

Attack on the nurses

We protest the police brutality

POLICE are at it again -- using highhanded methods to disperse demonstrators. This was not the first time police used batons to disperse a group of unemployed and diploma student nurses trying to demonstrate on streets. But on Thursday they had gone too far with their tactics. The nurses were trying to stage a peaceful sit-in protest at the Directorate of Nursing Services. How can the police justify the all out attack on them with such ferocity? How do they explain the fact that some of them were taken into a room and beaten black and blue?

Such highhandedness and lack of sensing the consequences of such behaviour by the police only increases misgivings about them among the people. And who suffers in the meantime? The patients, the common people who have no stake in the whole situation. The nurses were protesting against a government move which allowed nurses passed from private institutes to get jobs in public hospitals. Their reasoning is that since there are thousands of jobless qualified nurses who passed from government institutions, therefore those who graduated from private institutions cannot be recruited. We cannot accept this logic and as such cannot sympathise with the nurses' demands. But we protest the brutal police action. The ministry concerned should have given the agitating nurses a good hearing and explained the situation to them. Just as it was not right for the nurses to go on strike, the ministry was at fault too for not taking their plights and appeals into serious consideration. But under no circumstances we can accept the police behaviour with them.

There must be a well-defined procedure to handle such situations. The authorities must devise a mechanism for listening to the problems of various groups which could be solved through talks, not by batons.

Waiving of L/C margin only a palliative

Market equilibrium is what we need

THE government's decision to withdraw letter of credit (L/C) margin on import of selective food items is a short-term palliative. It will certainly have an impact on the prices of items categorised under the waiver, but market thrust is for an equilibrium in the demand and supply of food commodities to ensure a fair price regime.

And, if the aim of the government is to stave off price hike during the holy month of Ramadan only, the decision came too late. The stock for Ramadan has already reached retail outlets, which the retailers brought at previous price tag.

Short term gains can be expected by importers planning to import in future. By declaring that the aim is to combat price hike during the month of Ramadan the government has indirectly acknowledged the situation's artificiality. In economic terms, it is the consumers' psychology that encouraged the evident price hikes of recent weeks. Reasonable expectation guided traders to control the supply switch.

The waiver provides importers certain per cent of relief in not paying to the exchequer the amount waived by this decision, but the loss incurred by the public exchequer must be weighed against the relief such a reduction would ensure for the consumers. Consumers' mood runs against anything short term as their back is already against the wall.

The price hike has been a concern for some time now, especially over the last 12-14 months. But none expected it to hit the crescendo. Herein lies the problem.

In the long term, however, the revenue being sacrificed by the government must bring relief to the consumers. But much more is needed to reinstate the equilibrium between demand and supply of items on which the waiver is not applicable.

A major aspect of this waiver is exclusion of rice, wheat and sugar, which together exert the central pressure on the overall food prices. The waiver is presumably on auxiliary items like lentil, onion, spice, date, etc, which are favourite edibles of the fasting month.

While as a short term palliative we endorse what has been decided, our concern for bolder moves to put the horse of food prices under rein remains unclear. The crisis is an artificial one created by an ugly cabal assumably of bureaucrats and merchants.

Lessons learnt from the CPA meeting



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

the course and hopefully learnt a few lessons.

The 49th CPA Conference, a major event has come and gone. Attended by over 250 lawmakers from across the Commonwealth, the meeting was important because of what was discussed and the fact that the participants included representatives of populations from all the five continents bound together by a shared colonial past and belief in democracy.

agreed that these steps would facilitate good practice of democratic governance and strengthen the institution of the parliament.

One can only hope that representatives of our various political parties were listening carefully to what was being said. There was a lot to be learnt by them.

In this context one needs to refer particularly to the address of the Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon and his stress that

and fair elections but are still unable to recognise that 'the Opposition has a legitimate role and that it must be given a formal place in parliament and other political arrangements.'

