

Admission forgery

DU needs to set its house in order

Twenty-four new cases of forged admissions have been detected at Dhaka University (DU). One can be in little doubt as to how such discoveries, unpalatable as they are, affect public morale about conditions at the nation's premier institution of higher learning. One hardly needs to go into a recapitulation of the reputation Dhaka University has enjoyed since its founding in 1921, for reasons related to academic excellence as well as the progressive role DU students have regularly played in the shaping of Bangladesh's political history. But at this point, it seems that all the glory of the university now lies in the past. It is the present that is deeply worrying.

It is not merely the fact of the admission forgery that upsets public sensibilities. In recent years, the decline that DU has gone through has been reflected not only through a fall in the quality of students but also in a marked slide in teaching. Lest we be accused of making sweeping generalizations, we will of course note the presence of academics who have dedicated their entire careers to the betterment of education at the university. However, when there appear persistent reports about the negative goings on at DU, one is naturally perturbed. This issue of forged admissions serves as a good instance of a possible nexus that may have developed among responsible quarters of the university. All too clearly, such activities point to an unabashed circumventing of the normal rules of admission. When one adds to that such disturbing realities as the political science department of DU awarding as many as fifty-two first class positions to students of a particular batch, one is appalled. There has been an inquiry into the scam, for scam is what it is. Unfortunately, the report of the inquiry appears to have been pushed under the rug. Could moves be going on to let the guilty off the hook?

Some very purposeful steps are needed to get Dhaka University back on track. There are, obviously, some very real problems that afflict its performance across the board. Too much politicization leading to recruitment of mediocre teachers, delay in announcing examination results and now admission of students on the basis of forged documents are some of the issues that call for swift and serious handling. To what extent is Dhaka University prepared to set its house in order?

Cheating of overseas job seekers

Law must protect the victims

We are concerned at the increasing rate of incidences of corrupt elements cheating job seekers in the name of getting them employment abroad. It has been revealed that more than 100 cases have been lodged with various police stations in the last one and a half months, out of which 39 cases were filed with Paltan Police Station from March 1 to April 15 and 72 cases with Motijheel Police Station. Now, the question that comes to our mind is what role the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment and Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (BAIRA) are playing to address such scandalous activities of some of the recruiting agencies.

From the reports it appears that strong networks of criminals are operating all across the country and they are getting away in the absence of effective vigilance on the part of the law enforcing agencies. The victims, mostly young men and women, pay huge amounts of money to the brokers of some recruiting agencies of questionable antecedents and thereby fall into their trap. As these job seekers hand over the money usually against no written documents it becomes almost impossible to recover them even with the help of the law.

Cheating of job seeking people by the unscrupulous brokers has been going on for a long time in the country and yet we hardly see strong action taken against them by the relevant authorities. But these people need to be given all the required protection by the government since manpower is the second largest foreign currency earning sector of the country bringing in no less than 6 billion dollars annually.

In consideration of the positive aspects of foreign employment we urge the government to motivate the law enforcing agencies to extend all possible assistance to the victims of cheating at the hands of corrupt manpower recruiting agencies and their brokers. We believe the detective agencies have a list of such unscrupulous agencies in their hands, therefore, bringing them before a court of law should not be too difficult a task.

Towards burying the hatchet in the Gulf?

M. ABDUL HAFIZ

PERSPECTIVES

At the end of the day, the key to preventing an intensified civil war in Iraq is US's withdrawal from the equation, so as to force the parties having stakes to reach an accommodation with each other. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah has credibility with Iraqi Sunnis, especially now that he has denounced the US occupation. Shias will have to demobilise the Mahdi army and the Badr organisation.

Iranian was involved.

After the ghastly incident, Tehran was one capital of a Muslim country that witnessed thousands holding candlelight vigil with prayers and sympathy for the victims of 9/11. Muhammad Khatami, Iran's liberal president, condemned the 9/11 mayhem as an act of nihilism which has "no place in Islamic thinking." The US responded to all overtures by including Iran, in January 2002, in the "axis of evil."

