

So many on special duty?

What a waste of human resource!

A recent newspaper report on the number of government officers without a specified job, yet being fully paid from the national exchequer, gives one the impression that the phrase 'officer on special duty' (OSD) has undergone a definitional change of late. So far we had been given to understand that 'OSD' was a temporary arrangement to take care of the interregnum before the functionary could be placed in a suitable position. It now seems that the phrase has become a euphemism for chastisement of public servants.

The astounding figure of more than five hundred officers of different ministries currently as OSD, some of whom have been in this state of suspended animation, for ten years, demonstrates, the complete apathy to the need for harnessing the trained manpower available to the government, as well as the propensity to overlook the need for capacity building for good governance. The opportunity cost incurred by this is incalculable.

This has dealt governance a severe body blow while the government has preferred to take a back seat, having brought this state upon itself, largely motivated by political considerations. The statistics show that 'OSD' has become a device used by governments primarily to keep 'unwanted' government servants at arms length. At the same time many of the OSD are those who have been promoted out of turn, outside an existing vacancy. For them it's perhaps a welcome sinecure.

There is very little doubt that this situation emerges from entirely political rather than administrative considerations. Perceptions about public servants as belonging to a different political hue or inclined towards a different philosophy than that which incumbents hold, incite this type of action.

The corollary question that emerges is, since these officers are not surplus to the requirements of the establishment, then there obviously are positions that are vacant, and the vacant position, if one were to go by the figures appearing in the said report, is in excess of five hundred. Mind boggling situation indeed?

No government can allow an administrative expedient to be exploited for political purpose. Apart from a being a huge waste of, and burden on, the public exchequer, this has a very negative impact on the entire cadre of civil servants that can only have harmful effect on governance as a whole.

The government must address the situation with utmost speed.

Filling in a void

Patrol unit on the highway

THE launching of a core highway police unit that is envisaged to grow to ensure road safety and check crimes on the long stretch of 22,379 km highways in the country, goes to meet a long-felt need. It is unthinkable in today's world of mechanised communication system not to have a special kind of policing of the highways. Taking the wide network of roads we have in relation to the small size of our country into account, it won't be an overstatement to say our road infrastructure can be a matter of envy for any developing country.

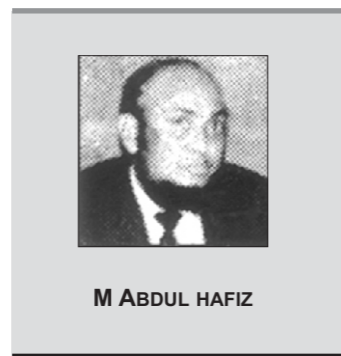
Naturally there are high expectations from the newly formed unit. They will be expected not to just manage traffic on the highways to prevent accidents but also to control crimes like robbery, extortion etc.

Speaking of highway accidents, there are two aspects to them: first, attend to the victims; and secondly, contain post-accident vandalism including smashing and burning of transports and obstructing traffic in a large area. The highway police unit, we hope, will be able to immediately reach the spots and help the victims. But they will need to be highly equipped and trained to perform under such circumstances.

Highway patrol units must have a fast-track communication network with a computerised control system to coordinate activities between the units. Highway patrol immediately conjures up two images in our mind. One is about them lying in wait for the traffic rule breakers and secondly chasing the reckless drivers and finally catching them. All these things must start happening.

Though in our context it is difficult to guarantee honesty and efficiency, especially since accusations of corruption against the law enforcers are rife, yet we would like to hope the authorities would be able to check any improper conduct on the part of any member of the unit and set the right precedents for establishing a dependable, efficient and responsible workforce to ensure safety of public life and property.

Paradox in Moscow



M ABDUL HAFIZ

V LADIMIR Putin, who was reelected Russian President last year for a second four-year term, believes he has a mission to perform: to win back for Russia its lost status as a great power. Notwithstanding his burning desire to do so, he is painfully aware that neither his country's weakened economy nor its steadily shrinking influence qualifies it to significantly shape world affairs today.

Yet his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, after having seen Russia suffering an all around decline accompanied by widespread corruption and mismanagement -- mostly the result of his own bungling -- and with his own health falling fast due to excessive alcoholism identified in Putin, a former KGB apparatchik, a certain passion to revive Russia's power and a commitment to the reforms needed to revitalise it.

