

## Recruitment at the university

*New rule to affect autonomy*

**P**UBLIC universities need the approval of the PM to fill their vacancies. This new directive does not eliminate the UGC -- the body previously tasked with overseeing recruitment -- it just adds another layer to the decision-making process.

The UGC was created in part to ensure that public university hiring be kept above politics. There have been allegations of irregularity in its functioning that need to be addressed and there is much room for improvement in how the UGC allocates teaching positions.

If one thing in this country should be decided on a non-partisan basis it is the hiring of educators, especially as university appointments have in the past been blighted by political considerations.

Public university appointments must not only be kept above politics, but also be seen to have been so done. Requiring the PM's approval for filling vacancies could be perceived in a way which one would have thought is sought to be avoided.

It is not even clear whether the new rule is consistent with the autonomy of the public universities guaranteed under the Public Universities Act, 1973.

Nor can the addition of a layer of bureaucracy be expected to expedite the hiring process. One of principal complaints against the UGC was that it moved too slowly and many vacancies were left unfilled. In addition to the UGC, hiring requires the approval of the education ministry, the finance ministry, and now the PM. This can only be expected to increase the delay in filling vacancies.

No one wants university appointments to be politicised. This should be a non-partisan issue on which every person of sense agrees. If the UGC is underperforming, then it can be reformed. But there is no doubt that an independent functioning body is what is needed to oversee public university appointments.

## AIDS patients

*They felt cared for*

**T**HE terrible physical and mental agony that Aids patients are subjected to has been revealed by their meeting with the members of parliament on Tuesday.

The MPs, led by Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, have taken a laudable initiative to prevent spread of HIV/ Aids and they talked to the victims of the incurable affliction as part of their plan to remove the social stigma and misconceptions surrounding it. What has transpired from the meeting is a tale of some mortally sick people being socially ostracized for no reason whatsoever. People know little about the disease and how it spreads and the patients are avoided out of an ill-founded fear.

The patients are losing social support at a time when they need it badly. But that is not how AIDS patients are treated in other countries. People in the developed world have been made aware of the risk factors and HIV positive people receive the treatment that they need to prolong the resistance against the as yet unconquered malady. In other words, they are doing as much as they can to help the patients, many of whom have contracted the disease for no sin of theirs.

We believe the MPs have addressed a sore point in our healthcare system, one that represents the abysmal ignorance of people about the hazards of HIV/Aids. The appeal of the move coming from the lawmakers is likely to be high, but it is equally important that similar efforts are made at other levels to spare the hapless patients the pain of neglect.

The move by the MPs is important for another reason which is that Bangladesh has been identified as a country with a low prevalence of but high vulnerability to HIV/Aids. So, it is necessary to take such steps as will lessen our vulnerability to the disease and give society a more humane face when it comes to handling the patients.

# US in Iraq: Indirect approach?

MUMTAZ IQBAL

**O**NE of 20th century England's preeminent military historians, Capt. Basil H. Liddell Hart (1895-1970) is famed for postulating the strategy of the indirect approach to warfare.

Using examples from antiquity to 1945, Hart said that guile not gore wins wars. Direct attacks against an entrenched enemy rarely work. Victory goes to the commander unhinging the enemy's equilibrium before the main battle. "The longest way round is often the shortest way... an indirect approach loosens the defender's hold by upsetting his balance," Hart theorised.

Iraq's US occupiers, complementing their tactics of the mailed fist (F16s, Abrams tanks, Apache gunships and other lethal toys), appear to be gingerly adopting Hart's strategy in a modest way to fight Iraqi resistance.

That is the charitable interpretation of the bizarre almost gleeful announcement of the US Iraq command on 25 October that it has captured the *wife and daughter* (author's emphasis) of Gen. Ebrahim Al Douri. Saddam Hossain's No. 2 man and credited by the US to be the "brains" behind Iraqi resistance.

Incredulity is the first reaction to this announcement. Good God! Is US Centcom so desperate that it trumpets the capture of one old and one young woman as a battlefield victory?