This is all the more vital because for the first time we have a situation where the Government in power has been in the Opposition and the Opposition has also been in Government. The poor people of Bangladesh can only hope that our

sharing of power and responsibilities between women and men in both public and private spheres would help nation-building. This is indeed a good idea, particularly for countries like Bangladesh with an overwhelming rural population. Having more women in the decision making process will ensure greater success in family planning, gender empowerment and education of the girl child;

(b) The causes of terrorism need

committees. This, it was commonly agreed would ensure executive accountability to the legislature. Indian Lok Sabha Speaker Manohar Joshi correctly reiterated the need for the executive branch of the government to be responsive and accountable to parliament. In this regard, there was also consensus that such interaction should not be adversarial in nature. This format of engagement can only be useful for providing every developing country with transparency and accountability. One can only hope that our current government will pay heed to the views expressed in this regard during the CPA meeting. There has to be a more effective parliamentary committee structure within Bangladesh in national interest.;

(d) There was need for undertaking urgent reforms within the United Nations. This, it was felt, would facilitate its principal task of conflict prevention;

(e) It was important for the developed world to initiate proactive steps to reduce the disparities between the rich and the poorer nations for ensuring a durable global peace and stability. In this regard, it was encouraging to find that the Commonwealth Secretary General thought that the current international trading system was 'unjust.' His observation that most European cows were better off than many living in poorer countries was indeed thought provoking. The adverse effects of subsidy were also highlighted very well with his remarks that US, Europe and Japan continued to subsidise their farmers at the rate of US\$ one billion a day while their aid budget was less than that figure per week. The imbalance could hardly have been more stark.

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POST BREAKFAST

The CPA probably yields insufficient clout in global terms. It however assumes importance in view of the varied nature of its participants. It is also significant because its membership can affect the policies of their respective governments... The CPA meeting was important for us in Bangladesh -- for what was said and for what was meant to be read between the lines.

In the course of a week, the CPA assembly focused on global peace and prosperity, adopted many important decisions related to the strategic plan for the CPA for 2003-2007 and the need for greater cooperation among its parliaments and legislative bodies. This was refreshing.

The past few days in October have been most tiresome for Bangladeshis. In front of an international audience, we have had eggs of various description thrown at our national face. Our image also took a battering with slip-shod management of an important international event. We managed to retain our much debated 'most corrupt' status, failed to present our national anthem at the appropriate time, accorded improper receptions and displayed acrimony when consensus was the required word of the hour. The unfortunate display of arrogance of power left a bitter taste in the mouth for many Bangladeshis. This was also the first time in 92 years that a CPA meeting was held without the presence of those belonging to the Opposition in the host country.

Nevertheless, we have survived

partnerships must have the 'maximum practical impact on the ground.' While elaborating on good governance, he correctly underlined the importance of the Government and the Opposition working together responsibly. In our political philosophy, shared by many other developing countries, there is always the approach of 'winner takes all' and (according to McKinnon) the tendency 'to regard victory at the polls as an invitation to capture all democratic and state structures and treat the institutions of state as no more than extensions of the ruling party.' Such a step is probably taken and encouraged to marginalise and completely sideline the Opposition 'rather than work with it.'

In Bangladesh, we have been seeing this evidence for quite some time now. Unfortunately, this leads in turn to the Opposition forsaking the path of constructive engagement. It is here that the Government in power has to remember that the onus is always on it to be seen as even-handed. We might have initiated democracy through free

Government will have noted the important philosophical aspects of McKinnon's statement. One can then also reasonably expect the Opposition to function responsibly.

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Accordingly, one followed with interest their views pertaining to impact of globalisation, promotion of sustainable development and means through which parliamentary democracy can be made more effective. Some of the more noteworthy elements that surfaced during discussion were as follows:

(a) There was need to encourage women to contest elections to representative bodies and to remove barriers to their participation.

It was argued that political parties should try to allocate proportionate representation of women in national and state parliaments. It was also agreed that

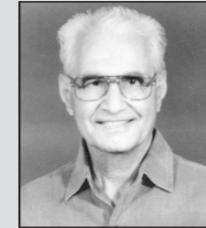
to be better understood in order to find appropriate solutions. It was also pointed out in this regard that non-resolution of decades-old Middle-East issues were working as a deterrent to the defusing of a spillover tensions at various places all over the world. It was interesting to note in this regard the observations of Nigerian Lawmaker Farrouq Lawan who urged for the redefinition of terrorism after Israel's recent uncalled for bombardment of Syria.

