The Baily Star

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Another Nudge for Police Reform

T is not without some valid reasons that the po-Lice role has been placed under some microscopic scrutiny by a rather worried civil society in our country. Litany of charges against the police force included occasional refusal to entertain cases, myopic or slothful investigation, flawed prosecution or arraignment, arbitrary arrests, custodial torture or deaths, delayed appearance at the scene of crime, bribery or extortion and variegated law enforcement failures. Amidst such a barrage of criticism the pieces of good work that the cops interminably posted on the scorecard were likely to be blurred, even though as a paper we have seldom failed to highlight any praise-worthy police action to our readers. But overall the police image has declined so sharply that it can no longer be dubbed as a mere crisis, of confidence between them and the public. Rather it borders on popular distrust now. Against this backdrop, it is essential that we

hear the police side of the story in order that a rational approach is taken towards formulating a police reform package commensurate with the democratic status of the country.

We get some valuable input from senior police officials by virtue of a front-page report in this newspaper on Saturday entitled " Police, DB & CID riddled with problems". The uniformed cops who man 21 police stations in a city populated by one crore people are altogether 3,010 in number. That adverse ratio aside, the paltry number of investigation officers at the police stations are distracted by VIP duties as the rest who are meant for crimecontrol purposes get whisked away to tail processions or be deployed at the venues of political meetings. The Detective Branch whose primary preoccupation ought to be prevention and detection of crimes works at half the capacity in those areas as 50 per cent of its workforce, officers and constables included, remains engaged in other kinds of activities - attending courts and training courses. let alone VIP duties. Furthermore, by modern standards, they are almost primitively equipped. Their poor salaries are only matched by poor budgetary allocations, especially under the heads considered vital in raising the level of police efficiency. Although their budget has been increased this time around, the emphasis of expenditure seems to be on decorative purposes.

It is our definite belief that the attention which the police received so far from the government and political parties has been much less than what they truly deserved. It is time we made amends for it with the pending police reform undertaken on a top priority basis.

Rein Them In

THE ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) appears to have developed a habit of hogging the headlines for wrong reasons. In recent times, there has been a sharp rise of incidents involving activists of the student wing of the party in power: intra-party feud and killings over tenders or territorial dominance of one commercial centre or the other, forcible occupation of residential and business complexes, abduction and extortion, obstruction of justice, the list could go on and on. Some 500 students at the Sir Salimullah Medical College, who boycotted classes and demonstrated in front of the principal's office on Saturday, have shown how desperate the situation has become at the victims' end. One fourth-year student purportedly even attempted suicide in an act of denunciation of BCL's sustained reign of terror on the college campus and at the halls of residence. Fortunately, he was not successful in his bid but he got the message through to all concerned.

Apparently, the central leadership of the ruling party does not have any hierarchic control over its student organisation. And even if it has, it is certainly not proving effective. Some senior leaders are alleged to have extended a blanket cover for whatever the BCL people do. The police, understandably, stay off harm's way. So arrogant the 'student leaders and activists have become that they don't hesitate to even intimidate the press. According to a report front-paged in the October 18 issue of the Prothom Alo, one of its district correspondents based in Meherpur has been stalked by BCL activists since last Monday. His fault is that he has filed a report on a certain incident involving one ruling party lawmaker which was considered 'detrimental' to his image. Now, not only the lawmaker himself rang the reporter up and subjected him to vitriol, he also allegedly unleashed his 'men' to hunt him down and teach him a lesson.

What could be more poignant a reflection of a fascistic mindset? We want to believe that it's not representative of the collective psyche of the ruling party. The prime minister has repeatedly vowed to rid his party and its front organisations of criminal and terrorist elements. On the ground, however, we see their proliferation. Once again, let us remind her that such highhandedness would eventually take a heavy toll on the ruling party if the latter does not put a brake on it.

