

Haris died after severe assaults

Who will 'police' the police?

WHAT could be more daunting for the soul of a nation than the case of a young and defenceless boy being picked up randomly by a posse of law enforcers and then being beaten until near death inside a police station? One would normally say that nothing could match such an outrage. But the death of the teenager Haris is taking a shape as outrageous as the deed that killed him. This is the cover up afterwards.

Having rendered their victim unconscious, Tongi police sent the boy to hospital where he ultimately succumbed to internal injuries. An 'unnatural death' case, citing asthma as the cause of death, was registered, the FIR being purged of any reference to injury marks on his body. Even after media reports and a public outcry forced the hand of the authorities, it took five whole days before an autopsy was performed. The DMCH autopsy report has confirmed that Haris was a victim of police brutality, sustaining multiple injuries and dying as a result of 'severe physical assaults'.

The question is, will those who killed Haris be charged and punished? Two policemen have been 'closed' or suspended from active duty and an inquiry committee headed by an ASP has been set up. But will this kind of mechanical departmental action lead to justice? As we have seen repeatedly in the case of Yasmeen, Seema, Rubel and many other victims of police brutality, when law enforcers themselves are culpable, departmental inquiries get nowhere. The machinery of power that police possess allows them to tamper with evidence in such a manner that framing charges in a court of law and making these stick becomes difficult, sometimes impossible, not to mention that cases take a long time to be disposed of.

A more viable and efficient option needs to be adopted. The concept of 'policing' the police themselves must be introduced, as it has been for police forces in other countries. An independent, empowered, supra body to look rapidly and efficiently into 'internal affairs' that smack of misuse of power and authority must be constituted in this country. The body must be independent of influence or partisanship from any vested quarters, particularly from within the law enforcement forces at all levels, investigating without fear and bringing law offenders to book.

Accountability of the police forces has become so eroded that nothing short of drastic measures can redress the situation.

EC's welcome step

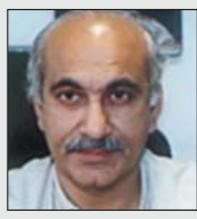
Good cheer for women voters

HOW vicious must have been the stranglehold of superstitious elements around those ten unions in nine districts that women in such pockets were held back from registering as voters for long thirty years. Obviously, it is the total lack of female names against the relevant columns on the voter-list that made the Election Commission sit up, take note of the void and have it quickly filled in with new entries. Fifty thousand women voters got thus enlisted. We wonder why this exercise was not carried out at the time of earlier electoral roll preparations, say in 1996, in view of the virtual disenfranchisement of so many eligible voters the omission entailed.

There is no question about *farwabaz* holding sway essentially over the men-folk; for, it is they who made sure that the women stayed put into their shells. With the local influential and those who passed the so-called religious edict in cahoots, a collective offence was committed against the law of the land. But if they were serious, the ring leaders could be easily spotted, proceeded against and made to pay for their offence. Why was no action taken against them by the local authorities for their brazenly denial of voting rights to those womenfolk? Somebody must answer that question.

The voters' list is going to be displayed at the union parishad level from May 27. The EC officials, local authorities, NGOs including FEMA in particular, need to work in concert to ensure that no woman voter is eventually left out of the registration process. In fact, the example set about 50,000 new women voters should enthuse others who remain excluded for some reason or the other to get registered in good time. Further down the road, at the election time, it must be ensured that all eligible women have cast their ballots.

Time for some cold business



M.J. AKBAR

I have always been curious about the motivation of this school. Why does anyone want power if they want to do nothing with power?

