

LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY DECEMBER 1. 2005

Annual confidential report irregularities

Need to nip tampering in the bud

HE news that a probe body of the establishment ministry has unearthed 31 cases of tampering with annual confidential reports (ACRs) of officials and that the ACRs of 48 more officials are missing is troubling in the extreme. The ACRs are critical documents used in determining promotion and placement of officials, and it goes without saying that the revelation calls into serious question the procedures and system in place that govern such actions.

The probe body is still investigating, which means that this may be merely the tip of the iceberg. However, we are glad to see that there has at least been a joint secretary level investigation and that the preliminary findings have been forwarded to the parliamentary standing committee on the establishment ministry. What has come to light is a truly worrisome evidence of cronyism and partiality within the government services that suggest widespread corruption of the process of promotion and placement.

A probe committee has apparently been investigating such irregularities for a mind-boggling ten years, leading to a number of uncomfortable questions. The first of these is: are we to presume therefore that such irregularities have been going on for so long, and if so, then how is it that nothing has been done as yet?

The committee has asked the probe body to complete its investigation and submit a full report at the next meting, which raises a second question, namely why is it that action seems to have been taken only when this was brought to the attention of the committee? The ministry itself should have taken action long ago.

One final point is that while such internal investigations are all very well, we must ask why there is no internal mechanism in place to correct such a blatant problem automatically. How is it that the system is so broken that such incidents were permitted to pile up for so long without redress.

Our suggestion would be to computerise the entire process in the hopes that this would make tampering more difficult and easier to spot. It would also make the entire process more efficient and less subject to error.

Now that the problem has been brought to the attention of the committee and the PM herself, who is head of the establishment ministry, we trust that corrective action will follow shortly.

A tribute to Shahadat

We mourn his passing

HE death of journalist Shahadat Choudhury is a great loss to the profession and men that he was associated with for over three decades. He opened a new horizon on periodical journalism and played a pioneering role in carrying it forward with an innovative flair. He in his own inimitable way upheld people's rights and the principles that the new born state stood for. He was a valiant freedom fighter equipped with not only arms, but also with ideas to face the reactionary forces.

Shahadat Choudhury's persona and works had two distinct features. First, he brought to bear on his activities a powerful element of social responsibility and commitment. Secondly, he set new trends in magazine journalism with a modernist vision. The infusion of new techniques and introduction of a wide range of interesting features through robust team work made weekly Bichitra, the most popular news magazine.

He was the epitome of a Bengalee. But his refinement and sophistication never detached him from the people. A

Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

EADING between the lines of the Daily Star editorial yesterday, one could not help imagine that it was alluding to the grim but the distinct possibility of Bangladesh being forced in that direction.

Some would like to take Bangladesh that way, i.e. the way Afghanistan went under the Talebans; some would like to make it appear that Bangladesh has already moved that way; but most of the people of the country, while perhaps dreading that that is where we are heading for, would like to see that such a possibility does not eventuate. However, our worst fears may come to pass if we do not rise above partisan politics and work to address the scourge in unison. And it is the government that must recognise the factors that can be exploited to prevent the dreaded prospect becoming a

reality. There has been spate of writings recently, both at home and

Bihar's gift

ambitious. If the new chief minister can ensure order, even if he cannot implement the full maiesty of the law, he can claim distinction. There has to be a curb on the dacoits and gunmen who form a parallel, and more effective, administration. He should import high-profile consultants who can draw up, and perhaps oversee, a comprehensive plan that addresses the menace district-

numbers are stacked. there is only one clear winner in the long-drawn Bihar Sudoku: a Sikh gentleman generally resident in Delhi who barely intervened in the turmoil of India's most turbulent state except to give Lalu Prasad Yadav the chance to convert what was a self-inflicted wound in March into suicide in November. When the Almighty was writing Dr Manmohan Singh's destiny. He took

a lot of care to ensure that every loophole was properly sealed.

abroad, expressing apprehensions that Bangladesh was well nigh that point where the Muslim radicals were about to overwhelm the country and its political system. Whether or not we replicate in the ultimate another Afghanistan by being Talebanised, there is surely a well-organised group in our midst that wants to take the country in that direction. The latest suicide bombings in Ghazipur and Chittagong leaves

Are we going the Afghan way?

thing that was brought out through these columns in the past. And listening to some rather childlike arguments in reference to the letters threatening action against the judiciary, claiming them to be a hoax, it appears that some are vet to comprehend the seriousness of the matter. There are those that would still like to think that these are but acts designed to destabilise the country to reap

too high a price for too insignificant an objective. These extremists have a definite political agenda. And they have not sprouted in a day or a year. The worrisome aspect is we have such people as these living amongst us that have been allowed to germinate when there were hardly any compelling circumstances for this to happen.