Military Debate in US Presidential Election

the country's commander-in-chief, the Inext American president, like his predecessors, will oversee the most powerful military force in the world. Although former President George Bush started to downsize the US military soon after the Gulf war in 1991 and it is already reduced to its third, it still enjoys an overwhelming technological edge displayed so effectively during its confrontation with Iraq. But in a post cold war world threatened more by the regional conflicts, terrorism, pandemic diseases, cyberwarfare, rogue missile and humanitarian disaster to be number one in sheer might is not considered enough. Neither will it be sensible to fight two major wars simultaneously as they may erupt together in volatile Middle East and Asia-Pacific. The realities unfolding at the threshold of the 21st century point to the need for a versatile force that can wage war and at the same time keep peace. The realisation, it is not surprising, sparked off an animated military debate during the course of current presidential election in

the United States. Strangely, even after a decade of the collapse of Soviet Union the US military is still oriented and organised to fight an invading Red Army in central Europe. It continues to be unwieldy, slow and structurally outdated notwithstanding its Gulf war blitz. Some of these drawbacks were highlighted during last year's war

The most controversial issue facing the new president involves the fate of a missile defence system for shooting down nuclear, biological and chemical warheads launched by rogue states. The system has been widely assailed by scientists who question its feasibility and NATO allies who fear it would trigger a global arms race and by domestic critics who say that its projected cost of at least \$60 bn is too high.

sending apache helicopter, tanks and rocket launchers to neighbouring Albania. According to defence experts, Kosovo brought out the key challenges facing the US Army the need to field lighter, quicker and more mobile combat force. Consequently, it is going to involve the replacement of ageing equipment and restructuring of its heavy forces into lighter, more mobile units to meet the demands of changed strategic milieu. At the same time the Pentagon must figure out how to recruit and retain skilled personnel at a time of critical shortages.

In trying to address these challenges both the presidential candidates agree on one thing the need to increase spending on defence. But on just about every other issue they have divergent views. Republican George W Bush argues that Clinton administration has let the military decay with its budget cuts and because of ever increasing strains of peacekeeping and humanitarian missions around the world. He vows to boost spending but reduce military roles overseas. Bush would like to dramatically expand a proposed land-based national missile-defence system.

in Kosovo when US Army was He alleges that the Army is still systems such as the Lumbering ridiculed for taking weeks in more organised for cold war and not for the challenges of the new century. According to him, there is almost no relationship between the budget priorities and a strategic vision.

Al Gore, on the other hand,

crusaders, a mobile artillery system. The defence analysts said It was too big and heavy for modern warfare. Bush says he would 'skip a generation of weapons' proposing 'a culture of innovation' at the Pentagon. He likes to argues that the US military needs appoint a task force to determine

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

to be globally 'engaged'. He strongly supports the troops for peace keeping missions. He promises to raise the defence spending with an emphasis on gradual replacement of obsolete Reaganera weapons. Gore favours a more cautious approach to developing a missile defence. He wants to work with Russia to amend the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty which now bans defence system and wait, until engineers can make a land-based system

Bush blames Clinton-Gore administration of caving in to the services chiefs bent on buying expensive or outdated weapon

'how best to spend our resources' and redefine how 'war is fought and won'

Gore says in response that Bush's proposal would leave the services with outdated equipment at a time when hardware bought during the Reagan administration build-up of the mid-1980s is fast wearing out. A senior Gore adviser says that the task force review sought by Bush is already under way and should be completed early next year.

According to defence experts the debate over how to prepare the military for the challenges of the new century comes down to 'research and development with two key questions: What weapons

and equipment are needed? And how much the US should spend on them? Although there are indications in the arguments of both the candidates that the defence spending would perforce shoot up there is no answer to either of the questions in specific term. Although Bush sounds like the bigger military booster on the campaign trail, Gore is proposing to increase defence spending on the armed forces over the next decade by \$10 bn a year compared to \$5 bn a year sought by the Republican candidate. Both candidates' spending plans would come on top of a budget approved by congress and signed by President Clinton in August last. The new defence budget increases from \$305 bn in 2001 to \$332 bn in 2005. Despite Gore's bigger budget plan for Pentagon and also in spite of the fact that he would be the first Vietnam war veteran to occupy the oval office, Bush is viewed more favourably by military brass. It is perhaps because of the endorsements Bush received from the Gulf War heroes like Collin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf. It is also because of Bush's plan for pay increases and

spending.

