

## CBA excesses

### New labour code needed

COLLECTIVE Bargaining Agents (CBA) are playing havoc in various public-owned organisations. Under political patronage, usually of the party in power, they influence matters through threats and intimidation. They also enjoy privileges that they are not entitled to; defy official discipline; and exert pressure on day to day decision making. They even control postings and promotions on the basis of partisan loyalty.

The Daily Star's investigation into the CBA activities in the Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs) revealed a pattern that no forward-looking society can afford to condone. In one incident in the Agrani bank on Tuesday, CBA leaders humiliated the bank's transport officer for not providing them with an air-conditioned car to travel out of Dhaka. The CBA members are class-III employees, hence not entitled to many of the amenities usually given to grade one and two employees. But their political clout and unruly behaviour invalidate all rules and regulations.

The problem is neither new nor unique. In 1988, a government-sponsored taskforce made a number of recommendations to rein in CBA excesses, but political pressures prevented implementation of those recommendations despite the then cabinet committee's approval.

The result from not acting to stem the problem has been a further slide in their behaviour. On November 8, the DGM of the Agrani bank's Mymensingh region encountered threats from CBA stalwarts as he complied with an instruction from the head office with respect to filling vacancies through inter-bank transfers. The Daily Star investigation found that, in addition to interfering with transfer and posting, CBA leaders take bribes from house building loan seekers and arrange loans by intimidating officers.

Corruption and bribery are endemic in this country and they pervade all tiers of our society. Our concern, however, lies with the highhandedness being displayed by a specific coterie of government employees in the decision making process. Particularly in the NCBs, the conducts result in reduced income generation and productivity. We urge the government to devise a standard code of conduct for the CBA and deter such activities through exemplary disciplinary measures.

## City traffic jams

### Ad hoc approaches won't do

THE government's initiative to ease traffic jams on the capital's roads during the month of Ramadan does not appear to be working very well. BDR personnel have been deployed on the streets alongside the police to direct traffic, but the traffic jams show no signs of easing, especially during the morning rush hour and the hour before Iftar.

Of course, the problem is a systemic one and merely putting more bodies on the street to direct traffic will not solve it. When the fundamental problem is too many vehicles plying too few roads, more traffic police cannot be expected to have much of an effect on easing traffic congestion.

The traffic situation in the capital has been steadily worsening over the years and the situation is now among the worst in the world. The simple problem is that there are not enough roads to adequately serve the burgeoning population.

Roads comprise roughly 8 per cent of the total land area of the city, as opposed to the 12 per cent which city planners consider the minimum for a workable metropolis. And this does not even take into account the huge increase in the number of both people and vehicles in recent years that has only exacerbated the problem.

Some by-pass roads have been built to ease congestion, but most of the plans to build new roads have been left languishing by successive governments.

We need first to build new roads where we can -- and this means following through on the existing plans for by-pass roads even if we have to demolish structures that have been put up, albeit illegally, on land earmarked for roads.

In addition, we need to step up construction of fly-overs and to seriously pursue the idea of an underground public transportation system. Indeed even improving overground public transportation would decrease our reliance on private vehicles and thus help ease congestion.

The traffic situation is already close to intolerable and the countless hours we waste in traffic cost us crores in lost manhours and productivity. It is imperative that the government act before the situation gets any worse.

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

THE Iraq war is generating more pains and little gains for the US-UK coalition. The US suffered 411 combat casualties so far, 150 of them since May 1. The UK casualties are 32, 12 since May 1. Combining deaths from accidents and friendly fires, US casualty stands at 539 and the UK at 65. As the death count mounts by the day (added by the deaths of 14 Italian soldiers on November 12) and the peace and reconstruction suffer under incessant attacks, the US seems in the quest of seeking a fig leaf to extricate itself from Iraq earlier than it would have liked to.

So far, few things have gone the right way for the occupation armies. The confusing statements by field commanders about the true identities of the guerrillas prove that the Iraqi fighters had adapted well to the tactics and strategy followed by hard-hitting unconventional forces.