The similarity between the benefits at the expense of one Bangladesh and Afghanistan counter the religious extremists.

political space provided by the values that Islam preaches that will militate against obscurantism conditions created as a result of and the distorted ideology of the extremists prevailing in the country. Talebans version of Islam is not the real Islam; the ideology of Taleban or Al-Qaeda is completely at variance with Islam.

from which they deviated in order to attain their narrow goals. And it is the people that the government must take along to

One would like to think that the

BNP remains at the core secular,

this clash. And this bickering is regrettably noticeable even after the recent suicide attacks in Chittagong and Ghazipur. While there is no alternative

but a joint position on this issue. cutting across party lines, and that is what the people want to see, there is also the need to assess whether we on our own can effectively combat this menace, who may well have links beyond our borders. There are countries that would like to help Bangladesh to take in hand short-term measures. The urgent need is to nab the terrorists and their mastermind, so that they can be brought to justice. For this we may seek international assistance for technical expertise from whatever source that is available.

Time for theorising is over. Time for blame game is over. Time for petty partisan politics is over. The nation is at stake. It is time to formulate rational short and long-term strategies to combat this scourge. There are some hard decisions that the government needs to take soon that may require it to de-link from many of its established views.

Otherwise, the worst fears may well come true.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

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no doubt that we are past the point of ifs and buts to a stage where a frightening prospect of combating an ideologically motivated group, prepared to kill themselves for the sake of establishing what they would like to think of as Islam in Bangladesh. More worrisome is the question as to whether we are equipped, politically, technically, and otherwise, to effectively combat this evil? We should not be surprised at

the graduated scale of attacks that these perfidious monsters are employing in killing innocent people. Their target is the judiciary and its members. They had given enough indications that they would resort to the most violent form of terrorism, some-

political party or the other with the situation is that there is a wellhelp of external sponsorship. While one cannot take issue

with the question of external support, because trans-boundary support, of money and ideas, is an essential ingredient on which these groups thrive, the argument that anyone would go to the extent of killing himself, only for the purpose of "destabilizing" a country, remains far from convincing. Killing oneself to achieve one's political objective requires deep motivation that no amount of money or persuasion can induce

To sacrifice one's life merely to break up a coalition or make one of the partners appear to be a political liability, as one leader of the ruling alliance has averred, is

entrenched deeply motivated group in the country with similar ideological orientation. And that is where the similarity ends. The fluid situation that prevailed in Afghanistan, with tribalism taking precedence over nationalism, where liberal thoughts were suppressed by means of brute force, whose preponderance was exhibited through the activities of the Talebans, that was raised and supported by a third country, is not to be found in Bangladesh. We should also take solace in

the fact that the deeply religious but moderate Bengali Muslims would not allow this to happen. It is their attitude to religion that makes them conform to the liberal

in spite of teaming up with an Islamist party with the expressed goal of establishing "Islamic Hukumat" in the country, and would resist radical moves by the Islamists outside the fold, but as per common perception, in league with the Islamic parties in the coalition. The only way to counter these so-called Jihadists is to fight them politically. One of the rea-

sons that these extremists have been able to sprout in our soil. apart from the socio-economic factor, is the rabid discord between the two major political parties. The extremists have made full use of the time and the

M.J. AKBAR

O matter which way the

is best that he start doing something right away

> Kumar should stop trying to think of the answers, because there is no answer that will take less than fifteen years to implement. He will have long passed his sell-by date by then. But there is something that can be done, which is a deft combination of the cosmetic and practical. Bihar is littered with

ing his core vote around backward

Muslims (akin, in some ways, to the 4 per cent Karnataka model rather than the hurried, ill-thought Andhra scheme that was punctured by the courts). This will create friction with the BJP, which will do him no harm either.

If victors are hard to identify, losers are not. Victors demand applause; losers invite sympathy. The biggest loser in Bihar was Shatrughan Sinha, because he decided to lose when his side was

the winner of the Bihar election? In just about every which way. Defeat in Patna has made Lalu

Yadav impotent in Delhi. After the first Bihar elections, Lalu was powerful enough to demand and obtain a disgraceful recommendation to the President dissolving the Bihar Assembly without due consideration. If he had won, he would probably be discussing a better portfolio for himself at the Centre -- for starters. Now, the Prime Minister can take Lalu's support for granted. An occasional smile will be sufficient to keep him happy.

A simple fact will explain more. Dr Manmohan Singh has never been in danger of being destabilised by the BJP-led Opposition. Why would any party of the ruling alliance exchange the comfort of power for the uncertainty of an election? The only party that might conceivably have an interest in another election is one that hopes to do much better. For the past year voices have been gathering

BYLINE

For the past year, voices have been gathering strength in the Congress that, with the BJP in disarray, a midterm election could win the party up to 200 seats. The additional seats would come from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra (where the Shiv Sena is fading into inconsequence). It is axiomatic that another election would mean the end of Dr Singh's tenure in office, irrespective of how the Congress fared. The defeat in Bihar has ended all talk of a midterm poll.