But the real purpose of detaining the mother and daughter is to use them as hostages to persuade Douri to surrender. This reprehensible and unchivalrous action contravenes international law -- the 1949 Geneva Convention 4, articles 34 and 147 -- and US Military Law.

Art. 34 states unequivocally

that the taking of hostages is prohibited. Art. 147 characterises hostage taking as one of a number of "grave breaches" of the laws of war.

Art. 97 of the Uniform US Military Code of Justice threatens court martial to any soldier who unlawfully detains any person. Hah! Hell will freeze over before courts martial are convened due to the detention of these women.

This is not the first time that history's "best ever military machine" (Bush) has used

concentration camp, and secret assassinations echoing Vietnam's Phoenix programmes in favour of Hart's indirect approach, the Pentagon announced on 24 October that it is sending 3,000 Marines to "restore security" in Iraq.

Now Marines are one of the Pentagon's elite killing machines, specialists in amphibious sea-borne landings. So why are they going to riverine Iraq?

Basically, to perform urban counter-insurgency operations

Massu.

While the French now refuse to send soldiers to Iraq, it is believed they (and the Israeli Defence Forces) have cooperated with the Pentagon in providing orientation to the Marines through intelligence, archival access and maybe interviews with Algiers survivors. Is Paris repaying Washington for the help it got in the First Indo-China War (1948-54) before Dien Bien Phu ended Gallic colonial ambitions?

France's cooperation is unsur-

prising. French opposition to US over Iraq arises not from any sympathy for Iraqis -- after all, Iraq was the progeny of the infamous Sykes-Picot treaty of 1916 -- or doctrinal considerations (multilateralism et al). It's a cold-blooded appraisal of France's long-term strategic and commercial interests in the Arab world.

As of now, both France and US share a tacit common interest in a pacified Iraq. One benefit would be that it would allow Elf and Exxon among other western oil companies to access Iraq's oil.

The Marines deployment to Iraq should be a tonic to the hard-pressed GIs there. They are under attack by "hajjis," under-paid (their combat pay has been cut) and under-appreciated worldwide, and increasingly in the US, despite their role as missionaries ministering democracy to Iraqis.

To show his solidarity with the GIs, Bush made a lightning three-hour visit to the bunkers of Baghdad International Airport on November 27 to share

But it shows that while jobs will be the pivotal issue in the presidential elections, the Rivers of Babylon could overflow into US politics next year.

*Oderint dum metuant* -- let them hate as long as they fear -- was Rome's national security mantra against the barbarian threats astride the empire's marches. Bush's policy of full spectrum dominance through unilateral conflict in third world lands (mainly Muslim) distant from Pax Americana's shores pretty much follows this Caesarian strategy.

The difference is that, in this digital age, imperialism foments hate geometrically to every arithmetical increase using instruments of fear. This could upset the best laid plans of mice and men.

The outcome of the US occupation of Iraq is uncertain. What is certain is that it has created much uncertainty in the international security system, misery for Iraqis and opportunity for

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women as hostages. On last 30 July, GIs picked up the wife and daughter of an Iraqi lieutenant general. They left a note: If you want your family released, turn yourself in.

Brigade commander Col. David Hogg justified this outrageous tactic with this hogwash: "It's an intelligence operation with detainees, and these people have info." (And we have the ammo, the intrepid colonel could have added).

If senior US officers brazenly break their own laws and international ones with impudent impunity and defend it with laughable justification, no wonder ordinary GIs are insanely trigger-happy, shooting first without bothering to ask questions then or later. After all, Iraqis are merely ragheads or "hajjis" to GIs and fair game for summary firepower.

But lest Iraqi resistance get any funny ideas that Centcom is abandoning its hard line tactics (such as collective punishment, turning Saddam's village into a

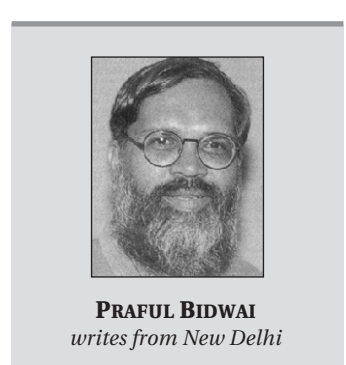
prison, French opposition to US over Iraq arises not from any sympathy for Iraqis -- after all, Iraq was the progeny of the infamous Sykes-Picot treaty of 1916 -- or doctrinal considerations (multilateralism et al). It's a cold-blooded appraisal of France's long-term strategic and commercial interests in the Arab world.

