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**Hunted!**  
First trees and shrubs, and now the earth and boulders ... the onslaught of human greed continues.  
— Star photo: A K M Mohsin

## The vanishing hills

### Greedy business colludes with law keepers in Chittagong and elsewhere

By Shehab Ahmed and Nurul Alam

Indiscriminate levelling of hills for collection of earth, gravel and chips are going on in the country unabated particularly in Chittagong, greater Chittagong Hill Tracts, Cox's Bazaar, Comilla, greater Sylhet and Mymensingh, despite an official ban.

A section of unscrupulous traders in collaboration with law keepers and officials are busy cutting hills in these areas, selling earth and chips for business. The trees come as bonus.

Bounty hunters have already levelled the famous Lalmai range in Comilla that once cradled an ancient Buddhist monastery and university.

The influx of Rohingya refugees in 1991 led to decimation of huge tracts of virgin forests and hills in Cox's

Bazaar. Land grabbing farmers, builders and riff-raffs found an easy source of income from hills expanding their land, denuding it off trees and shrubs and then the earth and boulders followed. Roadside brick and chip sellers bear testimony to their achievement, which is a cheap source of raw material for builders.

In Chittagong city the worst affected areas are Nasirabad, Devpahaar, Lalkhanbazar, Shahinagar, Jalalabad, Zakir Hossain Road and southern bank of the River Karnafuli.

A section of earth and gravel traders and brick field owners persuade poor people to settle on the hill fringes. As they clear space for their huts, the rains do the rest, loosening the fragile ecosystem, already stripped off tree and shrub cover.

would be taken against them soon, he said.

Kilometres of once green hills have been turned bare. First came the trees and shrubs and then the earth and boulders followed. Roadside brick and chip sellers bear testimony to their achievement, which is a cheap source of raw material for builders.

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Then come the big guys, at night, using often, earth excavators to complete their jobs.

In some places apartment builders have taken over the hills, razed them to raise high rises.

Such homebuilders care little about the Chittagong Development Authority (CDA)'s restrictions, concerned sources said.

Police hardly notice such activities despite the 1990 act by CDA banning it, sources said.

"We go for action with the help of police when we get information during the day but unscrupulous people, nevertheless, go about their business nocturnally, in secret. We cannot do anything about it, alone. We have to depend on the police."

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A view from  
**GULY**  
By Tawfiq Aziz Khan

Cricket has been transformed into a video game that is played by live characters instead of simulated ones. The limited overs version has given the dwindling game a boost that otherwise would have been impossible without the help of computers and satellites. The once gentle game of the 'gentlemen' has caught the men on the streets with fever and it is no longer an exclusive domain of the high and the mighty or the rich and the privileged. In spite of being one of the largest spectator sports, cricket has also grown into a multi-billion dollar industry having a clientele in the most densely populated areas of the world. We owe our gratitude to the TV channels, satellite companies and multinational and large and small business houses for promoting and supporting

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## River raiders continue to reign

### Encroachers elbow the flood embankment into the Buriganga

By Morshed Ali Khan

Encroachment on the river Buriganga has reached such an extent that the authorities are forced to build the Dhaka flood protection embankment on the river at the Islambagh and Kamalbagh points.

The engineer at the embankment construction site, Amanat Hossain of Bengal Development Corporation, a contractor of the Water

Development Board (WDB), told this correspondent at Islambagh that some makeshift houses were evicted from the river but none of the illegal but permanent structures could be removed. As a result, the location of the embankment had to be shifted, Hossain said.

A top engineer of the WDB, requesting anonymity, said they were facing a lot of prob-

lem in constructing the embankment due to indiscriminate encroachment. "I have never seen anywhere that a river gets sold in this way. I think the Dhaka district Deputy Commissioner's office should answer how these people could produce such documents justifying the ownership of the Buriganga River."