Russia did inherit the great power status of the Soviet Union after the latter disintegrated in 1991. Before that, Mikhail Gorbachev tried to revitalise the Union through his reforms: perestroika. But Yeltsin whose power base lay in Russia hastened the break up of the vast multi-ethnic union in a power struggle with Gorbachev -- thus demol-

ishing the edifice of the once powerful superpower. Boris Yeltsin and his protege Putin completed its liquidation by repudiating the communist system. In a way Russia abdicated the greatness bestowed on it by the history. Can the status lost by Putin's own default be regained?

While Gorbachev's Soviet Union under reforms melted away, the Russian Federation as the successor state of the former couldn't avoid its disastrous fate either. The feder-

ating for autonomy/independence. As a result he was named Prime Minister in 1999 by then President Yeltsin and won the presidential election the next year.

Putin, however, soon realised the hollowness of Russian power. He realised that his country, apart from courting defeat in the cold war, was also suffering terribly from internal mismanagement and decline of the once powerful state apparatus. Yeltsin's long weak rule and crony-

resentment in Russia. Taken together with the eastward expansion of Nato and the candidacy of some of the former satellites of Russia for membership of EU, this only intensified Russian suspicion that the marginalisation of Russia still remains a strategic western goal.

Hamstrung by western pressure to introduce liberalism, democracy, and free market economy, it is paradoxical that Putin was concentrating power in his hands for his

Russia has definitely improved both politically and economically since Putin assumed power. The Russian economy, though now reduced to the level of tiny Belgium, is no more in crisis thanks to the rising price of oil and gas of which Russia is a major exporter. Even politically, Putin can now be expected to step up efforts to challenge US hegemony as President Bush now faces worldwide condemnation for his unilateralist preemptive policy.

like 160 million in 1991. It has declined steeply, bringing the figure now below 120 million.

In most years, the reduction in population has been around half a million due to declining birth rate and greatly reduced longevity which is due mainly to poor nutrition, increasing alcoholism, and poor health care. The current life expectancy stands at 53, as against over 70 in US, Europe, China, and Japan. Unless there is a dramatic change in the trend, Russia will come to a standstill as a functioning state due to the lack of manpower.

Putin has not only revived nostalgia for the Soviet period but also has brought back the vogue for Stalin and his firm leadership, although he carried out some of the bloodiest purges and massacres in history. While claiming to honour democratic values, Putin is paradoxically reviving Stalinism as the recipe for restoring Russia's greatness.

There is no doubt that this has touched a responsive chord among a large number of Russians who believe that they need to revive the harsh discipline and commitment to national prestige and progress that Stalin stood for, forgetting his excesses. All they are now seized with is an irresistible craving for Russia's great power status -- but alas without a rationale and sense of direction.

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PERSPECTIVES

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ation neither achieved political democracy nor a viable free market economy to which Russia was lured for quick prosperity by the West. The country's wealth was speedily taken over by an alliance of corrupt bureaucrats and Mafia underworld, while the great majority of Russian people were pauperised and reduced to the living standard of a third world country.

The loosening of the ideological control and the demoralisation of Russia's armed forces due to the country's decline led to the insurgencies rearing their head in many areas that had never accepted Russian suzerainty. A relatively obscure Putin gained Yeltsin's confidence and public acclaim by the decisiveness he displayed in asserting Russian authority in Chechnya and several other areas

ism had already eaten away the country's vitals. The writ of the central government no more prevailed everywhere.

Also the former republics of the Soviet Union, which Moscow considered to be lying in its backyard and thus in its sphere of influence, began to break away by seeking closer relations with the West, which attracted them with aid and largesse. Russia's ruling elite became increasingly alarmed over the steep decline of their once powerful homeland. They gradually realised that the long term aim of the US as the sole superpower was to permanently clip the wings of its former rival and to cut it down to size.

In the post 9/11 scenario, the US strategic goal of extending its direct influence in what Russia calls its "near abroad" couldn't but generate

two objectives -- the country's internal recovery and greater international influence. Putin has raised his sights and has invoked recently the memory of Russia's role in the allied victory over the axis powers.