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# Fury over railway recruitment: Wages of jobless growth



**PRAFUL BIDWAI**  
*writes from New Delhi*

**I**F someone wanted to discover a fast track to the triumph of extreme ethnic-chauvinism in India, they couldn't find a better example than the three-week-long rampage in different states over recruitment of Category-D employees by Indian Railways. This has claimed scores of lives, over 50 in Assam alone.

What triggered off the orgy of violence was the denial of entry to 50 students from Bihar to Railway examination halls in Assam on November 9. The backlash began immediately. Trains bound for the Northeast were attacked in Bihar, and some of their occupants manhandled.

In reaction, the All Assam Students' Union organised a protest. This escalated into a senseless witchhunt of ethnic Biharis living in Assam, many of whom have never even been to Bihar.

Since then, extremist groups like the United Liberation Front of Asom have taken over the

"agitation", perpetrating murderous attacks upon the poorest of Biharis, such as rickshaw-pullers and casual workers.

Biharis have become the targets of xenophobic violence in Maharashtra too. There, the ethnic-chauvinist, quasi-fascist Shiv Sena organised vicious attacks on people from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh arriving to sit for Railways recruitment examinations. They were mercilessly beaten and bullied into missing the test.

fears of Bangladeshi "infiltrators" in "destabilising" the Northeast. This is of a piece with ULEFA's ethnic-xenophobic appeal. Indeed the Assam Chief Minister alleges collusion between the two!

The Railways' reaction to the violence is to suspend all-India tests and break them region-and local quota-wise into 67 divisions. This is in keeping with Railway Minister Nitish Kumar's short-term "pragmatism".

The decision is ill-advised. The

*shalasis* or gangmen.

Their 55 lakh valid applications translate into 275 eligible candidates for each menial job -- much greater than the 120 examinees who compete for each seat at the Indian Institutes of Management. If one considers all of India's management schools, 15 candidates compete for each seat -- a number 18 times lower than 275.

Clearly, the competition for jobs is cut-throat at the lowest end of the labour market. The

minimum qualification for a Category-D Railway job is the Eighth Standard. The vast majority of applicants are over-qualified.

Railway gangmen start on a meagre Rs 5,000 p.m. And yet, so many young people are prepared to go to any length -- even to kill -- to join the Railways. Even after considering the special attraction of government jobs because of pensions, healthcare benefits, etc, the number is extraordinarily high; it speaks of desperation.

The larger social disease is jobless growth. Despite 5-to-6 percent GDP growth, India is not producing enough jobs. Official figures show that India's organ-

ised sector workforce has actually shrunk during each of the past five years. It shed 4.2 lakh jobs in 2001-02, and accounts for a mere 7 percent of total employment. The organised sector has 9.1 lakh fewer jobs than in 1997. So much for "reform!"

The fall is not made up by the small-scale or informal sector. In fact, trade liberalisation and growing industrial oligopolies have destroyed many small factories. Micro-studies from Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka report a 20 to 35 percent decline in their number.

Unorganised sector employment has been annually rising by a mere 1 percent. The population growth rate is almost double this. As for the quality of employment among the 369 million in the informal sector, especially their working conditions, the less said, the better.

The latest *Economic Survey* admits that overall employment growth has decreased from 2.7 percent a year to just 1.1 percent over the past one and a half decades. In the past, an additional output of 10 percent created 6.8 percent jobs. Today, 10 percent more production means

**In GDP growth terms, India belongs to the top 20 percent of all countries. In HDI terms, it belongs to the bottom third... This speaks of social regression and a grossly unjust situation in which the elite rules by making groups of underprivileged people fight one another on fake identity issues... Such situations create cesspools of inequalities, disparities and discontent in which extreme Right-wing ideologies and politics thrive.**

The Sena wants Railway jobs reserved exclusively for "Sons of the Soil". In Assam, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav has tried to apply the salve. His remarkable initiative to mobilise people against ethnic violence is worthy of emulation by other national leaders.

