, the US and its staunch ally Britain are raring to go to war although the United Nations weapons inspectors have not yet come up with any tangible evidence that Baghdad possesses nuclear weapons. In fact, the inspection stipulated under UNSC resolution 1441 has yet to run its course.

Apart from North Korea, all other nations on the US list of terror-risk countries are predominantly Muslim. To top it off, Washington has so far shown a pro-Israel bias in its approach to the Middle East crisis. Whether the West admits it or not, Mahathir's words represent how the majority of Non-aligned countries perceive the US insistence on war against Iraq.

However, such a sentiment does not stem from any endorsement of President Saddam Hussein's regime. On the contrary, Muslim countries across the world, especially in the Middle East, disapprove of the way he has run Iraq and interacted with his neighbours. There was unstinted support to the Gulf War, led by the US in 1992, to end Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The reality is different now. President George W Bush has simply failed to convince the world that Iraq can pose a threat to global peace now. Overall, the Bush administration has given an impression that it reserves the right to police the world and decide what action to take and when over the head of the UN. Its repeated warnings to go it alone against Iraq, bypassing the UN, have not gone down well with other countries, especially powerful nations such as China, France, Germany and Russia. As western media has recently observed, Bush has induced a rare rift in the post-cold war world.

As Mahathir has said, a new Gulf War would "simply anger more Muslims who are likely to view it as a strike against their religion rather than against terrorism". More importantly, it could make a martyr out of Saddam Hussein, a proposition that will have a far-reaching consequence. Therefore, the US should desert 'vintage Europe' and 'irrelevant UN' filibusters and let the UN be "the top world arbiter of international crises such as Iraq".

Crowded places



K.A.S. MURSHID

CROWDS are essentially fickle, as Shakespeare so poignantly demonstrated through that famous speech by Mark Anthony in *Julius Caesar*. You cannot therefore blame me for not loving big crowds or even smaller crowds, even though I have witnessed both many times and from close quarters. I get the distinct impression that the bad apples frequently tend to predominate in those situations. Therefore, much as I love the festivities of February or *Pahela Baishakh*, for example, it takes a lot of persuasion and fervent appeal to my sense of (Bengali) patriotism to drive me out of bed on February 21 or April 14. Even a visit to the *boi mela* requires great fortitude along with an intense desire to check out the latest from Imdadul Hoque Milon or Humayun Ahmed. It also requires mental preparation -- you need to wear your toughest expression on your face (especially if you have plans to take your wife or daughter along to the fair) and a readiness to jostle, shove, push, argue swear and sweat.

So what exactly is it that draws huge crowds to the Fine Arts Institute or the *boi mela*? I mean let's call a spade a spade. The functions that

are held are usually boring repetitions of last year's performances. There are hardly ever any new faces amongst the participants, nor any new, exciting, innovative interpretation or idea. The speeches, for the most part, are uninspired, lacklustre, routine -- pretty much like a scratched record that's been stuck in a time groove. It is even difficult to locate more than just a few books worthy of your attention. Admittedly there is the occasional stunner in a

everything is fun -- including old books, old ideas, and old songs and old faces. In addition, there is the *basanta* factor that drives young men and women out in droves to the DU campus that has long been regarded as an oasis of tolerance and liberal values in an otherwise conservative society. (Interpretation: young people can walk hand in hand here or sit in dark corners without anyone actually staring or pelting stones!)

do, I 'borrowed' my father's car to go on a joy ride with friends. I had the misfortune though of hitting a rickshaw near Balaka Cinema Hall -- which even in those days was a rather crowded place. The damage to the rickshaw was minor; the damage that I was being threatened with by a quickly gathering crowd, seemed somewhat disproportionate. Now, in every crowd (it is my firm belief) there is a Good Samaritan. In my case, this assumed the

shouted 'CID! CID!' and soon enough a young man was set upon by scores of others and about to be mauled beyond recognition. Instinctively, my father jumped to the rescue, with me close on his heels, and eventually managed to save that young life from a certain, savage end. It was only much later that we realised the grave risk that we took upon our person by intervening in such a volatile situation. Crowds are dangerous because

lynching (and worse) of supposed muggers, bandits and thieves frequently reported in the media.

I wonder how many people, like myself, shy away from crowded places? I suspect many. It is not however, possible to avoid such places altogether -- the moment will come when you will find yourself at the Shaheed Minar or the Bangla Academy, for example. In other words, you might find yourself called upon to play your chosen role either as part of a lynch mob or that of a Samaritan -- not something one wants to look forward to. The answer must be to find a solution to crowd control. The best solution, by far, is to prevent huge crowds from gathering in the first place. My humble suggestion (after all, one should end on a positive note) is to decentralise -- the Shaheed Minar, the Bangla Academy, the *boi mela*, the Fine Arts Institute, the TSC and so on. And let there be NO central venue and NO cultural monopoly (that serves to stunt rather than stimulate). Let a hundred flowers bloom -- even if some do not smell as sweet.