However, sensing that it would be the prime beneficiary of Saddam's downfall, and the subsequent replacement by a Shia-dominated friendly government, Iran kept quiet over the US invasion of Iraq but did oppose its occupation by American forces.

By the end of 2003, two of Iran's worst enemies -- Taliban and Saddam -- were down in the dumps. Yet Iran was seized by a siege mentality as American forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Persian gulf, surrounded it. America also had military presence in, or close military cooperation with, all of Iran's neighbours except Syria and Russia.

In the meantime, Iran's negotiation

with EU-3 (France, Germany and Britain) hardly made any headway, as they were not in a position to underwrite security assurances to an insecure Iran without the United States, which posed a threat to Iran.

Washington's Iraq policy was based on the calculation that it could do business with the hitherto neglected Iraqi Shias who, being Arab, were thought to be different from Iranian Shias. The same mistake was committed in 1972 by president Nixon, who banked heavily on exploiting the Sino-Soviet divide to contain the Soviets in Vietnam. On both occasions the calculations went haywire.

Now, three years after the invasion of Iraq, the American assumption about the Shias in Iraq has proved to be wrong. For the first time since 1921, when Iraq became a republic, Baghdad has a government which is friendly towards Tehran.

As a matter of fact, it was at the request of Iraq's Shia political leadership that Washington felt compelled to initiate a dialogue with Tehran on the future of Iraq, which is presently on the verge of disintegration. Interestingly,

both Tehran and Washington have common interests in the stability and integrity of Iraq, as well as the war against Al-Qaeda in the Middle East.

The report by the Iraq Study group (ISG) headed by former secretary of state, James Baker, also has stressed the need for engagement with Iraq and Syria to improve the situation in Iraq. The argument that an unstable Iraq is in the interest of Iran is not convincing, according to the ISG report.

On the contrary, from Iran's point of view, a stable Iraq dominated by the Shias who are close to the Iranian leadership is what serves Iranian interests best. Last year's election in Iraq, which brought the Shias into power, has already achieved that objective.

Now it is in Iran's interest to ensure a stable Iraq presided over by a Shia dominated government. It can, thus, be seen that stability in Iraq is a common goal for both Iran and the US.

According to the ISG report, engaging Iran in talks over Iraq could also serve as a confidence building measure (CBM) for further dialogue on Iran's nuclear program, and her anti-Israel

stance, directly between the US and Iran, who have had no formal contact since the hostage crisis in the wake of Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution.

Bush's policy of a "surge," vetoing the time limit of 2008 for troops withdrawal set by Democrat-dominated congress, and his soliciting sympathy by making jingoistic speeches with the US armed forces in the backdrop, are only a reflection of how removed from reality the US commander-in-chief is. In the meantime, the Vietnam Syndrome is all too clearly visible, with Baghdad's green zone being frequently penetrated by suicide bombers.

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At long last, the United States took the right step in the right direction by attending the March summit of Iraq's neighbours at Baghdad, and speaking directly to Iran and Syria about Iraq's security. Bush is profoundly wrong in thinking that continued military occupation can forestall further warfare.

With the death toll -- of both Iraqis and coalition forces (according to a study in prestigious British journal Lancet, over 650,000 have died since the US occupation of the country) -- on the rise, and increasing sectarian chaos gripping Iraq, the outlook of any effort is looking bleaker by the day.

There has been absolutely no progress in any direction, despite billions of dollars being pumped into so-called reconstruction, and into the seemingly

futile attempts to prop up an unpopular, servile government and its ineffectual forces.

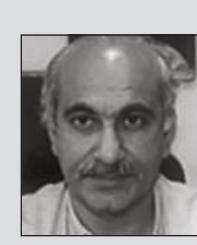
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There has been virtually nothing in the US's hand to influence Iraq's future in any way. By ending its occupation the US would go a long way towards burying the hatchet in the Gulf and repairing its relation with the Arab world and, thus, eliminating one of the Al-Qaeda's recruiting tools.