He used the 60th anniversary of the allied victory in Europe to organise an impressive military parade to remind the world of the enormous contribution of the Soviet Union which sacrificed 27 million lives in the struggle against Hitler's legions. Putin, the protege of Yeltsin, interestingly described the break up of the Soviet Union as the "greatest catastrophe of the century." He also stepped up the pace of Russia's diplomacy by visiting the Middle East to reestablish Moscow's credibility as a major player in global affairs.

Yet few think that the great Soviet power can really be regained. The recent analyses of Russia's assets and liabilities for resuming its previous world role haven't painted a very promising picture. The assets are, of course, its enormous size and rich natural resources. It also has a huge stockpile of nuclear weapons and missiles. Russia also retains a comprehensive military capability though its quality of maintenance is poor.

However, a careful examination of the elements necessary for regaining the position of a great power shows major weaknesses and raises doubts about Russia. The first and perhaps decisive element is the size and quality of Russia's human resources. Russia's population was something

Floor crossing in the House

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

K AZI Sirajul Islam who was elected member of parliament (MP) from Faridpur-1 constituency on Awami League (AL) ticket in the general election of 2001 crossed the floor into the ruling-party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on June 4. He went to the Prime Minister's office, offered a bouquet to the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, expressed his allegiance to her leadership, and announced his joining the BNP. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia welcomed Kazi Sirajul Islam's joining the BNP. Kazi Sirajul Islam set the first instance of floor crossing in the 8th parliament.

Let us have a look into the constitutional provision regarding floor crossing. Article 70(1) of the constitution of Bangladesh says: "A person elected as a member of parliament at an election at which he was nominated as a candidate by a political party shall vacate his seat if he resigns from that party or votes in parliament against that party."

Explanation.-- if a member of parliament -- (a) being present in parliament abstains from voting, or (b) absents himself from any sitting of parliament, ignoring the direction of the party which nominated him at the election as a candidate not to do so, he shall be deemed to have voted against that party."

It may be mentioned that the constitution of Bangladesh, which was adopted on November 4, 1972 and came into force on December 16 of the same year, did not contain the explanatory part in Article 70. It was included in Article 70 by the Constitution (Fourth Amendment) Act, 1975.

Let us now see what the constitutions in our neighbouring countries say on the vacation of seat by an MP on grounds of his defec-

tion. According to the constitution of India, a member of either House (Council of States or House of People) of Union Parliament or of the Legislative Assembly of a state belonging to any political party shall be disqualified from being a member of the House (a) if he has voluntarily given up his membership of such political party; or (b) if he votes or abstains from voting in such House contrary to any direction issued by the political party to which he belongs without obtaining the prior permis-

sion. Fiji, a member of the House of Representatives vacates his seat if he resigns from the political party for which he was a candidate at the time he was last elected to the House of Representatives, or if he is expelled from the political party for which he was a candidate at the time he was last elected to the House of Representatives.

Even though the constitutions in the above-mentioned neighbouring countries contain provisions for vacation of parliament seat by a lawmaker on ground of

is brought against a particular government, the concerned MP shall invariably vote for the party on whose ticket he was elected; (b) he shall not vote against the Finance Bill or against the smooth passage of the annual budget in whatever form it is placed and presented; (c) on sensitive defence matters which may be debated in camera, if needed. And except when a motion of no-confidence is moved, the members of parliament may be allowed to speak freely on any other subject maintaining the decorum of

ated an unhealthy situation for the growth of the nascent democracy. Moreover, Bangladesh should be compared with other parliamentary democracies in South Asia. Although India has a long tradition of parliamentary democracy, yet its constitution contains the provision of unseating a lawmaker for his defection.

Let me come back to the case of Kazi Sirajul Islam. Upon a petition filed by the AL, the Speaker of parliament declared on June 9 the parliamentary seat of Faridpur-1 vacant following the

of these allegations).

Let me turn to the second point. Was it necessary for the BNP to lure him to the party at this moment? The BNP-led alliance commands more than two-third seats in parliament. The BNP itself has got two hundred-plus seats in parliament. Some political analysts are of the opinion that the BNP wants to make a dent in the greater Faridpur area (Faridpur, Rajbari, Gopalganj, Madaripur, and Shariatpur) where it got only 4 seats (2 in Rajbari and 2 in Faridpur) against 16 seats in the parliamentary election of 2001. It would not be surprising if more MPs elected on the AL tickets from the AL dominated areas are lured to join the ruling BNP in the coming days.