The Iraqis can hit now without being hit back. They're elusive but impeccably effective. It takes quite a skill to shoot down Blackhawk helicopters with Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG). Iraqi fighters are doing that pretty effectively. Triggering remote controlled explosive is another achievement of the guerrillas. They are more sophisticated than what was thought of them. They also stand on a moral high ground as liberators of their motherland.

As well, the war is proving too costly for the invaders while the world around suffers due to the uncertainties

sparked by the conflict's intensity and duration. Economically, the US had faulted in its assessment of Iraqi oil production, which plummeted from 2.5 million bpd of the pre-war level to a trickle of 700,000 bpd. Pipelines toward Syria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have all been blown up.

Plus, the cost of reconstruction is proving horrendous. The damage done by a brutal air attack is well over \$200 billion this time. Add to this the 1991 war damage and the cost of over a decade-long sanctions. All these left Iraq too pauper to cope with basic needs. The 78 billion reconstruction budget for Afghanistan and Iraq is a

neutral experts predicted about the likely consequences of this campaign. Eight months on, Iraqi resistance is ever in the rise (numbering over 30 attacks per day), as are the instances of global terrorism. The US and the UK are more isolated than ever before while a replay of the Vietnam syndrome seems unavoidable. Even the Europe, which the US had built from ashes after the devastation of the Second World War, loathes the US now. Europeans say Israel poses the greatest danger to world peace, implying the US's culpability in the Mid East as Israel's main patron.

Militarily, the recent spike in attacks

the instances succumbed to the trauma of a mission creep, caused by a combination of factors. The first reason is bad judgement, which the military terms as "appreciation of the situation." The US-UK coalition prepared for the war on bad intelligence inputs about Iraq's capability to wage an unconventional war. Saddam and his loyalists also did not play to the coalition's expectations. In the thick of battles, coalition troops donned gas masks in anticipation of Iraq using chemical weapons; but Iraqi military preferred to offer token resistance before melting away within the population.

and their decision to suck the US into a prolonged war of attrition. Former Vice President Al Gore too accused Bush on November 9 of "recklessly putting USA in grave and unnecessary danger."

That aside, military as an institution has its own dynamics. If soldiers feel they're being used to pursue a goal that is not just, their morale saps. Another reason is nostalgia. All armies are prone to this depressive trend while undertaking missions abroad. However, the most important reason behind a mission creep is the fear of being defeated or killed. Iraq is fast turning into a killing ground for

**That aside, military as an institution has its own dynamics. If soldiers feel they're being used to pursue a goal that is not just, their morale saps. However, the most important reason behind a mission creep is the fear of being defeated or killed. Iraq is fast turning into a killing ground for coalition forces. The coalition commanders find it harder to cope with the changing tactic of an enemy that fights on its own turf, on its own term.**

political ruse to deflate criticism surrounding thousands of deaths among Iraqi and Afghan civilians.

As more infrastructures are being destroyed each day and international organisations --including the Red Cross and the UN -- are packing out of Baghdad, Iraq's neighbours insist upon the US' unconditional withdrawal, and soon. The Syrian president emphatically said so recently as did Iran and Egypt earlier.

Why such an anti-climax? The reasons are not nebulous. The war itself kicked off on faulty and illegitimate premises. From the outset, the US decided not to heed what

is reminiscent of the 1968 Tet offensive launched by North Vietnam guerrillas against US forces. The impact of the Tet forced President Johnson to take a strategic decision to withdraw US troops from Vietnam. But the botched campaign had by then cost the US nearly 75,000 lives and hundreds of billions of dollars. The blunder ended with a bang in US internal politics; in anguish Johnson refrained from seeking re-election and his military was left disgraced. Bush may not follow Johnson's footsteps, but he seems unable to wriggle out of it either.

Conflicts in Iraq and Vietnam are far from identical. But the military in both

They wanted to get the enemy sucked into a slump first before hitting hard.