Gore however responded with his plan for asking the congress to spend \$100 bn more on defence over 10 years. The Gore campaigners say that a lion's share of this amount i. e. \$80 bn would be spent for improving) living conditions of troops and modernizing weapons. Gore aids say that their candidate can propose more spending for the Pentagon than Bush because Gore's taxcut plan is smaller.

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Those factors, alongwith objections from Russia and two failed missile system tests this year persuaded Clinton several weeks ago to leave a decision to his successor. Bush blasted the White House for side stepping the issue and vowed to build a larger. more expensive system regardless of Russian opposition. Echoing Clinton's concern Gore has signalled that he would go slow on missile issue. Whosoever wins the next month's election, by all indications, it is going to be the heyday for the US militaryan additional \$45 bn in Pentagon industrial complexes.

Urban Space Goes Saffron: Hindutva's New Offensives

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

"Family values" may sound innocuous, like mother's milk. But this is a disciplinarian notion which emphasises hierarchy and authority, and restricts freedom and individuality, while perpetuating patriarchy. It is on such illiberal foundations that European fascism's ideological edifice was erected. The sangh parivar is building those very foundations.

ALENDAR-art recreations of Hindu mythology all along the Yamuna in Delhi? That's Mr Jagmohan's latest brainwave. Charged by the archaeologically unsound "theory" that Indraprastha existed somewhere near Purana Qila, he wants a Disneyland dedicated to a Pandava "theme village".

Each Pandava's pavilion will have a unique design. For instance. Bhima's will be an akhara. The project will span hundreds of hectares.

These pavilions are meant to inculcate samskaras. The minister is allotting Rs. 5 crore for a feasibility study alone. The project cost would be hundreds of times higher.

This spells Delhi's further architectural transformation. Already, the Yamuna's left bank is dotted with temples. The "theme village" will convert a "neutral" or "secular" public space accessible to all into a sectarian entity relevant only to some. Perhaps no other society has seen such retrograde landscape re-engineering barring perhaps ultra-conservative "Islamic" Saudi Arabia.

Like the British Empire which created Delhi's Eighth City, Mr Jagmohan wants to establish the NinthHindu Delhi, an amalgam of myth and modern technology, petty prejudice and power-driven ambition, money and mumbo-

This is an assault on anything approaching a civilised, urbane, not to speak of secular, sensibility. We'll soon be hoist with monuments to the BJP's sectarian prejudices which could prove hard to dismantlelike the makeshift Ayodhya "temple".

Mr Jagmohan's ill-conceived plan is as unbalanced as his "demolition" activity, which ends up bulldozing homes of the poor, while "regularising" the illegal, gross, mansions of the affluent. His latest achievement is the with amputated limbs.

The Yamuna plan puts Mr Jagmohan in the same league as Mr K.S. Sudarshan with his "swadeshi Church" demand. The demand is doubly offensive. First, he is poking his nose into the affairs of another religious com-

Worse, he casts aspersions upon the integrity of millions of citizens because they are, to him, lesser Indians, being non-Hindu. Such hate speech is morally and politically obnoxious. Free expression doesn't mean you

ema-hall without cause. Even less does it mean you question people's citizenship.

Hindus aren't more "Indian" because of their religion's origins. Christianity and Islam are as indigenous to India, indeed older here, than varna-based Hinduism. But even if someone's religious identity cannot be traced to ancient India, that is no reason for politically negating their democratic rights as citizens.

This is precisely the kind of anti-Jewish hate speech that Germany's "indigenists" and Aryan nationalists perfected "demolition" of shanties of people before Hitler's rise to power. This corroded the intelligentsia's sensibilities.

Senior BJP leaders like Messrs L.K. Advani, Jana Krishnamurthy, J.P. Mathur and Narendra Modi have endorsed Mr Sudarshan's "swadeshi Church" statement. Mr Bangaru Laxman hasn't, but going by his October 11 talk with U.S. ambassador Celeste, he too opposes conver-

So the BJP is taking us back to the rhetoric of all non-Hindus being suspect. What unites the BJP-VHP-RSS and their front scream "fire" in a crowded cin- organisations is precisely this

malign majoritarianism. They all lay claim to a superior "Hindu" identity by falsely rooting Aryans in Harappan civilisation, or grossly exaggerating the cultural achievements of Vedic Indians.