A second school has begun to lobby the Prime Minister for admission into its portals. The RSS, chief ideologues of a traditional BJP flank, wants the Prime Minister to do something: reverse. On economic policy their view is simple: stop the world, we want to get off. On social policy their attitude is not very much more complicated either: stop the

decimation in Uttar Pradesh would be a body blow. Some party thinkers are even suggesting that general elections be merged with the Uttar Pradesh polls so that the positive flavour message of keeping Mr Vajpayee in Delhi mitigates the negative current of the BJP's misrule and corruption in UP. That will not work, since the people will wonder why Mr Vajpayee is returning to electorate midway when they gave him a full term. But the hardliners are convinced that they cannot

one-side football match. The BJP kept scoring into an empty goal to loud applause from its supporters. The Opposition has not managed to put together a team yet, but you can be sure of one thing: quite a few goalkeepers are manning the post, and will not allow the kind of free scoring in which every minister began to pose like Pele. The last session of Parliament saw the BJP under pressure but it was uncoordinated pressure, largely because Mrs Sonia Gandhi could not draw

reached nowhere land, while the Left rearranged its ranks, consolidated and quietly awaited her return to the battlefield. By this time her behaviour had convinced the electorate that she was less of a general and more of general hysteria. The Marxists will be a replenished voice in the next session. The Prime Minister cannot hope to meet his political challenge by doing nothing.

He has to change the chemistry of the environment and revitalise the rationale of his government. A

that deafness can be cured, because the medicine is in Islamabad. Pakistan's General Pervez Musharraf continues to wait, with both ears alert, for an invitation to talks.

The one significant positive change over last year is the unforeseen shift in Washington's attitude to Delhi. The sharp rupture in Sino-American bonhomie is a principal reason for this, but Washington would not have turned on this arc if it also did not recognise India's potential to play a balancing role in Asia. To that extent it is in Washington's interest to encourage a solution to the India-Pakistan confrontation. In the Sixties, Washington used to dream of unity in the south of the Himalayas against China; but that is neither possible nor even particularly wise.

If Mr Vajpayee has the will, the world will find a way. He has some twelve weeks in which to set the high table for talks, because the General Assembly of the United Nations provides a convenient and neutral environment for talks. There are going to be no more Lahores, for which we should be grateful: practical steps towards a difficult peace, however small, are more useful than declarations of goodwill designed for good television.

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BYLINE

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future, we want some of that old-fashioned bloodshed from the past.

Mr Vajpayee has been what might be called a sporadic Prime Minister. Long stretches of calm are punctuated by bursts of creative energy. Long years in public life have made Mr Vajpayee a careful man. He raises a storm and then sits back and waits for the dust to settle. He believes that in the time-space thus created public opinion will move a little forward, towards the direction he wants to travel. That is his style. As one sympathiser pointed out, even when Mr Vajpayee had to get his knees operated, he did them one at a time, and a year in between.

Now that the BJP is wiping the floor (while Mamata Banerjee wipes her forehead), the same BJP spin-doctors are arguing that the finest adhesive for a coalition is called adversity. Why should any partner of the ruling party create a crisis that will be seriously injurious to its health? True: why should it? There are still some three years of power, privilege and summer jaunts to Europe and America to enjoy.

ask for a vote in Uttar Pradesh without reviving Ayodhya and sparking tension.

A communal fire is the only light at the end of a fundamentalist tunnel. If Mr Vajpayee accepts this advice, he will destroy much of what he has achieved since his improbable thirteen days in office four years ago. Every single element of his agenda will burn in that fire, his economic policy, his integrative social policy, and of course his Pakistan and foreign policy. The Vajpayee legacy will be that of a chaotic meteor, which promised good fortune but turned into an ill omen. Mr Vajpayee himself would not survive such a shift in strategy, for the very good reason that he would be incapable of implementing it. A different leader would be required and would be found.

The second option is to do nothing. This is tempting: the path of least resistance always is. The problem for the Prime Minister is that this is not going to work either. From the last general elections to this moment, Indian politics was a

line between a personal issue and a political cause. She did not, and could not, get support from other Opposition parties for her demand that the House should not function as long as there was any attempt to conduct an enquiry against her. The Congress, typically, placed her well-being over larger national issues. But that session was a match in the qualifying rounds; the real contest will begin in the next session of Parliament. All the Opposition parties are buoyant and revived by electoral success: the Congress survived its own mistakes to squeak past in Assam and took Kerala handsomely in the company of its partners. Jayalalitha humiliated the DMK, a partner of the BJP, in Tamil Nadu. Paradoxically, the only result from which the BJP could have drawn an element of satisfaction was Bengal, where the Left neatly outthought Mamata Banerjee. An analogy from military warfare would be appropriate: Mamata charged early and vigorously; the Communists simply opened a passage and let her charge right through their ranks. She kept charging ahead until she