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BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

Crowds are dangerous because individuals in a crowd are faceless, anonymous and unaccountable -- even to themselves. One loses one's identity completely, and can thus contemplate an act that would normally be unthinkable. One thus remembers the incident at the TSC some years ago on a new year's eve and the recurrent incidents of public lynching (and worse) of supposed muggers, bandits and thieves frequently reported in the media.

striking sari that serves to provide temporary distraction -- but for the most part, relief is only to be derived from platefuls of *chatpatti* and *fuchka*. So, what explains those crowds?

The venue

The location is probably crucial. The Bangla Academy, the Fine Arts Institute, the TSC and the Shaheed Minar are situated at the heart of Ramna and at the confluence of three of our largest campuses: Dhaka University, BUET and Dhaka Medical College, along with their numerous halls of residence for students. So you have here a large, eager, bored and rather excitable (captive) audience with somewhat limited spending power but with a great deal of enthusiasm. And of course, at their age, anything and

There are older visitors to these venues as well. For the most part these are the writers, poets and their hangers on along with would-be writers, would-be poets and their would-be hangers on. And then there are the stall owners and their staff along with a sprinkling of patriotic Bengalis like you and me.

Crowd control

There are crowds and there are crowds. Perhaps one ought to distinguish between say, a lynch mob and a political demonstration or between a bridal party and a very crowded city street. I have seen how a crowded street can transform itself into a lynch mob or a political demonstration degenerate into a kangaroo court. Let me recount two instances from my colourful past:

I had turned sixteen, and as boys of that age are sometimes prone to

shape of a big Pathan, who quickly came to my rescue. He commanded the crowd, so to speak with his 'kya hua, kuch ney hua' and managed to disperse it somewhat with his frantic arm movements -- allowing me just enough of a breather to make good my escape. So now you know -- I am a hit and run driver! The alternative is something that I would rather not speculate about.

The second incidence saw me (and my father) in the role of the Good Samaritan. I think the year was 1970 when the country was sitting on a political cauldron. Father and son had gone to attend a public meeting where Maulana Bhashani was due to make an important speech at the Paltan Maidan. After the meeting, the crowds were dispersing slowly when someone

individuals in a crowd are faceless, anonymous and unaccountable -- even to themselves. One loses one's identity completely, and can thus contemplate an act that would normally be unthinkable. One thus remembers the incident at the TSC some years ago on a new year's eve and the recurrent incidents of public

Citizens march against war

A historic moment for peace



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

FEBRUARY 15 has produced what has been called the world's Second Superpower: global public opinion. This can potentially tame the First Superpower, the United States -- if only President Bush listens to conscientious citizens.

Record numbers of citizens marched in London (1.5 to 2 million), Rome and Madrid (2 to 3 million), Berlin and Paris (500,000), New York (250,000), and in 750 other cities. This mobilisation was historic. It announced civil society's intervention in decisions relating to security, war and peace -- hitherto the state's preserve.

I was in London on February 15, having been invited to a panel discussion with Prof Amartya Sen on militarism, nationalism and the Bomb. Participating in the march was a thrilling, moving, enriching, empowering experience.

There were people from 100 countries, including activists as well as ordinary 'apolitical' individuals. Their slogan was "Not in Our Name". There was drumming, singing, and speeches by political stalwarts, poets, peace activists, and citizens' representatives.

The inspiration was not just opposition to war, but the goal of a just world free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), poverty and want.

This mobilisation came one day after UNMOVIC's Hans Blix told the Security Council that weapons inspectors found no WMD in Iraq. This demolished the US-UK case for early military action, and widened the Atlantic Divide.

France, whose Foreign Minister was cheered -- a rarity for the sedate Security Council -- for passionately opposing war, has decided to veto a second resolution sanctioning the use of force. A veto would humiliate America. It can still go to war unilaterally -- as it has threatened. But going it alone (or with poodle Britain) would only show America isn't the world's leader.

Today, the *real* global debate is no longer about disarming Iraq. It's about the US. Iraq is a *tactical* issue.

So far, India has seen very little peace mobilisation, barring an impressive 7,000-strong rally in Delhi on February 10, and smaller marches in other cities on February 15. The tempo must be stepped up... The demand for WMD abolition must not be confined to Iraq. It must apply universally, including to America. Double standards on WMD spell big trouble.