Madrasahs, mosques, fac-

tories and housing are growing like mushrooms in the river on its stretch between Jhaochar and Sewarighat. With the rise in the level of water in the Buriganga, the infringement is clearly evident everywhere. The stretch of the river between Kamrangirchar and Islambagh has shrunk to a mere 50 feet with hundreds of makeshift houses engulfing the river.

All along the river route, many encroachers told this correspondent that they had papers to prove that they own the land. When this correspondent pointed out that the structures were situated on the river, the reply was that in dry season the land could be visible.

On the north-western side of Kamrangirchar (Kamrangirchar is an island in the river Buriganga about half a kilometre wide and three kilometres long and mostly inhabited by people of lower income groups), at Jhaochar under Hazaribagh thana, a two-storey madrasah called Esak Abad Madrasah has encroached upon approximately 50 feet of the river.

Further down at Munshirhat Nadirpar, a black (in-shed godown has been built by filling up the river. Mohammad Faruk, a resident caretaker, said that the godown belonged to one Sirajuddin Sahab who lives in Urdu Road. An elderly person nearby said Sirajuddin had plans to expand his boundary by another 100 feet into the river.

One of the most aggressive infringements is visible at Huzsurpara where a massive half-built structure is standing on the river. The offenders, Venus Electrical and its sister

concerns, have taken up the part of Buriganga. Manager of the plant Poritosh Barua said the industry belonged to one ABM Firoze who lives at Palashi near Azimpur.

"We have all the documents for this construction and land," claimed Poritosh. Asked whether they had any permission from Rajuk, he replied that Kamrangirchar was out of Rajuk's jurisdiction.

But Poritosh then contradicted his own claim by saying that the construction had to be stopped after the Bangladesh Shipping Directorate served a notice. "We have submitted our papers to the directorate and because we are halfway through with our construction, the BSP officials have promised that they would arrange for leasing out the land to us."

Following Venus' suit, Akhtaruddin who resides near the company's office, has raised a concrete boundary wall stretching at least 200 feet into the river.

"When one person extends his boundary into the river, neighbours get encouraged and thus the river is slowly being eaten up," said a boatman at Madrasahpara. Nearby, a massive riverfilling work was in progress for construction of teachers' residence of the Nuria Madrasah which, the madrasah officials said, was set up by one Hafezzi Huzur.

Successful governments have so far promised that the Buriganga would be freed from illegal encroachments and pollution. But the river is being devoured at an alarming rate before the very eyes of the authorities.

## Return of the prodigal sons

### A heroes' welcome awaits the cricketers today

By Nazmul Ashraf

Our cricketers come home today. They are heroes after mind-boggling win over heavyweights Pakistan in the World Cup, and a grand reception from

120 million proud Bangladeshis awaits them.

A Biman flight carrying the Bangladesh cricket team touches down at the Zia Inter-

national Airport at 8.45am.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and State Minister for Sports Obaidul Quader will receive the cricketers at the airport, said Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials who will also be present there.

From the airport, the entourage will drive straight to the National Parade Square at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar to attend a public reception scheduled to start at 10am. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will attend the

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## Menacing or meek McGrath?

### Titans of the willow game meet today in a do-or-die battle

LONDON, June 3: Australian fast bowler Glenn McGrath faces his toughest World Cup test when he runs in against India's mighty batting side in a make-or-break second round clash at the Oval here on Friday, says AFP.

The lanky paceman, who took just five wickets in the first four matches, struck

timely form with five for 14 against the West Indies on Sunday to lift Australia into the Super Six.

McGrath now comes up against the in-form Indian trio of Saurav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar in a match both sides need to win to have a realistic chance of making the semi-finals.

India and Australia squeezed through to the next stage on run rates and without a single point carried over from the first round. They may have to win all three matches to stay in the tournament.

Ganguly, Dravid and Tendulkar have been in awe-some form while notching up

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## The growth tangle

### Ministers come up with 'detailed picture'

By Staff Correspondent

Bumper production of Boro this season contributed to a 5.2 per cent GDP growth rate against the projected 3.8 per cent for the current financial year, two ministers retorted yesterday amid skepticism by certain quarters about authenticity of the figure.