The morale of occupation forces nose dived further since the false declaration by President Bush on May 1 that the "mission is accomplished." If anything, the declaration was followed by an intensification of attacks on coalition forces. Although astute military strategists absorbed Bush's declaration with indignation and bemoaning, the president is widely accused of deceiving his nation. Even the hawks in Washington say that the president and his advisers underestimated the strength of the 450,000 strong battle-hardened Iraqi military

coalition forces. The coalition commanders find it harder to cope with the changing tactic of an enemy that fights on its own turf, on its own term.

Then, there is the absence of a *raison d'etre* that ought to have decided the fate of this campaign. As Scott Ritter, one of the US weapons inspectors, aptly said, "We lost this war the very first day. You don't win militarily if you lose the politics and diplomacy of it." He added, "Those who think the US is winning have no knowledge of how modern warfare is fought and won." *The Washington Post* claims, the administration is sick and

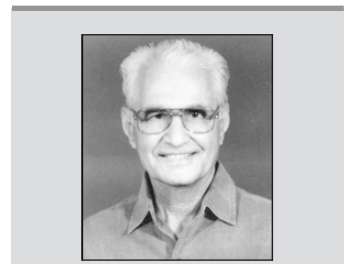
tired of the provisional authorities' incompetence. Well, how can they do better amidst fear of death? Whosoever collaborates with the coalition gets blown off, including Iraqi police.

Now that the US mulls an exit strategy, one is reminded of the horror unleashed by the largest war machine of the world once it rolled past Kuwait-Iraq borders on March 20. Whatever the Bush administration said before and after that D-day proved false and "sexed up." Bush cannot reply to some basic queries of his soldiers, such as: Why the Iraqis never received the invaders with flower and festivity? Why the Iraqi army did not surrender? Why the WMD was not found? Why the resistance intensified and the reconstruction hampered? And, why the war was not over in weeks with dozens of casualties, as was predicted?

Above all, despondency and an acute sense of foreboding grip US soldiers due to the failure of the US diplomacy to cobble together an international force under the UN to maintain peace and stability in the war-ravaged country. At the close of the 1991 Gulf war, the senior Bush claimed haughtily, "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all." If he proved right then, the syndrome is back with a vengeance under the calamitous leadership of his son. The US is indeed mired in an Iraqi swamp and it needs a strategy to creep out of a killing field paved by die-hard Iraqi guerrillas. If it fails to withdraw, the inferno might engulf the entire region.

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# PPP and historic challenge



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

MS Benazir Bhutto's vigorous efforts to convince the world and the US in particular that she is not really corrupt have received a temporary boost from another Swiss Tribunal's acceptance of her appeal against the conviction by the original investigating magistrate. The decision appears to be procedural in nature and she is not out of the woods. More is likely to be heard of the matter.

For the present, her stance is that without her party's (PPP) reconciliation and sharing power with President Musharraf, US interests in and around Pakistan will not be best served. The articles she has written and statements she issues often sound strangely subservient to the Americans who are held out as the ultimate decision makers in Pakistan. However, her political record in and out of power is also not awe-inspiring. Even so, she remains a factor in Pakistan politics. All said and done, she is the biggest vote puller and her PPP remains the largest party in the country. The PPP is saddled with the duty of explaining so much about its Chairperson.

A Swiss Magistrate's original sentencing of the former Prime Minister and her husband Asif Ali Zardari for laundering tainted money should have been a shattering blow to her Pakistan People's Party. But that does not seem to have hurt it much; the party needs a Bhutto at its head no matter what he or she does. The PPP itself is a great survivor. It is likely to take the taint of corruption on its Chairperson in its stride. In part, corruption in a charismatic leader does not shock Pakistanis the way it does in the West; this results from a civilisational attitude that expects social elites to be above the moral constraints that envelop ordinary folks.