Nitish Kumar has not vet won needed. Priority number two will be the Bihar election. He has only won an opportunity. We will know Naxalites. Bihar shares a long whether he has converted that border with Nepal that is porous opportunity into a hard political for criminals, smugglers and victory by this time next year. those who dress up violence in If Nitish Kumar believes that he ideological clothes. The sharp can do everything, he will achieve escalation of Naxalite violence nothing. Bihar is not suffering just across the country is also an from the sins of Lalu: Lalu was indictment of the Union home only the most cynical of a long line ministry. As far as this terrible of chief ministers who comproblem is concerned. Delhi's pounded a disease that began in response is to jerk a knee before the Sixties. It might shock readers the cameras whenever a story to know that Bihar was consisbursts on the front pages, and tently ranked among the bestretire hurt when the news disapadministered states in the Fifties; pears from public view. Clearly, but there is no point discussing unlike straight crime, there is a how prosperous Bihar was when social dimension to this problem, Chandragupta Maurya was in which has to be addressed politically. Nitish Kumar must involve Chief minister Nitish Kumar will the Leftist parties in a bipartisan be tested on a five-point report effort that must be transparent card. I was going to put "law and and sincere. The chief minister order" at the top but felt, on conwill probably run dry of his

cally incorrect level, a few trigger- tombstones of projects aborted. castes other than Yadavs, but winning. All wars have collateral happy policemen might be For decades, its leaders have laid there had to be a spillover from damage, the serious-sounding term for being shot dead by your the Lalu vote to ensure such a own side. Shatrughan Sinha. comprehensive victory. Lalu was erstwhile filmstar and BJPcomplacent because he was minister pulled off something convinced that no one would get a spectacular: he shot himself majority, and no one was better than him in cobbling a coalition. dead. No wonder his nickname Complacency is the blood brother was Shotgun Sinha. I hope this ment done, offer the best terms to of power gives pause to the myth that Nitish Kumar's problem is filmstars enable you to win elections. This proposition was always accentuated by the fact that the BJP is his ally, and too many of its demeaning to the Indian voter. To leaders find Muslim-baiting irrecollect a crowd is not synonymous with collecting votes. Former sistible. But the challenge is greater than being the good cop of filmstars make a difference when they become politicians, in the the alliance. Nitish Kumar has to extraordinary manner that N.T.

wise. On a practical, and politi-

vear's pressures and strains, so it Third: the economy. Nitish

severely tested on Hindu-Muslim relations. So many of Lalu Yadav's crimes were forgiven because he was absolutely flawless in ensuring peace between communities so easily provoked into violence. His government imploded because even Yadavs and Muslims deserted him in large numbers. Nitish Kumar found a brilliant political answer by creat-

Finally, the government will be

genial, effable and instantly helpful man, Shahadat Choudhury was known for his friendly warmth and engaging charm. He never shrank from the sense of responsibility that he always felt towards his friends and well-wishers

Shahadat Choudhury belonged to that breed of men and women who had dreamt, fought and worked for an independent Bangladesh. The standards set by him are worth emulating, if only because they are so firmly rooted in our culture and ethos.

His was one of the loudest and most persistent voices against fundamentalism and bigotry. In his own writings and in the coverage of Bichitra and later Weekly 2000, he exposed those who used religion for political ends. The new genre of journalists have a lot to learn from him -patriotism, an uncompromising stand on all social ills and an unflinching commitment against all forms of fundamentalism.

We mourn the death of the man who has always been a source of inspiration to us and pray for the salvation of the departed soul. May his family have the strength to bear his loss.

the foundation of grand schemes that never saw as much as a wall being built, let alone a chimney constructed. The chief minister could go back to what had been sanctioned (this will save a lot of time), get a fast-track reassess-

industrialists of repute, and bring at least a few tombstones to life. Fourth: urban renewal. If some one were to control the mosquitoes of Patna, he would be renamed Chandragupta. Disease is another name for neglect and filth. So far, the city's services ensure little more than comfort for the residential area of the political class, up to a point. There should be a ministry for infrastructure in the Bihar Cabinet, with a politician of some ability heading it, and a strong bureaucrat in charge. To treat a road as a joke, as Lalu did, is to sign the death warrant of the economy.

use power to create a vote base as solid as Lalu's. Only then can he hope to change political equations. If he grows, he will be a potential leader of a Third Front. The "if" should be written in capital letters. A key to his future will be the level of trust he can create among Muslims. I suspect that he will at some point announce a job reservation for backward caste

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Unless some seismic event takes place that no one can foresee, the government of Dr Manmohan Singh is safe for the rest of its tenure. The accidental Prime Minister has become a politician of substance

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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.