"It is miraculous, no doubt. We posted a 5 per cent growth rate in the bumper production of Boro. Yet, after a conservative estimate of crop yield, we have calculated the GDP growth to be 5.2

per cent. This has created a strong base for achieving 7 per cent growth in the coming fiscal", said Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Minister of State for Planning.

He joined Food and Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury and Prime Minister's Agriculture Advisor M Anisuzzaman at a news conference held in the city yesterday to give a "detailed picture" on the issue.

When journalists asked

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## Saifur calls it 'doctored'

By Staff Correspondent

Former Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman has termed "absurd and irrational" the government's projected GDP growth rate of 5.2 per cent for the current fiscal.

"A person who has minimum economic sense would not believe that the growth rate can be 5.2 per cent this fiscal. It is absolutely a doctored estimate," he said.

He was chairing a workshop on promotion of private investment for industrial devel-

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## The powers that be

By Staff Correspondent

Two ruling party leaders, Muhiur Rahman Manik MP of Sunamganj and Afzal Khan of Comilla, addressed a gathering of party activists and supporters yesterday in front of Comilla Central Jail -- Manik from inside the jail gate and Afzal outside -- sources in the district town said over telephone.

Afzal Khan, Chairman of Bangladesh Cooperative Bank Limited and former general secretary of Comilla district Awami League, was granted bail by the Additional District and Sessions Judge yesterday. He was ordered to appear before the court for trial court on June 7.

Afzal was arrested on Tuesday on charge of embezzling more than Tk eight crore of the bank in 1987. The Bureau of

Anti-corruption filed a case against Afzal, also a chargesheeted accused in the sensational Shankar Kumar Das murder case.

Muhiur Rahman Manik was arrested in connection with bomb blast at his Chhatakar residence.

Meanwhile, road communication between Dhaka and Chittagong, disrupted due to barricades put up by Afzal's supporters at Comilla, resumed around midnight Thursday night after withdrawal of barricades.

Second Additional District and Sessions Judge Shamsun-nahar Begum granted bail to Afzal in the corruption case.

Later, supporters of Afzal brought out a procession and held a rally.

## Too many missed deadlines

### Local polls suffer delay as ministry fails to act

By Nurul Kabir

The government seems to have developed a habit of failing to hold elections to various local bodies on time.

The Union Parishad elections were held nine months later than originally scheduled. The municipal polls went even better, finally taking place 11 months after the original date. The original deadline for holding the City Corporation polls, previously slated for April 4

last, have already been shifted to October 27 this year.

The polls of the country's third tier of local government -- Upajila Parishad -- is likely to embrace similar fate.

Elections to 463 Upajila bodies are scheduled to be held by July 30 this year. But there are ample indications that schedule is set for another round of revision. The polls might eventually take place sometime be-

tween October this year and January next year.

The main reason behind the failures to hold the elections in time appears indifference on the part of the government, especially the Ministry of Local Government.

The Upajila Parishad Act was passed by the parliament on November 25 last year. The law says that it will take effect from a date to be determined by

the government through gazette notification.

Once approved by the House, the LGRD ministry simply 'forgot' to publish the gazette notification. The ministry finally brought out the gazette on January 28, thanks to Election Commission's reminders.