Nevertheless, despite PPP leaders' expression of disbelief in Judge Devaud's conclusions and despite their campaign to question his integrity or legal competence, the fact is that the case against BB and her husband stands proven. It is unworthy of PPP's lawyers and spokespersons to malign Devaud. After all, he was primarily trying two Swiss companies, namely SGS and Cotechna, along with a Swiss citizen, for malfeasance and infringing Swiss laws, especially about

live on, despite serious heartaches and disillusionments. What went into the making of this party and what its composition today is should be instructive.

Born in Nov 1967 by a bunch of "socialists" with varying ideas of socialism, it went on to win the 1970 general election in what is now the residual Pakistan. After the trauma of 1971, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was vilified by his rightwing opponents for having obviously sided with the generals

youth flocked to it for the Roti, Kapra aur Makan slogan and found a radical nationalism, with a pinkish tinge, very attractive; the Islamic part of PPP rhetoric sanctified a vague, if not bogus, socialism. Lately, a contradiction has entered and survives: PPP prides itself on being the guarantor of federation in this fractious country. But some Sindhi nationalists, sworn enemies of the present federation, somehow find the attractions of PPP irresistible.

imperialist party? Is it an anti-feudal party? Has it a distinctive vision for removing poverty and backwardness from Pakistan? Has it any specific reforms in view? The answer to all these questions is a loud "No".

There are a few other questions. How different in effect will a PPP government be from another run by any Muslim League factions? The answer can only be "scarcely". The party today is as much a galaxy of feudals as are various PMLs and other

own with or without a Bhutto at its head. Let them have a holistic view of democratic politics and agree on social and economic reforms, a non-aligned independent foreign policy and a distinctive programme for fighting poverty. Such a party should be distinguished by its democratic working and well-formulated programme of action.

All the rest can continue in the BB's PPP. They cannot find a more commodious home. BB's leadership is a tried and tested one. There are still a lot of Bhutto lovers who can only be called political Janissaries, especially in Sindh. A BB-led party is sure to survive, though the changing situation around and inside the country will force them, and indeed all, parties to redefine their attitudes to the sole superpower, the IFIs and the Pakistan Army which constitute today's ruling triumvirate. Each party has to define its attitude and place in the political spectrum.

Such a bifurcation of PPP is largely wishful thinking, to be sure. One holds that while the Right is chockfull of parties committed to no significant idea while the Left side of spectrum is virtually empty except for a few stragglers from the old, crushed or barely surviving groups of the Left. Most are politically lame and halt. Conditions in the country are now increasingly acquiring the characteristics that uncommonly remind one of the Latin American countries. This results from pursuing policies that have been dictated by the World Bank and IMF -- as was the case with most Latin American republics. The process should reach an apogee after 2005 when all the WTO rules will be fully implemented. That is the outlook.

How will rightwing parties, both quasi secular and religious, behave in today's volatile social conditions? More of the same is the only likelihood. The challenge is either a Leftist party will provide a path to self-reliant growth and stability or some versions of Peronism will flourish under a crypto-Fascist party. We have perhaps the latter already in BB's PPP but not the former. Aren't there some Pakistanis out there who can rise to this historic challenge?

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## PLAIN WORDS

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banking. BB and Asif came in as accomplices in, and beneficiaries of, the crimes committed by Swiss persons in terms of Swiss law. BB's and Asif's sentences were consequential.

As for the facts of the case, it is an open and shut case. SGS and Cotechna have paid money; it has been traced; and is now sitting in certain bank accounts that Devaud found belonged to BB and Asif Ali. No one need doubt these facts. One is, however, concerned with the PPP. One has noted that even a Swiss conviction will not seriously affect PPP. In part, the PPP is a peculiar phenomenon. It is perceived to be genuinely concerned with democracy and has no vital links with the military establishment. It survived 1973-74's internal convulsion when the elder Bhutto purged leftists from the party; it bore with fortitude the tough repression by Zia's Martial Law in the 1980s. It came out strengthened because thousands of its workers, served varying terms and thousands were whipped. But none left the party. They are in a class of their own where commitment is concerned.

against the people of East Pakistan. That had no effect on the party. It is extraordinarily ambiguous down to this day: neither sorry for its conduct then nor self-confident enough to boldly defend ZAB's conduct. All it emphasizes is that it truly represented West Pakistan. Therefore it was entitled to rule -- in West Pakistan. PPP assumed a basic rejection of, and disassociation with, East Pakistan even before 1970. Its rank and file accepted this in practice.