Poor performance

Deficiency of gas, water and electricity has turned our lives miserable. This is, no doubt, a disappointing and pitiful matter. There are some reasons behind it mentioned bellow:

- Putting papers for development in a file for an uncertain period of time
- Approving a hypothesis and cancelling it again for nothing! Nepotism.
- Complexities of bureaucracy.
- Cancelling tenders again and again!
- The number of industries has increased but production is simply zero.
- Indecision. All these anomalies must go

As modern civilisation is based on electricity, everything revolves around it. Our students suffer verv

much due to load-shedding. The reasons behind 'load-shedding' are age old plants and machinery, poor maintenance and low grade fuel

The government should address the issue with due haste. Sarwar Ali Dhaka

Champions!

What we are? How do we do? Why we are champions (in corruption) five times in a row? I cannot discern any light of hope for our improvement. Now corruption is in our blood. We never even dream of any sector, any department of the country being corruption free. The 27th BCS exam was held on Friday. Many student leaders of the ruling party got question

hard? Rather, he should be a politician, putting an end to his academic career. If one gets a job through a corrupt practice, how

the way

power.

papers before the exam was held. So, why should a student work

the summit.

can he be a good officer? Terrorism is not my main concern. I am more worried about everything is being destroyed in this country. Md Mahbubur Rahman Khan

sideration, that it might be too

IPE, BUET, Dhaka

Saarc Summit I am happy to see that the 13th

Saarc summit ended successfully and peacefully. By adopting strict security measures the law enforcing agencies displayed great sense of responsibility. No untoward incident that might have tarnished the image of our motherland occurred, thanks to their devotion and commitment to the country during the Saarc Summit.

Our government deserves full credit for successful completion of

resources of sincerity after a

People also cooperated with the government and sacrificed their self-interest for the greater welfare of the Saarc Summit, which had been postponed twice. Despite severe hardship that they encountered during the Saarc Summit, people proved once again that they could place national interest above every-

thing else. I firmly believe that the meetings and declarations will not be frozen within the four walls and that they would come out in concrete shape to implement the Dhaka Declaration. The decisions in the meeting to give Afghanistan new membership and China, Japan observer status will certainly increase the importance of Saarc.

We are all grateful to all Saarc leaders for conferring the first award on late President Ziaur Rahman. who had contemplated formation of the regional grouping.

We also feel honoured that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has been elected chairperson of Saarc once again Md Shahidul Islam,

Dhaka

Stop this cheating

We are champions, not once or twice, but five times at a stretch! Yes, you are right! We are the topmost in the ranking of most corrupt countries. But who have contributed to this great achievement? Only the government? Only the police? No! not at all! Police corruption or taking bribe or Bakhshish is now an open secret. They take it explicitly. But

implicit corruption is not less rampant in our country! Are you surprised? Then I will make it clear by sharing my two bitter experiences with you.

It was the month of April. My MA (English) exam was going on. Meanwhile a gorgeous (only regarding earning money) advertisement of a job drew my attention. The criteria of that job was only 2nd division in HSC exam and fluent in English but no experience. After two weeks, yes exactly 2 weeks from the time of dropping of my application, I telephoned the advertiser to know if they had sent my interview card or not. Surprisingly, the woman who received my phone told me that the candidates had already been selected. She also added that only short listed candidates were selected. Before asking her how it was possible, she cut off the line.

However, I was guite astonished I, an Hons Graduate (English), was not eligible even to face the interview. Some days later I came to know from one of my friends that one of his close friends who had just passed his BA (Pass) exam got the job only for being a nephew of a big uncle. Anyway, a few days ago I was cheated/bluffed by another advertisement. My question to the sensible

Rama Rao did, or Jayalalithaa

Lalu Yadav may have suffered

a setback, but he is still in play. His

fate will be determined by the

quality of Nitish Kumar's perfor-

And thus to the question that I

hope has been nagging you: how

has Dr Manmohan Singh become

mance as chief minister.

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

has done.

citizens of the country and concerned authorities is, why the organisations and educational institutions do not mention the criteria for being selected to be interviewed. I secured a place in the SSC merit list, my HSC result is also good. In the Honors and Masters level also I have secured the desired results (second class with good marks; as first class in English Literature is the rarest

criteria are required to be shortlisted for interview to be an ordinary Lecturer of a private college? Does anyone need a degree from the Oxford University? Should he/she posses Ph.D? If they are needed, then why do they not mention it in the advertisement? Then is it employment or only a business of receiving Pay Order of Tk 200/300 etc? They do not even mention their phone number. Why? The government should make a rule (to be implemented) that every advertisement should have clarity in it so that no

thing in Bangladesh). Then which

job seeker is cheated. Md Jasim Uddin Uttara, Sector-7,

Dhaka