reshuffle always helps, but we cannot expect too much drama from the shuffle that Mr Vajpayee has promised. There is a section that is pressing for a change in the finance ministry, but Mr Vajpayee is unlikely to oblige the hardliners who want swadeshi instead of liberalisation. This is going to be a Cabinet expansion, a distribution of rewards and bonuses, rather than a reshuffle of portfolios or a major induction of heavyweights who can contribute their individual credibility to the exercise of policy. Mr Vajpayee will have to do more to change the mood of the country.

There is room for a dramatic thrust in one area: Kashmir, and of course in relations with Pakistan. The stage was set last year for a positive and even imaginative play when Mr Vajpayee announced an unilateral ceasefire in the valley. That opportunity was wasted in dithering provoked by clashing views at the top levels of the BJP. (In the process the government made Syed Ali Shah Geelani into a minor hero.) The stage is being re-set now. Mr K.C. Pant has begun his dialogue with the deliberately deaf. But

Chinese Premier's visit: Significant for Pakistan



M.J. ZAHEDI

China began to figure prominently in Pakistan's horizon. The reason for this was the Indian drive towards hegemonism, which was so obvious in its dealings with Pakistan, its immediate, but much bigger, neighbour. This also was the reason that had driven Pakistan towards America in the first place --- in search of allies in the face of India's drive for hegemony.

But one of the turning points of Pak-US relations was Pakistan's

This was a major diplomatic coup and one that helped realign the world. But Pakistan did not benefit from this coup much, beyond strengthening its friendship with both Peking and Washington. China at that time was in the throes of the Cultural Revolution and the USA was still mired in Vietnam. In this atmosphere came the 1971 India-Pakistan war. China offered help to Pakistan but on the same terms as it

Mao era and the resurrection of Deng Xiaoping in China and the replacement of Bhutto by Zia-ul-Haq in a military coup did not have any adverse effect on the relationship. Events in Afghanistan were another chance for Pakistan to improve its relations with the USA. More so since the Reagan administration saw China as a counterpoise to USSR. At this time Pakistan became a nuclear power for which USA and Russia wrongly accused

been moving to normalise its relations with USSR and India. This reduced the importance of Pakistan a little bit though. The Pakistan-China relations became to some 'boring' but to Pakistan itself 'stable'.

After the Taliban, came Pakistan's entry into the nuclear club. This irritant too was already offset by India's entry into the club. Pakistan was a counter-balance. Then came Kargil, which again was another embarrassment for China's

against which China seems to be leading in international opposition. This may force China to look more kindly upon Pakistan but only a little more kindly, according to daily 'The Nation', because paradoxically Pakistan has less international influence now than at any time since the early 70's.

Therefore, 'The Nation' advised Pakistan to make the best use of the help that China has given and make good use of the atmosphere created by prime minister Zhu's visit.

China appears to have forgotten all that has happened in the meantime. 'The Dawn' pointed out to the signing of no less than six agreements and a memorandum of understanding on the first day of the Chinese PM's visit 'testifies to the continuation of close cooperation and friendship' between the two countries.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

The signing of no less than six agreements and a memorandum of understanding on the first day of the Chinese PM's visit 'testifies to the continuation of close cooperation and friendship' between the two countries.

refusal to send troops, even a token contingent, to Vietnam. Pakistan did not even issue a statement supporting US intervention in Vietnam. Pakistan considered the fighting there as between colonial and anti-colonial forces, and not between communism and democracy as the Americans portrayed it to be.

Then when, in 1965, USA offered to help Pakistan in its war with India, Pakistan looked to the Chinese for some kind of help.

The high point of Pak-China relationship came when President Yahya Khan arranged for US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's visit to Beijing (then known as Peking)

did in 1965. After Yahya Khan's fall, it was the original architect of Pakistan's China policy, then foreign minister and now prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who reaped the benefit of the friendly ties with China. Peking came to Pakistan's aid in its defence production indigenisation programme. Pakistan pulled out of SEATO and CENTO and wished to join the non-aligned movement. All these were interlinked moves and the Chinese link was crucial in all these.