This "superiority" claim is used to demand privileges for a particular group. Its numerical strength is cited to invoke "democracy". But majoritarianism is the opposite of democracy. Democracy is based not on a permanent majority defined by ethnicity or religion, but on political majorities, which change.

Hindutva ideologues invent spurious archeological-historical theories to support their prejudices. The latest is "vedic" archaeology. Two eminent U.S.-based Indologists have thoroughly exposed this in Frontline and demolished the communal work of N.S. Rajaram. This claims to "prove" that the Harappans were pastoral Aryans on the basis of some Harappan seals.

In fact, Rajaram's computer "enhancement" of a unicorn seal into a horse is pure forgery. It is of such stuffvoodoo archaeology, distortion and manipulationthat Hindutva's claims to national

The saffron agenda is gathering particular momentum in education. Under the guise of morality, the National Council of Educational Research and Training is making "value education" mandatory for schoolchildren. It lists 83 "values"a confused, contradictory compen-

This will promote false pride in a glorified past and teach the child that if there is anything commendable in any civilisation or culture, it must be Indian, or rather, Hindu.

Universities too will have compulsory "value education". IIT Delhi will act as the "value" centre for all engineering colleges. The course is likely to include the teachings not just of Vivekananda and Chinmayananda, but also of the controversial Sri Sathya Sai Baba, even Brahmakumaris.

At this rate, education will collapse into religious instruction. Creationism will replace

The vague term "values" includes "spirituality, meditation, yoga and ways to manage the self". Now, one can understand the "value" of being truthful or diligent. But yoga and meditation aren't "values".

Such half-digested notions will produce incoherent syllabi bound only by a fiercely arrogant nationalism, and by emphasis on Hinduness and "family values". This last is the favoured lexicon of the Hard Right in America's Bible Belt. It is now being imported, wholesale into India.

"Family values" may sound innocuous, like mother's milk. But this is a disciplinarian notion which emphasises hierarchy and authority, and restricts freedom and individuality, while perpetuating patriarchy.

It is on such illiberal foundations that European fascism's ideological edifice was erected. The sangh parivar is building those very foundations. The BJP may not last long in power. But its poison will stay with us for a long timeunless we stop it now.

Postscript: After Mr Advani's emphasis on the RSS as the "guiding force" of his government, and his description of the RSS-BJP link as unbreakable (Oct. 17), it should be plain that the NDA is lurching dangerously Rightwards. As this column has been saying, Mr Advani seems set to succeed Mr Vajpayee. This makes Hindutva's menace even

To the Builton

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Frustrating facts

Sir, Shipu, Jewel, Rubel, Bushra, Mohsin, Sayem... the list goes on and on. To the ignorant, these may just seem a few names of people in the crowd, but what these names symbolise is the reign of terror that has become the hallmark of the society that we are currently living in-- the legacy of the present Awami League government. The names that I have just mentioned are all of deceased people and these unfortunate people share three common factors-- they were all brutally murdered, the perpetrators that masterminded these killings are all influential AL leaders or their kith and kin, and not a single one of the offenders has been captured as yet, nor does there seem the remotest chance of their ever being captured.

I wonder where the home minister's lofty promises have gone to regarding the capture and punishment of criminals irrespective of the party they belong to! How can all these killers still be absconding when we have always been led to believe that the hands of the law are very long indeed? Do the government think that we, the people of Bangladesh are so gullible as not to realise that all

these criminals could be captured if only the ruling party and the police truly desired? Why does AL have to raise a hue and cry about the 25-year old murder case of Bangabandhu all the time, when most people of this country are more concerned ted. about the prevailing deteriorating law and order situation? What pains me most as a con-

cerned citizen is that the people, as well as the media seem to wake up to a particular problem only after some form of irreparable damage has already been done. Case in point, the brutal murder of 12-year old schoolboy Muhit at Matrichaya Pre-cadet School at the hands of some butchers in human form, with a claim to being "students" themselves. Right after the incident, the newspapers were full of horrendous tales of atrocity and inhuman lifestyle led by the inmates of Matrichaya and many other similar institutions. Why could not these reports be made earlier, before a poor innocent boy had lost his life? Similarly, all the black deeds of the Gandaria Rifles Club have come to the forefront only after the flendish murders of Sayem and Mohsin. I am sure this was not the first or only instance of "mockery of justice" that Sumon and his henchmen prac-

tised there, of course with the blessings of the local police station. Then why was there no investigative report of their misdeeds ever published for the awareness of the relevant authorities? When it is an open secret that our police are the most corrupt and inefficient, it places an additional responsibility on the media to practice investigative journalism and uncover these stories and let the public become aware of the fact before, and not after, a crime has been commit-

