

Mass transfers hurting administration

Officials must function without fear of reprisal by next governments

THE government has embarked on mass transfer of officials. This is markedly devoid of the principles of good governance. The objective is clearly to get rid of officials who are thought of as having been of service to the past government. While some of them may have political affiliations, most are simply officers carrying out orders. But this transferring smacks of revenge postings.

Unfortunately this approach has a history. Heads roll with every change of government. Sheikh Hasina on assuming power said that 21 years of garbage had to be cleaned and went on a transfer spree. Although Khaleda Zia promised in her first meeting with secretaries that under her transfers and promotions will only be on "merit, competence, seniority, honesty and experience", she has now gone on a transfer binge not seen before. We seem to have developed a culture of discontinuity in the administration.

Both parties have encouraged partisanship in administration. Officials even found that post-retirement future lay in politics, groundwork for which begins while on active service.

Even though only a small number of people belong to such camps, the majority are now receiving a signal that it may be dangerous to exert oneself on behalf of the republic. By looking at the administration as a tool of power rather than governance a body blow has been delivered to the concept of neutral governance.

One had thought otherwise when Khaleda Zia delivered her inaugural address and she focused on merit as the platform for career advancement. But the energetic manner in which the transfer policy is being pursued seems to mean that the position no longer holds.

An officer will have political views but the dominant persona is that of the administrator and unless that becomes the guide, we shall see the destruction of the administrative machinery.

And that is suicidal and has to stop now. Government officers have to be able to function without fear, otherwise this rather weakly functioning administration will simply collapse. Khaleda Zia and her government must set new examples in this transfer game. At some stage the bureaucracy must be allowed to function professionally. Just to say that the "previous government has politicised everything" to justify one's own politicisation process will not solve anything. It will only drag us further down the same path. The new Prime Minister must set a new direction in this regard. She can if she wants, given the mandate she got.

Hell let loose on Airport Road

Law-enforcing agencies don't enjoy public trust

MONDAY afternoon saw the closest thing to Dante's Inferno on the Airport Road. A three-hour duration five-kilometre long traffic jam during pre-iftar peak time left the citizenry around that VIP Road area in an accused state of mind. Piecing together the various newspaper versions on the chain of incidents triggered by a police sergeant beating a bus driver reveals the following. According to the police version, the driver was manhandled by a sergeant as he was caught fleeing a scene of accident that he had caused. By the police department's own admission, the sergeant was only expected to take legal action against the driver and not beat him up. But the motor vehicle drivers say, so do some of those who witnessed it all happening, that the sergeant asked for 'toll money' from the driver. It's the latter's refusal to pay that brought the cop's wrath on him. The fall-out was horrific, the sympathetic bus and truck drivers pulling up all their vehicles brought the traffic to a grinding halt. The pent-up grievances against traffic sergeants and policemen erupted.

Traffic policemen's business-as-usual notoriety of toll collection takes on an aggressive form during the month of Ramadan as the Eid-ul-Fitr approaches. Their activism is heightened by an insatiable appetite for collection money that gets bartered away as if in an Eid bonanza netted as a matter of right. The vehicles are stopped just about anywhere, ostensibly to examine papers or show circulars to drivers - all for the sake of palm greasing. The goods-laden trucks in particular are eyed wistfully on, like ants beholden to beehives. The entry points to the city such as Gabtali, Saidabad and Airport Road are where tolls are collected before the public eye. This is not to say the city interiors are immune to the malaise.

The government hardly realises that we have a potential breakdown of law on our hands in terms of a deteriorating public-police relations. On the one hand, we have a serious police image crisis and on the other the reactive eruptions of the simmering discontent against increasing police corruption and highhandedness. One hopes the massive transfers across the police department have not worsened matters. This needs to be looked into but what is highly imperative now is a greater supervisory control mounted over the cops in the streets.

America's troubled Arab alliance



M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE Kingdom of Saudi Arabia together with Shah's Iran had once been the US' twin pillars of security in the Gulf. Even as one of the pillars collapsed with Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, Saudi Arabia continued to be America's trusted ally and steadfastly served the latter's interest in the region. While the world watched with a bit of puzzle the curious friendship between the two entities, each diagonally opposed to other in their beliefs, culture, tastes and customs they themselves garnered dividends from it over the years.