The party's glue was the charisma of ZAB and which is why his workers took no notice of his many faults. PPP's original workers were the leftovers of the Left, mostly Mao-loving. Also present were a few secular minded democrats because they had nowhere to go. A large number of PPP workers were extremely anti-Indian and militant Pakistani nationalists, such as Bhutto himself seemed. Bhutto's basic slogans were two: the first was 'Roti, Kapra aur Makan' (bread, clothes and housing); and the second was 'our politics is democratic, our economy is socialism, and our faith is Islam.' In short, all things to all men, especially attractive to the poor for whose benefit he thundered against the rich landlords and capitalists.

Therein lies the secret of its survival. No other party has such a charismatic leader nor can another leader cater to all these varied constituencies. The "others" are the various Muslim Leagues, all undifferentiated conservatives with hollow slogans of Islam, Pakistani nationalism and militantly anti-India, indeed anti Hindu. All their politics is a quest for ministerships and all of them rely for votes on the tribe, "brathery", caste, sect or some such ethnic detail -- and of course money. Then there are religious parties corresponding to the multiple sectarian divides; they cater to primary religious affiliations to various orthodoxies. Then there are new parties like Millat, Insaaf and TI; all these are tailored around their leader's integrity or standing. For the rest, there is a plethora of either regional, nationalist, or self-styled leftist parties with the common belief in four nationalities. A new sort of ethnic nationalist party, MQM, has also emerged in Sindh.

parties. PPP too is dependent on a leader's personality and her family. Its economic policies were and will be indistinguishable from that of either the military or other PMLs or even mullahs (in essentials). Its total dependence is on the US and the military for power as is the case with other parties. The military denied it power after the October 2002 polls just because it did not like BB; it preferred more subservient turncoats from it and PML(N). What then distinguishes PPP today if we ignore its history? The answer is "nothing"; all parties seem to be chips of the same old timber of a feudalism that is also becoming capitalist.

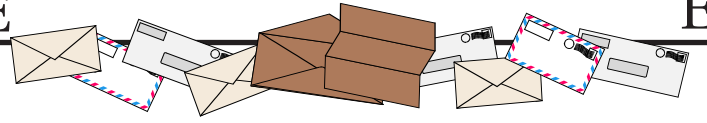
Does that mean we should be unconcerned with PPP's fate? That may not be advisable. The human material that comprises PPP is unmatched, except here and there in the small Left-oriented or regional ethnic parties. PPP workers' practical idealism is not found in other conservative parties like the PMLs. True, they are being wasted, are unhappy and downhearted. But where can they go? It is a tragic waste. Something should somehow be done about them. But it is not for outsiders to do it.

Among this whole lot, the maximum vote pulling capacity still resides in PPP's BB. Can PPP go on like this for a long time to come? It would be odd if, headless as it is today because of BB's compulsion to stay abroad, it continues to survive indefinitely because of its heterogeneity and contradictions. A few questions should illuminate: Is it a party committed to socialism? Is it an anti-

All one can say is PPP should cease to be Janus-faced: let the surviving socialists or pinkish nationalists and secular democrats form a party of their

PPP thus became a natural home of varied kinds of socialists, simple secular democrats and minorities who found it to be their last refuge; gullible

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



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

## DS heritage page: Congrats

I am writing to congratulate the people who produce the feature page of the DS for their excellent job. You help educate people of Bangladesh, and many outside the boundary of the nation. You make readers aware of the treasures available around them. I hope further reporting will convince people that our architectural heritage should be preserved for the posterity to know how rich was our heritage.