To conclude, the confrontational politics of the BNP and the AL has already become a cause of concern for the democracy loving people of Bangladesh. During their visit to Dhaka sometime in the second half of the last year, the representatives of two big powers clearly indicated that "squabbling politicians must not take democracy for granted as their confrontational politics was fuelling violence and wrecking the nation's economy. To save democracy, leaders of the two mainstream political parties must come together to trash out differences by negotiations."

People are, therefore, worried about the fate of their hard-earned democracy. In such a situation the ruling BNP must not lure any opposition MP, particularly of the main opposition AL, into the fold of the BNP. Such incidents will take the relationship between the BNP and the AL to a point of no return. This may await the return of the next caretaker government.

M. Abdul Latif Mondal is a former secretary to the government.

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sion of such political party and such voting or abstention has not been condoned by such political party within fifteen days from the date of such voting or abstention.

According to the constitution of Pakistan, a member of a House (the National Assembly or the Senate) or of the Provincial Assembly shall lose his seat if he defects from a political party which nominated him, or votes contrary to any direction issued by the parliamentary party to which he belongs, or abstains from voting in the House against party policy in relation to a Bill. He however gets an opportunity to appeal and the party chief's decision is final.

The 1990 constitution of Nepal says that the seat of an MP becomes vacant if the party of which he was a member when elected provides notification in the manner set forth by law that he has abandoned the party.

According to the constitution of

his defection, yet some constitutional experts and members of civil society argue that Article 70 of our constitution "contradicts the fundamental rights as enunciated in Part 111 of the constitution, thereby curbing the rights of the MPs also, as far as freedom of thought and expression is concerned."

It has also been argued that "Article 70 has, in effect, usurped the powers of the MPs to defend the cause of the people -- more specifically the electorate, who voted them to parliament."

It is further argued that some parliamentary democracies having no such thing as Article 70 of our constitution have not suffered from political instability. They have suggested to suitably amend Article 70 "incorporating the option of an MP to vote according to his conscience except on three fundamental and vital issues, vis-a-vis, (a) when a vote of censure or no-confidence

the House as far as possible."

The other group of constitutional experts and knowledgeable people argue that Article 70 of our constitution "was framed after much thought to ensure stability and strengthen parliamentary democracy."

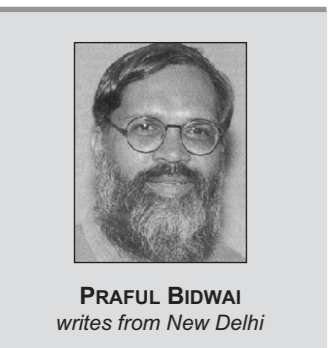
They say that parliamentary democracy that was introduced in the constitution adopted on November 4, 1972 did not survive for more than three years. The deadly blow came when multi-party parliamentary system of government was replaced by one-party presidential form of government through the Constitution (Fourth Amendment) Act, 1975.

Thereafter, the country suffered under two martial laws for about a decade. Parliamentary democracy came to be reintroduced through the Constitution (Twelfth Amendment) Act, 1992. But the confrontational politics of the two major political parties -- the BNP and the AL -- have cre-

defection of Kazi Sirajul Islam. Necessary gazette notification has already been issued to this effect. Now the questions arise as to why Kazi Sirajul Islam defected from the AL, and was it necessary for the BNP at the moment to lure him to the party? A staunch Awami Leaguer, Kazi Sirajul Islam was twice elected MP from Faridpur-1 on the AL ticket.

A report published in a Bangla daily (Prothom Alo) on June 7 suggested that he joined the BNP to settle a business deal of Tk.14 crore or so. Quoting the AL leadership, one English daily (The Independent) of June 5 reported that he was allegedly involved in immoral activities including smuggling of gold and diamonds. It is thus alleged that he left the AL and joined the ruling BNP in order to settle the business deal as well as to save himself from the due process of law for his alleged involvement in immoral activities (I proffer no opinion on the accuracy

Jinnah's 'secularism' divides parivar: BJP in a dire crisis



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

for razing the Babri mosque was front-paged admiring chandeliers in the opulent Faisal mosque. He said December 6, 1992 was "the saddest day of my life." Yet, he was asked to lead the reconstruction of the Kataraj Hindu temple -- as if his party specialised in rebuilding monuments!