The champion of democracy had no qualm in promoting one of the world's most undemocratic regime so long it enjoyed a monopolised access to the quarter of the world's oil reserves that lie buried under Saudi desert. Neither did the custodians of the holiest shrines of Islam have compunction in rubbing shoulder with the American 'infidels' so long the latter stood guarantee to their security from internal upheaval and external aggression. The *quid pro quo* worked wonderfully well till September 11 last which have brought to the fore some disturbing questions developing fissure in their

alliance. The Saudis suddenly find their American connection a liability. After the gulf war in 1991, 5000 or so American soldiers were stationed in Saudi Arabia primarily to protect the Saudi oil field from falling into the hands of extremist elements. Over the years they have become the source of criticism for the domestic dissidents. Because of this and the corruption and venality of some of its myriad princes, the royal family is

critics. In the current crisis the kingdom has adopted in response an enigmatic silence on its attitude towards its western patrons and the Taliban's in Afghanistan are now under US attack. It did not give blanket support to the Americans on their war on terrorism which they expected from an ally like Saudi Arabia. Instead, it perfunctorily finished its obligation to the US by innocuously revoking its recognition to the Taliban's. The

cleric issued a *fatwa* proclaiming that 'whoever supports the infidel is himself considered infidel'. The anonymous statements draw the connection between this fatwa and the royal family's willy nilly support for 'infidel' America. This is unmistakably a dangerous pointer towards uneasy time ahead. So, the Saudi exasperation of its link with the Americans seems to be total. The obvious parallel is that of the last days of Shah in Iran: a monar-

lukewarm in its support for US war on terrorism is a veiled allegation of Saudi 'ingratitude'. They tend to remind the Saudis that 10 years ago they saved their country from a possible Iraqi invasion. It is true but then the Saudis feel that the Americans extracted price for it. The Americans however have more grudges as they remind themselves with certain anguish that at least half of the 19 terrorists who carried out the Black Tuesday attacks were

authorities were equally non cooperative after 19 US servicemen were killed by a bomb explosion in their barracks in Al-Khobar in 1996. The Saudis carried out their own summary justice without taking into consideration any American evidence. At the peak of the warmth between the two the US saw a symbol of moderation and stability in the Kingdom. Now spurred by new doubts on its reliability as an ally the fresh doubts are cast about the Saudi regime's stability although nothing much has changed in the royal establishment and its attitude towards things.

Another crucial issue in US-Saudi relation is that of Palestine. No body denies the need to defuse the current Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Yet the need has been impressed *ad nauseam* on every visiting American and Briton by the Saudis much to the latter's disgust. The Gulf of misunderstanding that exists between two countries was highlighted when New York's mayor rejected a charitable donation of \$10m because the Saudi Prince, who offered the gift as a gesture of sympathy, called for a change in American policy with regards to the Palestinians. The Saudi regime is indeed pulled between its alliance with America and its anti-American domestic supporters, and this erodes the country's reliability as an ally to the Americans, yet the Americans cannot afford to abandon her lest the Saudi oilfields are taken over by some hostile extremists' group. It is to be seen during the days ahead just how the US repairs the damage to keep the alliance floating for her own interests beyond the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan.

Brig (Retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

PERSPECTIVES

The Saudi regime is indeed pulled between its alliance with America and its anti-American domestic supporters, and this erodes the country's reliability as an ally to the Americans, yet the Americans cannot afford to abandon her lest the Saudi oilfields are taken over by some hostile extremists' group.

constantly engaged in a delicate balancing act to justify many of its unpopular steps including an American presence which adds rather to its vulnerability instead of giving an extra sense of security. Even before the Gulf War when the American troops were first introduced to the Kingdom, the 'balance' was badly shaken as early as in 1979 when the Ultra-religious rebel groups accused the al-Sauds of letting the Muslim values be eroded and besieged the grand Kaaba in protest. Since then the regime did its best to accommodate dissent but the dissatisfaction lingered. There was fresh trouble in early 1990s but this was weathered with a mix of cunning and repressive measures. But now the 'balance' is again threatened with mounting pressures from both anti-terrorism campaigners from the west and their domestic

reason of this halfheartedness is not hard to find. Osama bin Laden is known to have a powerful constituency within Saudi Kingdom which may be roused to a new level of militancy if the monarchy lends its full support to any effort leading to his capture or elimination. The monarchy, already accused as 'apostate' by Osama, does not want his further idolisation to let him sprout into a new revolutionary cult. So the ruling family tries to ease the domestic pressure by giving full rein to the critics of the anti-terrorist campaign and allowing them to blast fullthroatedly at what is happening to Afghanistan. Unfortunately for the Saudis the American hawks cannot understand this subtly.