As I write this letter, there may

be another Sumon passing on "divine justice" and another helpless Sayem or Mohsin undergoing horrisic torture or death at his hand, but we will get to know of it only after the deed has already been done. Then some sensational reports will be published for a few days and the whole incident conveniently forgotten. This is not an attack on the press, but an ardent appeal from a hapless countrymanplease do something to lift us from the dirty cesspool of politics practised by the ruling party and the useless musings of the inefficient opposition. Don't let the public forget these crimes or ignore them as a price to pay for being a Bangladeshi. Create such fearless reports that are able to raise fear in the hearts of these criminals, their political "godparents" and in the hearts of all corrupt policemen.

A Frustrated Citizen Dhaka

LPG price hike

Sir, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) is widely used as a domestic cooking fuel in some part of our country. During the eighty's Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) started marketing LPG through their three petroleum companies Padma, Meghna and Jamuna. These petroleum companies again appointed dealers to distribute LPG filled cylinders to the ultimate end users for their domestic cooking purpose.

Recently, while I was going through different local newspapers. I noticed that the price of LPG in the local market is rocketing like anything. To me it does not seem surprising because of awareness of LPG international price. But this is not applicable to general mass as they are hardly aware of LPG international price, as it is not their concern how this LPG is coming to their doorsteps.

At the fag end of '99, one of the private enterprises entered into local LPG market to mitigate the crisis of LPG where our natural gas pipeline is not available to the doorsteps of the ultimate end users or who cannot enjoy the benefit of natural gas. It may be mentioned, prior to that BPC's three petroleum companies are catering the same market. Since the demand supply gap was quite high, the government allowed private entrepreneurs to set up such type of LPG bottling filling plant in the country to mitigate the crisis of LPG as a domestic fuel.

Considering the recent scenario of international oil market, no body can foresee that this LPG price can shoot abnormally high. It may be mentioned that LPG is very much related to crude oil. According to Drewry, LPG Quarterly, from year '94 to 2000 price has increased almost 100 per

The present government has given permission to import LPG from abroad to alleviate the fuel crisis where natural gas pipeline is not available. According to present international LPG market if one goes to import LPG from abroad its landing cost comes to in BDT 22000+/metric ton i. E. per Kg 22+. Adding overheads and marketing cost (without mark-up) it comes to TK 28+ per KG of LPG.

Considering this present international LPG market scenario how one can supply 12.5 Kg of filled LPG cylinder at Taka 250 to 300 in spite of having strong desire to offer it at a competitive price in order to mitigate fuel crisis in northern and southern region of our country?

The present government is kind enough to waive VAT in import stage but imposing VAT in bottling stage ultimately cost to end users and as such it becomes unaffordable. We know that through BPC's three marketing companies, LPG is being marketed to the gas starved areas. which is not enough to cater the present demand. Considering this limitation, our present government allowed private entrepreneurs to import LPG and alleviate the crisis.

Considering from the end users' side as well as protecting our deforestation, I earnestly request the government to waive all sorts of duty and other taxes from LPG in order to supply it at a competitive and as well as at a affordable price.

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Dhaka

Exporting bad politics

Sir, We are so obsessed about exporting everything, that our leaders while travelling abroad do not hesitate to sell the bad political image of the country to the foreigners and the NRBs (nonresident Bangladeshis).

Political back-biting has now firmly entered into our culture. This political virus is now being carried by non-politician citizens also. God is one, but in this damned country the two begums demand and expect separate individual allegiance; thereby introducing dualism. When shall we be delivered from the clownish political culture which has now besieged the nation? May our leaders live long in isolation.

Dhaka