In Maharashtra, no tall public figure has countered the malign hate-politics of Mr Bal Thackeray. He again threatens to send all "outsiders" packing from Mumbai. Meanwhile, the BJP is playing characteristically sectarian politics by demanding the resignation of Congress-led governments in Assam and Maharashtra.

Worse, it's stoking exaggerated

Railways are an all-India network and a symbol and agency of national unity. Under Article 16 of the Constitution, they cannot discriminate among candidates on regional or linguistic grounds. Mr Kumar's decision to abandon national-level recruitment will further sharpen ethnic-regional "Us and Them" divisions.

This blood-stained crisis over Railway recruitment reveals a terrible sickness afflicting Indian society. Quite simply, the Indian economy has stopped generating jobs.

That's why more than 75 lakh youth apply for a mere 20,000 Railway posts, involving the roughest of unskilled labour as

refined way of self-limitation.

Writers do indulge in blasphemy, name-calling obscenity and sometimes down to earth sleaze. However the writer (if he/she is worth it) should be guided by conscience as to what is right and what is not. Conscience is not taught anywhere, but is the result of judgement and morality. It is, however, a somewhat scarce trait among some people in spite of all other credentials. Also many have different views and yardsticks to go by, and as the saying goes: "what is sauce for the goose is not sauce for the gander"

Hence the final solution comes to litigation, which is the avenue of last resort. There too judgement varies in interpretation from country to country and is as different as the points of the compass. One does not clearly know where to draw the line.

Finally, it is my personal opinion that the write up published reflects more as an outcome of emotion rather than a neutral presentation on various aspects of freedom of the writer.

**SAMANSOOR**  
*Gulshan, Dhaka.*

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## Freedom of the Writer

This refers to Mr Syed Shamsul Haq's article titled "I speak of the freedom of the pen" published in *The Daily Star* on 17<sup>th</sup> November. Perhaps the title could be "I write on the freedom of the pen," but then again the choice of the title is a freedom of the pen or more appropriately freedom of the writer. As a professional in engineering and management with over 55 years of the hobby of reading and writing in English I hope to have the freedom to write down my views.

Literary freedom is an accepted norm of society, but what is the limitation of this freedom? That is the main issue discussed in the article. Starting from the autocratic mode of censorship at one end it can go down to the exercise of conscience in a more liberal and

our country. Then why blame others?  
**Md Abad**  
*Dhaka*

## Stop phensidyl marketing

We have made enquiries with narcotic officials, police and BDR personnel, railway guards, bus and truck drivers, medical and drug stores and many others. They have told us that phensidyl is not produced in our country, there is not a single phensidyl factory in our country.

Where from, how and why thousands of bottles of phensidyl are being sold in almost all cities, towns, markets and bazaars of Bangladesh?

In many areas of West Bengal and Assam of India bordering Bangladesh, Indian Marwaris have set up phensidyl factories and they are producing huge quantities of phensidyl for consumption in Bangladesh for their financial interest.

They in collaboration with some Bangladeshi terrorists and miscreants smuggle out thousands of bottles of Indian phensidyl for marketing and sale

in our country and earn crores of taka every year at the cost of sweat and blood of our poor people.

The affects of phensidyl are very dreadful and harmful. Our people, mostly the young generation, unemployed youths, students and frustrated poor workers get intoxicated with phensidyl and they commit all sorts of crimes -- hijacking, rape and murder.

We don't understand why different law enforcing authorities have so far failed to stop smuggling of phensidyl from India.

We are also surprised why our Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not lodged any protest with its Indian counterpart or raised the question of illegal production of phensidyl in West Bengal and Assam and large scale smuggling into Bangladesh at the SAARC conference or the SAARC Secretariat as yet?