Moreover, in a theocracy like Saudi Arabia where the religious edicts are sacrosanct, a prominent

chical regime, repressive, corrupt and overly pliant to America which was under attack from religious extremists intent on imposing their own infidel-free regime. As disclosed by Wall Street journal similar concerns were prophetically expressed by Crown Prince Abdullah who virtually rules the Kingdom since King Fahd's stroke in 1995 in his letter to President Bush at the end of August last. "It is time" said Abdullah, "for the United States and Saudi Arabia to look to their separate interests. Those governments that do not feel the pulse of the people and respond to it will suffer the fate of Shah of Iran..."

Even though the Americans do understand the Saudi plea for distance they do it with a pinch of salt. The crudest form of American reaction to the current posture of Saudi Arabia which is at the best

Saudi citizens, as was, until his citizenship was revoked, Osama bin Laden himself. Also many of the trails from the 'charities' that finance terrorist or militant groups including Osama's al-Qaeda wend back to the Saudi Kingdom and even to the royal family itself. The Americans are to reconcile with certain discomfort to the fact that until recently Saudi regime supported Taliban and encouraged its citizens to visit Afghanistan which was not much different from the Saudi's own system, social and religious practices.

The Americans have other complaints regarding Saudi non-cooperation. It is alleged that Saudi authorities have been reluctant to give the FBI the assistance it needs to trace the contacts and backgrounds of the hijackers of September 11. It is recollected that the

The case of a poor Asian Bangladeshi Muslim



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

I ask myself constantly who I am? A Muslim? A Bengali? A South Asian? A third world citizen? A citizen of the globalized world? Every question is loaded with far reaching implications. I am told I must be one or the other. The words of President Bush, either you are with us or with the terrorists has defined contemporary politics far more definitively than perhaps the attack of September 11. There is only "either or" in this war. History and identity has been simplified to fit into the imagination of political convenience. In the black and white world of globalized politics, the colour gray has been declared a casualty and the rainbow has been banned.

I get a mail from a friend in London and she writes that the young generation likes to identify themselves by religion more than anything else does. Palestine has become a religious fight. Muslims support the cause because Islam is oppressed by a Jewish conspiracy. Our letters column is filled with rage against actions taken against Islam. "I am a Muslim. Islam is in danger. The entire Islamic world is a brotherhood. "Are we part of Arab or Middle-East history then? Will we get a chance to be part of South Asian history?"

A Bangladeshi on his way to Kurdistan has to make a stopover in Iraq. He has to find himself a hotel in the middle of the night. He finds one but they refuse to believe he has a real passport. It says he is a Muslim but they demand he speak Arabic to prove it. They all laugh derisively when he can't. How can you be Muslim and not know Arabic? He fails to convince them. To them and to almost all Arabs, Islam is an Arab legacy. In fact, the

radical Islamist group Hamas an Israel supported creation to dilute Marxist influence has stolen nationalism from the movement and replaced it with Islamic colours. Now the chant of Islam is stronger than the cry for the land.

WE pass through Sharjah on way to Moscow from Dhaka. You pass through Dubai on way from Dhaka to London. You fly Qatar air to go to London from Kathmandu. The

ment despite the papers. Finally they are convinced when I explain that I haven't reached London to do a job but edit my work in the Bush house studio. In London, I can't be a miskin. In the Arab word I can't be a miskin. I have been identified.

WE read in the paper that Osama bin Laden is guarded by Bangladeshis. Many people express pride. Osama's vision is not something I share. Osama and

because the brotherhood demanded that we be excommunicated? Is that why Saudi Arabia didn't recognize us till 1975? And if we are Muslims and the acts were to save Islam and the entire Arab world and almost the entire Islamic world stood by and watched, we as Muslims must also share that silence at our carnage. So we as Muslims killed ourselves? As Huntington would say, a civil war within the same civilization. He also says that

am poor, therefore I am." The Hindus and Muslims were united in a common identity without even knowing. They were first poor, then everything else.