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Time to have a baby

M.J. AKBAR

BYLINE

It is now common to suggest that the Congress vehicle is stranded because it has two steering wheels. But consider another possibility. If Dr. Singh had the qualities of a political leader, with the flexibility and communication skills needed to move forward, this vehicle might have acquired two engines instead of two steering wheels. Instead, Ms. Sonia Gandhi has had to write letters to the prime minister recording her objections to government policy. This means, at least in her mind, that even the single engine of this vehicle is stalling because the government has either gone into neutral gear, or is in reverse.

towards a more reasonable approach in the Indo-US nuclear deal.

His patriotism found a wonderful mission: in teaching the young that their finest personal investment was in the future prosperity of their nation. As an individual, his courtesy and warmth were self-evident. He was a marginal presence in the nation's consciousness when he entered Rashtrapati Bhawan. He will be genuinely missed if he leaves it after only five years.

Dr. Manmohan Singh has taken just three years to become a disappointment. His career is a textbook case of good intentions not being good enough. You can't be pregnant all your life. You also have to have the baby.

It is possible that our expectations were beyond his reach, but you cannot fault the voter for believing in his leader. The Punjab results were a direct indictment of the prime minister's performance. Dr. Singh is the first prime minister from an Indian minority community, and yet could not deliver the votes of his fellow Sikhs in sufficient numbers to his party.

Muslim faith in him, which had soared three years ago, has sagged visibly after his failure to deliver on the Sachar Report. The prime minister

raised hopes when he publicly promised a massive increase in government spending on development for projects that would benefit minorities.

When the budget was announced a few months later, we discovered that the finance minister had actually cut spending on this head. The prime minister did nothing, and has now relapsed into his all-too familiar, and convenient, silence. Once again, lots of pregnancy, but no baby.

His reputation for honesty has also soiled just a bit. No one in his senses believes that he is personally culpable. But a very damaging question is being asked. It is common knowledge that corruption is rife in the present union cabinet.

Of what use is the prime minister's honesty if he is presiding over a dishonest government, with some ministers collecting money with both hands, and a couple of feet as well? Dr. Manmohan Singh's silence is a form of abetment, and worse. He has compromised in order to preserve his job. It is guilty by association.

In a smart piece of positioning, Dr. Singh has preserved a waterproof image despite 16 years in the thick, and occasionally muck, of politics. The

Instead, Ms. Sonia Gandhi has had to write letters to the prime minister

recording her objections to government policy. This means, at least in her mind, that even the single engine of this vehicle is stalling because the government has either gone into neutral gear, or is in reverse. Why else would she place her qualifications on record?

The voter has no sympathy for excuses. He -- or, more important, she, for the really decisive voter is now the woman -- elected a government that would deliver, not one that would dither.

The allies of the Congress know that they will have to share the costs of failed leadership without having been given the most important portfolios in this government. Their unease is seeping through in their body language, and is getting vehement in their private language.

When the Left and the BJP set aside their almost irreconcilable differences and came together on the floor of the Lok Sabha over the blatant attempt by some American legislators to pressure Delhi over our relations with Iran, they were sending two messages, one explicit, and the other implicit.

The first, obvious, one was to the United States: India is not, and never will be, a client state. The second message was unstated, and might even be denied if you discuss it. But they were also sending a signal to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who has eroded his credibility by seeming to cut corners in his hurry to push the Indo-US nuclear deal. It is true that Dr. Singh was badly served by over-reaching bureaucrats who undersold the problems and oversold the advantages, but advisers don't hang around to take the blame.

It is always bad news for a prime minister when parliament feels that it has to draw a line he cannot cross on

matter of such vital national interest. A prime minister should know such cut-off lines out of a combination of instinct, knowledge, experience and honest advice.

Perhaps the reason why President Kalam smells of roses after five years in Delhi is because his job required him to be above politics. President Kalam was comfortable in this upper zone; he even enjoyed its temperate climate.

A prime minister has no such luxury. He is a lung of Indian democracy, and democracy is a political nervous system. The prime minister is the executive authority of India, the first among equals in his cabinet; he is not above his cabinet. He cannot claim the Nobel Prize for clean hands, while some of his cabinet colleagues are swilling up the stufflike mops.