**Kaiser Faruq**  
Tallahassee, Florida, USA

extortionists at 16 points?" commented Amir Khosru Chowdhury, commerce minister (The Daily Star, November 10, 2003). Our government is saying that the law and order is totally under control although the dailies are not supporting their comments.

We can see mugging, murder, toll taking by the godfathers and what not. But the commerce minister is confessing publicly that toll taking is practised by police and gangsters alike. The government also knows that law and order situation is out of control. I think the government should refrain from commenting that "Law and order is under control." Rather they should say that 'we're trying to improve the situation.'

**Mostakim Motijheel**

## Why not hospitals?

If you live in Dhaka, I think you must have noticed how fast new shopping malls are being built in every corner of the city. The look of this malls, really no doubt, is up to the mark. The decoration, style, facilities etc. of these malls/super markets attracting the city dwellers more and more. So now it's become a good business for all of our wealthy people to establish a super mall or market.

But I have a question for all of them: why they are not interested about building exclusive hospitals in the city. Nobody has probably considered the idea of building good hospitals very seriously. Won't the investment be a very profitable one if we can make hospitals that have the standard of other developing countries?

Hope every citizen of the country

will think about my proposal with care. Please make good hospitals in our country like Mount Elizabeth, Tata Memorial etc., not only shopping malls.

**Samiha Esha**  
Uttara, Dhaka

## Will the prime minister keep her word?

Jagannath University College was declared a complete university in 1995 by the then prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia. Since then, eight years has past but her declaration has not been implemented. As a result, the long cherished desire of thirty-five thousand students of Jagannath University College to study in their own Jagannath University has not turned into reality.

In the year 2001, Begum Khaleda

Zia came back to power again and since then have accomplished many works she had declared in the year 1995. But in the case of Jagannath University College, she has not taken any necessary steps yet. We don't know what is the reason of such discrimination?

Under such circumstances, we are requesting the prime minister to look into the matter and take immediate steps for the implementation of Jagannath University within the year 2003.

**Students of Jagannath University College**  
Dhaka

## Marriage crisis: Who is responsible?

My letter refers to the letter 'Marriage

crisis" written by a citizen on 26 October in 'To the Editor'. The writer has suggested to establish a match-making institution to solve this crisis. But will a match making institution resolve this problem? Actually the marriage crisis is partly a result of the prejudice of our parents.

It is only natural that a university going girl or a boy may fall in love and choose a life partner. But the problem begins when they are in a stage where they are suppose to inform their parents about the relationship. Because our parents at once start measuring the everything -- whether their boy or girl will be properly benefited from this marriage or not. If the answer is negative, most of the parents become very strict with the 'no'. It is really pathetic that till today there are many parents who consider

'district' (the district you originally belong) a major deciding factor for their son's or girl's marriage. They do not want their child to marry someone from another district.

But we, who are born and brought up in the city, do not have any favour or fear towards districts. I have seen many couples who had to give up their dreams of marrying the one they love only because their parents did not allow it.

If our parents become more liberal and progressive, certainly this marriage crisis will be solved; partly if not fully.

**Naomi**  
Department of Law, DU, Dhaka

## Of Iftar parties

When the country is reeling under one of the worst effects of price hikes,

when eight northern districts are facing near famine situations, when hundreds of rootless people are flocking the cities and begging on the city streets and camping on its foot-paths; it looks vulgar to say the least, to witness our leaders hosting or attending grand Iftar parties and sitting in front of tables laden with lavish food and drinks. Doesn't these images remind us of, "Nero playing the flute while Rome burnt?"

In a democracy, cannot we expect our leaders to be more sensitive? If they must continue to glut every evening in the month of restraint, the least they can do is stop visual display of these lavish occasions. If they are not ashamed of it, we are.

**ZH**  
Chittagong