The *strategic* question is how to tame America's overbearing might.

Faced with unprecedented resistance, the US has two options. Either it defers to the UN and withdraws its 200,000 troops from the Gulf. Or, it unleashes war without UN authorisation.

The first course would expose America's macho leaders as "wimps". Mr Henry Kissinger summed up the logic: "If the US marches [back] 200,000 troops ... , the credibility of American power will be gravely, perhaps irreparably, impaired."

So US leaders want to save face, not life!

Under the second course, war would lack a moral and political basis. It will be extremely unpopular even in the West. It will inflict terrible cruelty, without necessarily unearthing and safely destroying whatever WMD Iraq may have stashed away.

Apart from destruction, at stake here is the structure of multilateral global institutions, including the UN. These were painstakingly built over two centuries against opposition from nation-states to any reduction of their absolute sovereignty. That's how international humanitarian law

and disarmament treaties evolved.

The US threatens to undermine that multilateral structure. This will legitimise force as the "normal" method of resolving disputes. The consequences will be profoundly undemocratic.

On Iraq itself, UNMOVIC reports offer no conclusive evidence of WMD. Iraq is cooperating with UNMOVIC. It has even allowed its scientists to be privately questioned and U-2 spy-planes to reconnoitre. (Imagine the US doing this!)

aren't about disarmament. They have to do with oil, Islam and Israel. With new discoveries, Iraq is believed to have added 200 billion barrels to its oil reserves over its proven 115 billion barrels -- making it richer in petroleum than even Saudi Arabia.

The US also wants a "regime change" in Iraq as part of its plan to reorganise the entire Middle East -- favouring "moderate Islamic" (read, pro-US) states.

These goals are parochial, self-serving and unworthy. Their pursuit will destabilise the Middle East. An unjust war will be seen as vengefully anti-Muslim and produce enormous resentment even in South Asia, adding to already aggravated communal tensions.

An unjust war is compatible neither with political principle nor the national interest. The Indian government must reject pro-war pressures from the extreme-Right and from pro-US hawks who want to side with the likely winner, America.

New Delhi is hovering between two positions: there should be no war; and second, military action must be taken within the UN framework alone.

Mr Vajpayee seems to favour the first view. But his government has moved from ambiguity towards the second position, rejecting a Parliament resolution against war. It's under US pressure and won't take an independent stand -- unless peace-minded citizens take to the streets.

So far, India has seen very little peace mobilisation, barring an impressive 7,000-strong rally in Delhi on February 10, and smaller marches in other cities on February 15. The tempo must be stepped up.

Yet, we must not allow Hindu or Muslim communalists to convert the anti-war platform into an anti-Western or anti-Islamic plank opposed to a liberal, humane, secular orientation. The demand for WMD abolition must not be confined to Iraq. It must apply universally, including to America. Double standards on WMD spell big trouble.

Praful Bidwais an eminent Indian columnist.

Cricket as a metaphor for nation

HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

THE ignominious defeat of the Bangladesh team at the recent World Cup Cricket matches and the sad state of affairs with regard to our national cricket team somehow depict a malaise that is not just confined to our cricket team but to a large extent to our nation. The commentators used such phrases as "lack of commitment", "absence of plan", "lack of team work" to explain our poor performance at the competition. They also pointed out such problems as "lack of experience" (Bangladesh team was probably the youngest in the competition in average age of the players). Upon reflection, it can be said that these statements apply to us as a nation as much as to our hapless cricket team.

Lack of commitment: Lack of

commitment can be read as a metaphor for lack of patriotism that is a lack of sensible respect and discerning love for our nation. What we lack is a sense of responsibility. We don't want to take ownership. We love the blame game. We blame the cricket control board for team selection, we blame the players, we blame the organisers, the management, the captain, the commentators at the commentary box, though they were sometimes unfair and patronising (especially, coming from a forgetful dresser). We blame every one except ourselves as a collectivity. Or, sometimes, we become defensive. We don't say that yes we were outplayed. Period. And this is not the end of the world; we will work harder and come back, we will strive. Even if we don't win the next world cup so what? Cricket is a game. It is not a matter of life and death. If it is seen that way then

there is a problem that we should seriously look into. We don't need to invest all our emotional energy into this game. We need to show some commitment to our genuine national

level of collectivity, it amounts to a sense of direction. We need to ask ourselves: where are we going? What is our achievable target? Not empty promises made by the politi-

come from? When we look at that question, we see fanciful, politically convenient interpretations where history becomes a province of imagination, and truth an exercise in

As a former cricket player, I can assure all my young friends that we have come a long way in cricket. Compare scores of first division league from 1973 with that in 2003. What we lack is a blueprint for national development and a sincere and honest evaluation of our achievements and our failures in a sensible and objective manner. Such an impartial assessment is a crucial first step.

causes -- fighting corruption, poverty, illiteracy, etc -- with consequences for all. At the same time, we need to take pride in our achievement. We cannot afford to make defeatism a national ideology. But taking pride at the cost of responsibility will also spell disaster.