The Jews of Europe fought being pegged as only Jews but in the end lost the battle. The Nazis only saw them as Jews and rest is history. The European Jew had an identity imposed on him. The then politics was not convenient for multiple identities. I am not suggesting that the same force is at work but politics seem to reject this multiplicity of identities. The jingoism of identification lies on both sides, those defined and those who define. Everything has to be reduced to easily understood stereotypes. The fact that there is no notion of Asian Islam, no notion of Persian Islam Asian Islam says much about us. There is no notion of the diversity of identity in the West either.

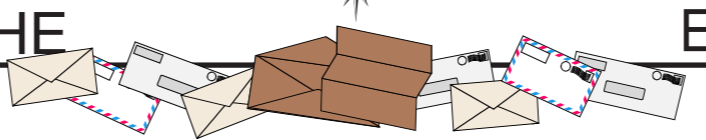
The merger of Islamic and Arab identity is a political need and the Muslims—the articulate middle class Muslims—cheer that too. It doesn't matter that a Bangladeshi will always be a Bangladeshi and never a full Muslim in the Arab world, however loudly he may beat his Islamic drums. The Arab doesn't want to part of an identity, which is so poor, so full of headaches.

No one wants to tolerate the thought that he is a Bangla speaking Bangladeshi who practices his own variety of Islam in this part of south Asia of which both India and Pakistan is a part, has the same linguistic cultural types people in West Bengal and most of his people are poor who are breeding their own culture of poverty.

Rather than be himself, he would rather be full of only a part. Is that what everyone else wants?

Afsan Chowdhury is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



"Who we are, and what we stand for!"

My attention has been drawn to a letter by Bill Rouchell from USA (November 14).

I studied in the United States for four years in the early eighties and had the general impression that Americans are too engrossed in themselves—that the world exists outside the United States is of not much concern—to an average American. That fact is perfectly evident from Mr. Rouchell's letter.

Five Palestinians school-going boys died two days ago—by an Israeli tank-shell—left by the Israeli Army to maim and kill Palestinians. More than likely the shell had "Made in USA" written on it. When the Palestinian kids took to the streets to protest the loss of their friends—Israelis replied with live ammunition—shooting another 15-year old Palestinian youth. The US government will provide the necessary cover-up so that nobody dares condemn Israeli brutality.

As for the attacks in Afghanistan, Patrick Martin (www.wsws.org) writes, "If history had skipped over September 11, and the events of that day had never happened, it is very likely that the United States would have gone to war in Afghanistan anyway, and on much the same

schedule." Purpose—lay hands on the vast oil and gas resources in Central Asia. He writes, "Talks between the Bush administration and the Taliban began in February 2001, shortly after Bush's inauguration. At one moment during the negotiations, the US representatives told the Taliban, 'either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs.'" Thousands of innocent babies, children, women and men have lost their lives, thanks to America.

I can go on, but I don't need to. The average American needs to wake up and look at the world as it is, instead of through the glasses of CNN and BBC.

An average Bangladeshi
Dhaka

How can we accept it?

Since student life, my father had a special respect for Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and thereby, had supported Awami League all along. But his foremost introduction should be as a retired army officer, who was awarded the King's Commission in 1958. He was also a dedicated freedom fighter during the liberation war in 1971. I along with my mother and younger

sister were always with him during the war and witnessed everything that he did.

During the Awami League regime, although our ex-prime minister was well aware of his sincerity and dedication, yet he was deprived and humiliated. And what is BNP doing now? Have they come out with wiser wisdom?

For example, this time the Defence Ministry has conspicuously dropped my father's name from the list of invitees for the celebration of "Armed Forces Day". We have a sovereign state, because of sacrifices of people like my father. How does anything else matter when it comes to the issue of honouring people like my father? What a shame, what a mockery!
Naseema Tariq
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Keep up the good work

Thank you very much for publishing some thorough investigative reports on the recent incidents of DU campus. I also extend my thanks to those who did these excellent reporting. It will be really helpful for us to identify the cadres who were involved in the gunfight and to take action against them.