That the strategic relation was important to both countries is signified by the fact that at the end of the

China of giving the necessary help. But this did not endear China to the USA. USSR and, of course, India. Moreover some pinpricks began to cause some strains in Sino-Pakistani relations. First, in the early nineties after the end of the Afghan war, some Islamic groups, including former Afghan veterans, started operating in China's sensitive province of Xinjiang; they had backing from some Pakistani religious parties. Of course, the Pakistan administration fought it out and stopped that. Afterwards relations came under strain again when the Taliban took over Afghanistan.

In the meantime China had also attempt to normalise its relations with India. Although China offered to support Pakistan in case the stray battles developed into war but it was non-committal about how the support would materialize. It advised Islamabad to get out while the going was good.

Pak-China relations, at the moment, are not as straightforward as before. But China might now find itself ready to overlook some of these irritants because it itself is running into repeated troubles with the Bush administration. India also is cosying up to the USA as its welcoming of the national missile defence initiative would show but

that

China's entry into the world trade organization this year should help Pakistan as well as other developing countries as China would be lowering its import tariff.

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



Begging business

A group of beggars are enjoying an afternoon tea-break at Uttara. The influx of beggars is increasing each and every day posing a serious problem for city dwellers. Begging has turned out to be a profitable business, reflecting the deteriorating and fragile economy of the country. Is there any plan by the government to rehabilitate this indigent community and turn it into a constructive human resource?

Erratum

In your editorial "Law of Lawlessness" (16 May), it was stated that the nephew of the State Minister of Environment and Forests bashed a teacher's face and broke his nose. But in the "Daily Prothom Alo" (May 17), it has been said that the same person, I mean the accused Lemon is actually the nephew of the State Minister of Communications Anisul Huq Choudhury. It seems that whoever wrote this editorial did not collect enough information and did not bother to browse through other newspapers.

In fact, in the 16th May issue another news came out in the "Daily Prothom Alo" in its 7th column of the last page which continued to the 15th page, stating that the accused Lemon was not related to the State Minister of Environment and Forests instead he was related to the state minister for communications Anisul Huq Choudhury.

I hope that *The Daily Star* would practice healthy journalism and help those politicians who are, even today, far away from being corrupt and trying to keep up their good image.

I feel it would only be proper and fair if the acknowledgement of the mistake on the part of the writer would be highlighted in your news media in such a way so that the unnecessary damage that has been

done to a well respected individual can be revoked.

Rashed

Dhaka

We regret the error and inconvenience caused. --Editor

Our media, their media

For last few weeks, I have been monitoring Indian newspapers like 'Times of India', 'Teherka', 'Hindi' etc through the Internet. It is important that we do not discount the role of Indian propaganda media.

During the last couple of years, the Indian media have been well organised in propagating their own version of stories to general readers through the Internet. Yet, I was amazed to read an article in Teherka where the authors don't even know where the 16 BSF soldiers have died during the recent border clash.

The author thought that they died in Padua in Sylhet division, whereas they have died in Baraibar, Roumari, Kurigram district. After going through this report, I was completely misguided.

We, Bangladeshis, don't know how to utilise the media, especially the Internet media. We don't know how to influence the citizens of other countries with our news. Our media,

including the Internet, newspapers, TV etc, are not smart enough compared to that of the Indians. But I do strongly believe it is temporary. In the near future, the situation will definitely be changed. It is time to be more cautious about it in our own interest.

Our government, senior columnists and intellectuals are too India. They still live in the 60's and 70's. They have serious problems in understanding the current international and national politics. The "old version software" that runs on their brain needs to be upgraded very soon.

Sohail Ahmad
Massachusetts, USA, on e-mail

In a later report (DS, March 23), it was pointed out that he threatened the tribals to release the foreign hostages, otherwise he would send in 10,000 trained activists to ensure their release.

This reads like fiction, and needs

official clarification. What's going on?

Citizen

Dhaka

PDB & BTB

The Awami League government would be doing a great public favour if, before