Mr Advani dissociated himself from "Akhand Bharat" by saying that Partition is "an unalterable reality of history." He bent over backwards to appear a "moderate" who has put anti-Islam, anti-Pakistan prejudices behind him.

There was an element of nostalgia in his Pakistan visit, only his second trip since 1946. As he wrote: "I do feel sentimental ... I am somewhat at a loss to articulate the totality of my feelings and thoughts." A similar romanticism was visible when he discovered that the Indus (*Sindhu*) originates in Ladakh -- the root of his Sindhi identity.

However, nostalgia cannot explain Mr Advani's utterances. The Pakistan media went ga-ga over them, speculating on the reasons for "a change of heart" in the life-long *swayamsevak*.

General Pervez Musharraf made an astute calculation in

inviting Mr Advani and laying out the red carpet. He can claim to have "softened up" the man whom Pakistanis see as the Agra Summit's villain. The General can now get more military and economic aid from the United States.

Three questions arise. Why did Mr Advani go out of his way to lavish praise upon Qauid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah? Was he right in saying that Jinnah stood for a secular state which

old temple reconstruction.

Mr Advani said: "[T]his was the first time any Indian leader had been asked [to rebuild temples]... since 1947." -- if Pakistan is moving towards Jinnah's secularism, "we should acknowledge it."

Mr Advani wanted a new image because he feared he won't be BJP president for long -- after vitriolic attacks against him by the VHP-RSS, and his failure to relieve the party's leadership

non-denominational, multi-religious, multi-ethnic state.

True, Jinnah was not pious. (Nor, probably, is Mr Advani). But secularism is *not* a personality trait. You don't become secular because you know Urdu couplets, wear a *sherwani*, or throw *iftaar* parties. (Many wrongly think Mr Vajpayee is secular because of this.)

Secularism is about *separating religion from politics*. For

Mr Advani's admiration for Jinnah is understandable. Communalists of different shades bond together. One communalist recognises and respects the ideology of another. For years, the Muslim League and the RSS-Hindu Mahasabha worked separately, but for the same goal -- of establishing a society in which one group would be dominant by virtue of religion.

doesn't distinguish between citizens on grounds of faith? Third, what's the likely long-term impact of the present crisis on RSS-BJP relations?

Mr Advani's reconciliation-and-friendship note brought tremendous attention in Pakistan because he fits a stereotype -- the *dhoti*-clad communal Hindu who starts his visit by inaugurating an

crisis. So he's positioning himself as a Second Vajpayee -- despite the reaction from Mr Praveen Togadia denouncing him as a "traitor."

Mr Advani is comprehensively mistaken about Jinnah's "secularism." The very *project* Jinnah stood for, his entire *political mission*, was deeply communal -- to build a new nation by rejecting a

communalism, the legitimate subject of politics is the community, defined by religion. This is the basis of the Two-Nation Theory, which Savarkar invented and Jinnah embraced, but Gandhi and Nehru rejected.

True, Jinnah in his famous speech of August 11, 1947, said: "You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to

your mosques or any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, That has nothing to do with the business of the state. In course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith or each individual but in the political sense as citizens of the state."

vailed. Pakistani historians say he never explained the rationale of his August 11 speech.

Mr Advani's admiration for Jinnah is understandable. Communalists of different shades bond together. One communalist recognises and respects the ideology of another. For years, the Muslim League and the RSS-Hindu Mahasabha worked separately, but for the same goal -- of establishing a society in which one group would be dominant by virtue of religion.

One doesn't have to be hostile to peaceful co-existence with Pakistan to be critical of the Two-Nation ideology. This column has always advocated peace with Pakistan -- without woolly-headedly blurring distinctions between secularism and communalism.

The crucial issue while judging a person or movement is not this or that utterance, but their actions. By that criterion, Jinnah wasn't remotely secular. Nor are Savarkar, Golwalkar, or Vajpayee/Advani. But Mr Advani's reductionism misunderstands Jinnah's politics.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.