The gazette says that the law will take effect from February 1, 1999 and elections will be

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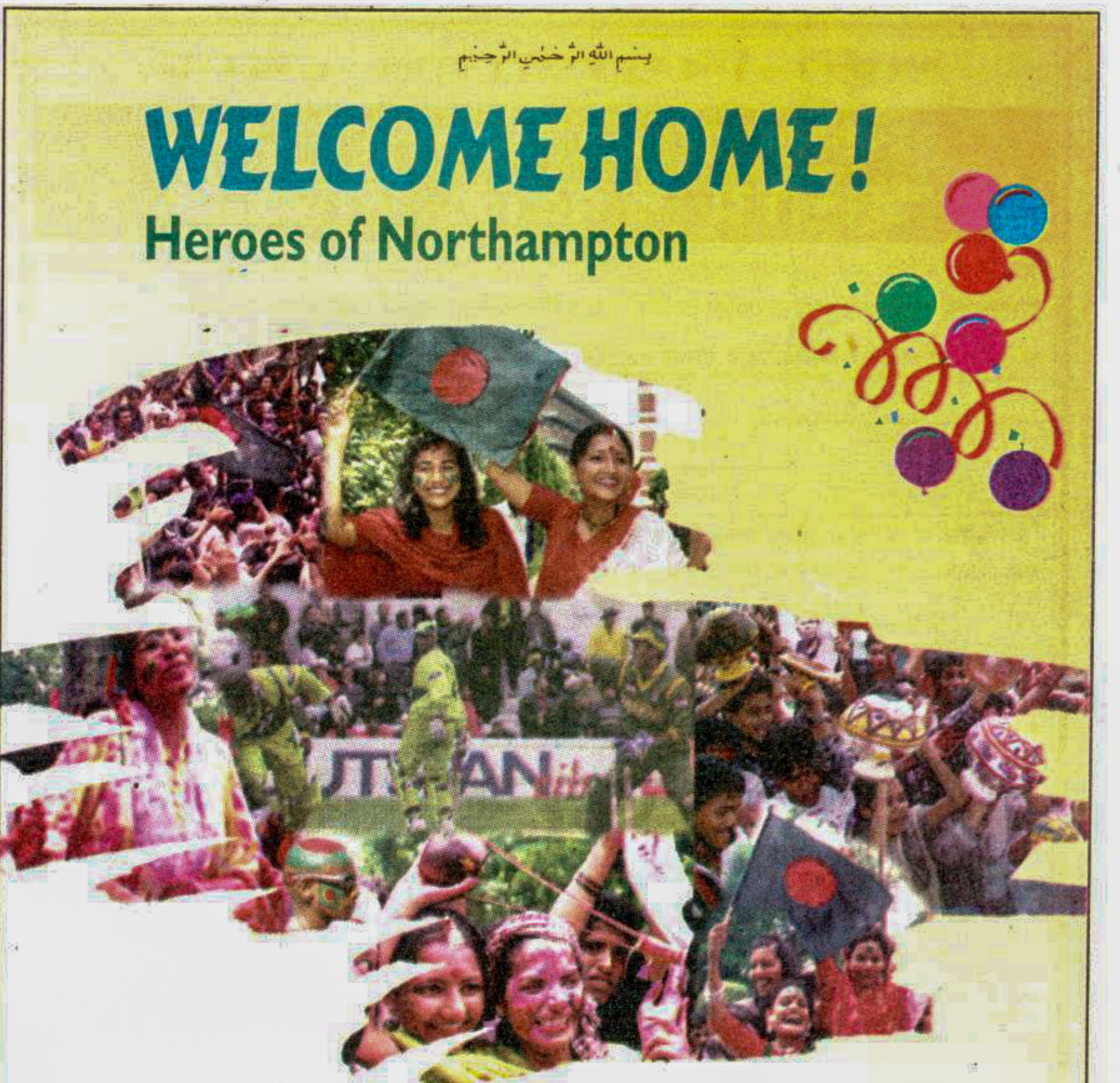


### TODAY'S MATCH

India vs Australia  
Venue: The Oval  
Live Coverage: BTv and Star Sports (3:45 pm)

### TOMORROW'S MATCH

South Africa vs Pakistan  
Venue: Trent Bridge  
Live Coverage: BTv and ESPN (3:45 pm)



The Bangladesh cricket team's victory over mighty Pakistan has proved that anything is possible if one works in harness in trusted partnership.



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