I hope *The Daily Star* will con-

tinue to publish similar reports irrespective of any party affiliation to enhance the academic environment of all the educational institutions. Thank you once again.
Dr. Nazrul Islam
Proctor, DU

What have we done!

What have we done to our universities! Over the years we have literally turned them into political battlefields. Look at the way vice-chancellors are being appointed and released. It would be utterly foolish to believe that any love for education has prompted these changes. Purely selfish partisan motives lie behind these decisions.

However for this deterioration of our educational arena, I do not blame the politicians in power as much as I blame the university teachers. A large number of our teachers have become active political workers of different political parties. The result has been disastrous and our education sector is now in a shambles. There is hardly any education worth its name at the universities. The atmosphere is hostile to any kind of academic activity. The universities are now have become the abode for all the evils that go with politics in this country. What can be more damaging than university teachers turning

de facto workers of political parties? When teachers turn against education, who can save it?
Prof. A. K. M. Mohiuddin
Department of English
Rajshahi University

Stop this propaganda

Indian border security has claimed involvement of Bangladeshi nationals in the Jammu-Kashmir guerrilla war. This is a war between India and Pakistan. Bangladesh has no interest in this war. How can a Bangladeshi fight for a country which itself committed genocide in our country only twenty year ago? This is just a trick by the Indians to show that Bangladesh is also involved in terrorism.

Recently, the US published a list of the countries who are more or less involved in terrorism. Bangladesh is not in that list. This is a good sign for us to get aids and business benefits. But, if it is shown that we are involved in terrorism, we may lose those benefits and might be compelled to sell the gas to India. I would like to request our government to strongly protest this kind of claims.
Waqar Mohiuddin, on e-mail

The burden of BTTB

People of Bangladesh should not have any moral obligation to support

a corrupt and inefficient organisation like BTTB. It charges one of the highest rates in the world and at the same time imparts the poorest of service. To get a telephone connection, an "ordinary" citizen has to submit Tk. 20,000 with the demand note and wait for an indefinite period unless he bribes the officials and/or the linemen of the BTTB. Sometimes the cause for their delay seems to be genuine: they do not have any connections available at the particular exchange. But this soon changes if you happen to have a "special" identity to disclose or a certain amount of money to spare.

To add to people's discomfort BTTB has recently disconnected 59 ISPs who did not renew their licenses and/or had provided the VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) facilities to their clients. Although the disconnection due to failure to renew licenses may be justified, BTTB's ban on VOIP is ridiculous. Why should BTTB act like the high school bullies and make people pay twenty to thirty times more for a service, which they can get for less? When better low cost technology is available why should people pay for BTTB's technological incompetence?

Our heavy headedness in the early nineties had made us loose the opportunity of getting connected to

the submarine optical fibre Internet backbone for free. Let us not allow it to stifle our technological progress any further.
M Tawfiq F Rahman
IBA, DU

An appeal

Dear Bengali brothers and sisters, please save Bengali culture. Please save the culture of Rabindranath and Nazrul. Please save Bangladesh from becoming another Lebanon.

Dr. Supratik Das
USA

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

This refers to Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed's article on the subject published on November 18. The writer has mentioned about the rumour of 4000 Jews not reporting for work at the World Trade Centre on September 11th, allegedly warned by Israeli Intelligence Mossad about the impending disaster.

However, we would like to know from Dr. Ahmed the actual number of Jews who had died at the WTC and the approximate number of Jews who used to work there, if the information is available with him.

Further, it is true that Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon was supposed to visit the WTC on that day but did not because of intelligence reports?
Abul Mohsin, on e-mail

Rajuk notification

In late August 2000 Rajuk issued an urgent notification followed by another such notification in late October, 2000 through daily newspapers naming certain roads in Uttara, Banani and Gulshan Model Towns having width of 100 feet or more and that plots or such roads could be used for non-residential purposes subject to payment of a fee.

Unfortunately a year has passed since then but many people though applied were never told about the financial implication so that payment could not be made to obtain formal approval.

Rajuk should have followed normal process of dealing with such cases in date order as received for the sake of transparency. If expeditious actions would have been taken a few crores of taka could be in Rajuk Bank A/C entitling them for service charge interests. Is it not a loss to the nation?
A Bari
Dhaka