It is possible that Dr. Manmohan Singh's preferred virtues would make him a better president than prime minister. President Kalam has laid down a condition for re-election that is virtually impossible for the political system to meet. He wants all three principal blocs, the Congress, BJP and the Left, to support him for a second term. Only a very remote set of compulsions could engineer that.

The president's palace is going to be vacant soon. Dr. Manmohan Singh might consider changing his address. He will remain in the neighbourhood. President Kalam has got us used to a soft-spoken, gentle, decent, likeable, honest, prudent, professional, educated person at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Dr. Singh fits the job description down to every comma.

M.J. Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

Reform of political parties

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

BY THE NUMBERS

We think it would be more prudent for the caretaker government to allow both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina to stay in the country. The CTG should collect evidence of corruption and abuse of power by them and try them in the court of law. If they are convicted, they must be barred from engaging in politics or ever holding public office. They must not be allowed to run away from the law of the land to enjoy a decent vacation abroad.

Nothing as lavish as the lifestyles of some of the politicians has been revealed since proclamation of state of emergency on January 11. They possess villas with flamboyant architecture near the capital for weekend recreation. Mini-zoos have been set up to make their villas exotic. People were simply astonished when they saw such ostentation in the lifestyles of their political leaders.

Things in the political arena took a sharp turn in the crusade against corrupt political bigwigs for amassing

fabulous wealth by misusing state power. Deer were found roaming the roads of the capital, and a crocodile was found where it was never before, in a pond in the city. Five pythons were found wandering on a street in Chittagong. It all really seemed like jiggery.

These wild animals which kept our political leaders entertained have now been let loose in fear of the drive by the joint forces. A luxurious sports utility vehicle, a Hummer, was found abandoned in the capital.

Really, our political leaders cannot think of giving anything to the people

without riding costly cars like Hummers, Jaguars, BMWs and Mercedes Benzes. Sadly, most of them went from rags to riches.

The most talked about corrupt figure in Bangladesh is Tarique Rahman, eldest son of the former prime minister. Tarique became a millionaire in just a few years, and many of his friends also became very rich under his patronization.

At least 50 million people in the country subsist on the equivalent of a dollar a day, the concentration of such unbelievable wealth in a handful of political bigwigs has set new

records. The combined wealth of these people, who turned into multi-millionaires by massive looting of public funds, most likely exceeds the gross domestic product of the country.

Politics in Bangladesh is now considered a big business for amassing wealth, which has vitiated the political atmosphere. Here, wealth can be translated directly into political power; the so-called democracy is ruled by the wealthy elite. It is clear that the country was undergoing a phase in which money and muscle governed politics.

It is really a vicious cycle we are

living through, and the good politicians are being driven out of the political arena by the bad ones, following the Gresham's law that bad money drives away good money. The caretaker government can bring about a change in this scenario by breaking this vicious cycle.

In fact, there are no two opinions regarding the need for drastic reforms in the political parties, as the people in general are deeply disappointed with the malpractices of, and breach of trust by, their elected representatives. All the major political parties are responsible in varying degrees for this situation.

We need not go far off to find political idols who possessed political vision and charisma. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Sher-e-Bangla A.K. Fazlul Haq, Maulana Bhashani were legendary leaders who maintained simplicity throughout their lives, and were dedicated to the cause of people. Unfortunately, the country failed to fill the vacuum (after their departure) in all these years. In a political misadventure, the

abroad.

The government's ban on indoor politics is unlikely to be withdrawn before June, as the major political parties, including the BNP and AL, are yet to initiate reforms. The government now hopes that the major political parties will bring about necessary reforms so as to create conditions for emergence of new leadership within May.

The election commission (EC), on April 23, indicated that the ban on indoor politics would be lifted in two weeks to allow consultation with the political parties on electoral reforms.

We cannot fully agree with the law and information advisor, Barrister Mainul Husein, who told the media on April 28 that indoor politics had been banned for three months so that the political parties could complete reforms, to field honest and efficient candidates in a free and fair national election, during the period.