We would also like to mention here that different government organisations and NGO's in our country are making an all out campaign against smoking and Aids but we are shocked to see

Democrats to bash Bush.

And what of Massu and his minions? In an interview in 1990, the then 92-year-old general appeared penitent. France, he said, should recognise and condemn the actions taken at the time. "Morally," he said, "torture is ugly."

General Paul Aussaresses, who was 39 and in charge of French military intelligence in 1957, admitted on French radio that he "personally killed 24 Algerian prisoners." Does this make him a Klaus Barbie lite? Aussaresses showed minimum remorse for what he did. "If I had to do it all over again, I'd be upset. But I don't think there were any alternatives."

The French authorities are in a pickle over how to tackle the confessions of these now geriatric former killers in uniform.

One wonders what present-day US commanders and policy makers handling Iraq will say two decades hence. Like Massu and Aussaresses, will they invoke the Nuremberg defence and claim they were patriots following orders and there were no alternatives?

Or shall we see repentance, Robert McNamara style? His autobiography "In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam" concluded that the US was "terribly wrong" on Vietnam.

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Mumtaz Iqbal is a retired banker.

only 1.6 more jobs -- a huge 76 percent decrease!

Rising unemployment even in agriculturally developed states like Punjab has induced thousands of people to flee abroad illegally as the Daler Mehndi scandal reveals.

Even 8 percent GDP growth will not reform this situation. Perversely, higher GDP means less employment and lower income for the people (or most of them). India's rank in the UN Human Development Index has slipped from 124 to 127 (between 2000 and 2001).

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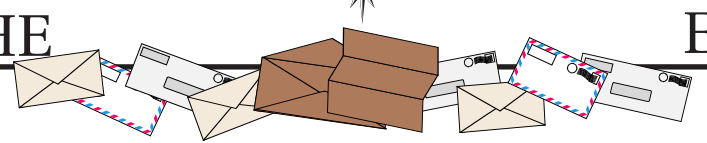
This speaks of social regression and a grossly unjust situation in which the elite rules by making groups of underprivileged people fight one another on fake identity issues.

Such situations create cesspools of inequalities, disparities and discontent in which extreme Right-wing ideologies and politics thrive. Nazism and Fascism couldn't have triumphed in Europe without the Great Depression's havoc.

The Shiv Sena wouldn't have grown dramatically in the late 1960s and early 1970s without the terminal decline of the textile industry and growing unemployment -- and all the social chaos it produced. We stand warned.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

## Uncertainties rule the day

Begum Khaleida Zia, as the prime minister, has to take some tough decisions to save the government and the country, before she looks how to save her party. This is the national responsibility vested on her by the people.

It is inhuman when an injured person, a victim of toll collection, is shot again at the hospital, after he was shot earlier by the hired goons, and was able to get admitted in the hospital. Hundreds of UC chairpersons cannot attend office in fear of their lives. And recently *dacoits* set household members on fire. The Islamic religious factions are attacking mosques. The civil service is not running even in the daily routine mode. Then what is the purpose and usefulness of political speeches?

According to a survey, the miscreants and killers are the young generation in the age group of 18 to 25. This is a dangerous trend. What these persons will do to the rest of their lives? The morale and the morals in the education sector are in a mess.

Land grabbing has become a routine feature. Neither life nor property is secure, not to speak of losing children to the kidnappers. The future of Bangladesh is not bright considering the present situation (to speak modestly). The government cannot make its presence felt anywhere at any time, as corrupt practices rule society. The alternative to government failure is unrest. Now internal killing has started within the rich with illegal wealth and misuse of power cannot remain hidden for long.

Disintegration is the sign of the day. True leadership at the time of crisis is not measured by popularity at the common sense level. It is time for tough decision-making. The public has to know how the powerful groups inside the power castles work and cheat the citizens.

At this juncture some outside leaders have made a public call for the formation of a third moral force to combat the inefficiency of the government. This is due to the unacceptable, debased political culture which is prevailing in the country since liberation. We seem to be unfit politically to run

our country. Then why blame others?  
**Md Abad**  
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