Absence of plan: Absence of plan is a national problem. At the

cians, but realistic goals. It is unfair to say that we have no plans -- we do have five-year plans. How useful it is to have five-year plans in the post-socialist world? Plan should be seen as a sense of realism. Do we have realism, or objective assessment of our successes and failures? If we want to know where are we going we should also know where have we

power play.

Lack of teamwork: Lack of teamwork plagues not just our cricket team but us as a nation. Every sector of our society, our government departments, corporations, etc are rife with divisions along party line, factionalism, tribalism, districtism and so on. We love to destroy institutions; we are poor

phancy does not count as praise. We don't say yes, the past regime had their share of achievements as well as failures; our regime will build on the successes and avoid their failures. At the national level rather than trying to build consensus, we work hard at avoiding it. We work extra hard to destroy what fragile unity we had achieved.

Lack of experience: When Bangladesh achieved its independence in 1971, we only had a handful of senior civil servants with experience in running central government. We now have a -- more or less -- functioning (and sometimes dysfunctioning) centralised civil service. Let's look at Biman, our national carrier. In 1972 we had a handful of pilots and planes. We have come a long way. Our achievements are not negligible. We look bad in comparison with other countries. But sometimes those comparisons are unfair and methodologically unsound. Our comparison should be between what we had and what we have; what we were and what we are. In the early days, we had a small number of small planes (a leased DC3 from the Air Force and subsequently some Fokker 27s and two Boeing 707s) and if one wanted to go to USA, for example,

first, one had to go to an international airport in India or Bangkok to embark on one's journey. Now one can board the New York bound flight right from Dhaka and as the flight takes off one can indulge in mouthful of criticisms of the poor services of Biman not to mention our cricket team in the accompaniment of *samosas* and piped in Bengali music. As a former cricket player, I can assure all my young friends that we have come a long way in cricket. Compare scores of first division league from 1973 with that in 2003. What we lack is a blueprint for national development and a sincere and honest evaluation of our achievements and our failures in a sensible and objective manner. Such an impartial assessment is a crucial first step.

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Indemnity for Cain

MUHAMMAD HABIBUR RAHMAN

Cain wanted to marry his sister, his twin.
Adam said, "Son, one does not marry one's twin.
If you want my heart to win
Then you marry Abel's twin."
And let Abel marry your twin."

Cain said, "I do not want any heart to win.
I will marry my sister, my twin."
Adam said, "Well, young man,
Sacrifice, look and then settle by the omen."
Cain the ploughman
Offered a handful of grain.
A little lamb offered,
Abel, the shepherd.

From the heaven,
Came down a white fire
With new discoveries, Iraq is
believed to have added 200 billion
barrels to its oil reserves over its
proven 115 billion barrels -- making
it richer in petroleum than even
Saudi Arabia.

Before Cain Satan placed a bird and stone.
The bird did mock, moan and groan.
Irate Cain stoned the mocking bird on his head.
Soon it was all stone-dead.

With the first blood spill
On her the earth shivered and felt ill
Cain however learned how to kill.
Any quails to kill no more did he feel.
But looking at the dead body Cain was disgusted.
Not knowing what to do he was flabbergasted.

Soon appeared before him two murderous crows.
They fought with each other with knitted brows.
The killer dug up a ditch and buried the killed.
Cain learned the lesson and buried the killed.

Then Cain begged with all solemnity
Of the five elements for an indemnity.
He begged pardon of the Earth
And the Earth refused.
He begged pardon of the water
And the water refused.
He begged pardon of the energy
And the energy refused.
He begged pardon of the air
And the air refused.
He begged pardon of the sky
And the sky refused.

Cain's own flesh and blood
Were swept away by the great flood.
They had no place in the Noah's Ark
They did not leave behind any mark.

Who could have given indemnity to Cain
None but Abel's kin.
It was not for the high and mighty
Not even for the God Almighty
To give an indemnity to Cain.
Did not He say,
"Except as a punishment for murder or mischief
Whoever kills a man
Should be looked upon as if he has killed all mankind.
And whoever saves a man's life
He should be regarded as if he has saved all mankind."

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