The participants also significantly agreed that religious fundamentalism was strengthened by flow of funds from illicit narcotics trade, smuggling of weapons and money laundering. It was also mentioned that terrorism of any description could only be curbed through political determination and cooperation. This last factor needs to be carefully sorted out particularly in South Asia;

(c) The most effective manner for achieving balance between the legislative and the executive branches in a parliamentary system of democracy is to consolidate the infrastructure of parliamentary

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International gangsterism unlimited

M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

aggressive actions. Israel, as soon as it sees a violent act, with no consideration of why, shouts 'terrorism'. It uses it as a cover for its own aggrandisement. Israel has been acting thus to reach an undefined goal. In this it is aping the US and UK. There is merit in Syrian President's observation: Israel cannot live without an (aggressive) war; it committed major aggressions in 1948 and 1967 and an unending series of permanent aggressions in the shape of settlements on Palestinian land and other so called

spits on the UN's face and wages preemptive, indeed preventive, wars. All the much trumpeted idealism of the time when UN was founded, supposedly to enforce international law, stands forgotten or set aside simply because the US wanted to wage wars on Afghanistan and Iraq. Why? because it did not like the regimes these countries had. Others suspect that Iraq's location, its oil and its natural role in the region and Afghanistan's geography were the real reasons why Messrs Bush and Blair were

the rights of others, the essence of international law, stand subordinated to the whims, misjudgments or plain bad intelligence -- because of which the Bush-Blair duo went to war on Iraq -- as is now emerging from on-going inquiries. That apart, the lesser fry have been left wondering about how to cope with this nasty and brutish world. Are not there any countervailing forces?

It is true that on a purely military plane, there is no countervailing military force to stop the US-UK-Iraq juggernaut. Is there nothing to

likely to be met for some time but before too long American public opinion might elect a peace-making Administration.

One says this knowing that politics in the US is very largely bipartisan and that on the fundamentals of keeping America number one, militarily and economically, there is near unanimity among Democrats and Republicans. It is not that Democrats have not waged wars or denied enough funds to the Pentagon. Even so, the common Americans forced their government to run away as fast as it could from Vietnam. Steady deaths of its youth and loss of treasure concentrate the minds of American people pretty quick. Domestic social consequences -- shrinking expenditures on social security, health and education while military spending goes through the roof intensify anti-war sentiments.

An eventual imperial overstretch has been clearly visualised by American writers themselves. In the flux that characterises present state of the world, many nations feel the pressure to acquire the wherewithal to deter aggression: weapons of mass destruction. Campaign for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons has lost its elan; it is increasingly failing to inspire confidence. When medium strength powers see America throwing its weight about all round the globe, simply because it is the biggest nuclear power, many are tempted to go nuclear. If some cannot acquire atomic capability, they would work for getting chemical or biological WMDs. World's flux today might become the chaos of too many WMDs in too many places. American policies are pushing towards an even more chaotic and dangerous world where civilisation will be

PLAIN WORDS

When medium strength powers see America throwing its weight about all round the globe, simply because it is the biggest nuclear power, many are tempted to go nuclear. If some cannot acquire atomic capability, they would work for getting chemical or biological WMDs. World's flux today might become the chaos of too many WMDs in too many places. American policies are pushing towards an even more chaotic and dangerous world where civilisation will be

retaliatory attacks on the militarily occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza.

Actually Israel acts the way it does in Syria and Lebanon simply because of the assurance that the US is behind it four square. The ultimate responsibility for Israeli transgressions and aggressive behaviour can only be on the US. Everybody in the world appreciates the situation in this way. Therefore nobody was surprised when the American Ambassador to Negroponte, instead of condemning Israel for its plain aggression on Syria, tried to provide a cover to it in the UNSC by calling for condemnation of Syria for training terrorists on its soil simply because Israel made this claim.

One's immediate reaction was to underline the fact of this Brave New World that Bush and his neo-cons have roughhewed. What else could be expected from Israel? The US and UK, the leading powers that had played a decisive role in the formation of the UN at the end of Second World War, are now in the forefront of the new tendency that

fixated on these two countries. They went to the extent of what critics are now describing as telling lies to justify the wars.

It bears repetition to say what counts now is power. If you have more of it, you can dictate your terms to your neighbours. You can enforce your preferences and punish those that do not accept your dictate. Israel is just doing that -- simply because it happens to be in fact an outpost for the US power. It does look as if the Palestinians have no realistic hope of forcing Israel to vacate its aggression. Their violent protests are playing on the aggressor's pitch; in a violent contest Israel will always win. They have to change their tactics. Adoption of non-violent methods of protest and agitation holds more scope, as they had earlier seen. Their original non-violent Intifada's results can be compared with what they have achieved by their unparalleled sacrifices. World's moral support -- an important factor -- will be easier to obtain if the protests remain non-violent. As it happens, fairly and respect for

checkmate this colossus? The question occurs and recurs. On further thought, several possible countervailing forces of a non-military character can be discerned.

Indeed one is of a quasi-military nature: If the pattern persists, wanton aggression evokes two kinds of reactions; one evident in the behaviour of Palestinians ranging from Intifada to suicide bombing; the second is some version of armed resistance or guerrilla tactics as the US occupation forces are encountering in both Afghanistan and Iraq. There appears to be no end to Palestinians' resistance also, despite their helplessness, or perhaps because of it. At one level these are also wars of attrition. It is to be seen for how long can the Zionists sustain the current cycles of violence in occupied areas of Palestine. Similarly the ability of the US to recruit enough foreign forces for the duty of safeguarding the American interests and lives is uncertain. No Army is designed to face guerrilla resistance for long. America's War on Terror, so far, has produced more

that seek to hold them to account. This is happening in UK as well as in the US. While Bush might be tempted to do another neat spectacular job in the election year, it does look it is a highly risky approach and experienced election campaigners might successfully advise him against it. At any rate, it is risky to ignore the long-term effects of world opinion. Only tight dictatorships are immune from it -- but only for a time.

For electorates in democracies, despite the governments' ability to manufacture consent for a time, sustaining wars of conquest that clearly benefit only certain sections is all but impossible. Even in the home of capitalism, America, not all voters are thrilled by the vision of large strategic, economic and political gains that the war party hopes from Afghanistan and Iraq occupations. They notice the large expenditures on war that mean more taxes on themselves and shrinking budgets for social sectors. They do not like the prospect. President Bush's demands on the Congress for more budgets are

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

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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.

Chronically corrupt indeed

It is indeed a new phenomenon and Bangladesh has just started to become a 'chronic corrupt country' in the world. I actually want to blame this government particularly for this. Whoever rules our country, they must brace for this particular allegation.

The whole system has been badly infected by a vicious cycle and corruption has been ingrained in the wires of the system. We the general people are also responsible for this.

No one can deny that everybody contributed to this process. The entire situation has gone to such an

extent that no government can possibly get rid of this within a short time. Everybody has to realise that we are following the sinister path of the devil. As a result, we are sliding backward.

Nowadays sacred duties of the government and the opposition are just not apparent. In all political parties, numerous intelligent and qualified people exist, even though no progress is evident in any area so far. Despite our policy makers being intelligent, bureaucrats are talented people. We have to face the embarrassing assessment to become the most corrupt country for the consecutive third year. We literacy also failed to protect the country from corruption. So

education cannot be a criterion to be honest and sincere to the nation. On the 2nd anniversary of the 4-party alliance government I tried not to view the negative sides because I think, not only me, but we all are sick and tired of the pessimistic run of the country. I did not want to be too negative regarding their performance because I have accepted the fact that our life in Bangladesh is basically just like living with the killing disease cancer. As long as you live you have to live with corruption. There is no way out. One thing I know for sure that I won't be able to see a corruption-free Bangladesh in my lifetime. And I can also bet on the fact that no government can uproot this

corruption predicament from our country.

As we know that earthquake may hit our country any time, therefore I think the only solution to this corruption charge may be that: As a result of which a new Bangladesh may emerge and everything can be started from the very beginning where we can see hope. Other than this I do not see any hope like a cancer patient. Despite the fact I want to be an optimistic person, I cannot remain like that after going through the publication of the BNP-Jaamat coalition government's two years misrule in the newspapers. I felt tremendously disappointed to read such news. I cannot help writing a letter to release my

excruciating pain a little bit.

Shahriar Hussain Tania
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Friday must be holi-day

I agree with Mr. Sajjad on the argument of holi-day, we do not need to follow the Middle Eastern countries. But we do not have to follow the Westerns either. In fact it is not a matter about which country we should follow, rather how we must study our advantages and sentiments to fit our holi-days. I think most of the readers are aware of the fact that Sunday is holi-day in the western countries because Christians perceive Sunday as their holi-day. So, would we follow them

and shift our perception from Friday to Sunday? Do we have to change our lifestyle accordingly to western world?

I am not denying the importance of international correspondence and transaction. But how many companies or government offices have to execute such tasks? Schools, colleges and universities and local offices don't need this. So why will we shift our holi-day to Sunday? The holi-day can be partly altered only for offices of international companies, export-import agencies and few other offices.

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Sex education

This is in reference to Md. Aminul Hoque's letter dated October 8, 2003. The first four paragraphs of his letter discuss the issue of sex in a rather distant manner. However, he is entitled to his views.

But I do not understand this portion, "Let