wisely and on and on. The television

spectators, we are not permitted on

**DHAKA TUESDAY JUNE 4, 2002** 

# Controversy over upazila system

MPs should have an advisory developmental role

HE cabinet committee formed last November to examine the desirability of upazila system remains undecided on the issue even after five meetings held so far. The system introduced during the Ershad regime was discontinued by BNP government in 1991 through the scrapping of the Upazila Act. The subsequent Awami League government revived it under an amended act back in 1998. It is basically the extant law that is being addressed by the cabinet committee to either recommend change in the law to continue with the system or scrap it.

The six-member cabinet committee's last meeting on Sunday ended on a note of dissent. The ministers fell apart on the question; two of them arguing in favour of the system, three against it while LGRD minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan chose to remain non-committal. Those on the negative side harped on a development role for the MPs arguing that this would come in conflict with the upazila parishad if it were to be introduced. Committee members favouring the system's revival, however, asserted that upazila parishad merits consideration as the focal point of a decentralised local government system.

A certain controversy has been stirred on whether MPs should take a development role on top of their primary function as lawmakers. This debate seems wholly unnecessary for the cogent reason that if the legislators were to compromise on their raison detre what remains of their locus standi?

The MPs think they must have a say in development projects being proposed or undertaken in their respective constituencies. Does having a voice mean they will have claim to allocations of money and the right to execution of projects? Such thinking is neither administrative nor developmental. It is patently political and self-serving with constituency nurturing through dispensation of favours being the agenda there.

What they are conveniently forgetting is just as the MPs, the chairmen of the union, upazila and zila councils are elected functionaries, too. So, the legislators cannot claim any prerogative over the chairmen, especially where local developmental functions are the legitimate concerns of the latter category of elected officials.

All this works out to the bottom-line that we have a local government structure which is autonomous fully in accord with what is seen in the rest of the democratic world. If effective decentralisation is what we are looking for, that's the way to go about it. Ideally, the MPs should at best have an advisory role in local development affairs.

## India refuses talks with Pakistan at Almaty

An ignored problem becomes a global threat

HILE India and Pakistan continue to sit with their hands on the war button, Indian PM Atal Behari Vajpayee has refused to hold a meet with Pakistani PM Pervez Musharraf at Almaty in Kazakhstan. He is demanding that Pervez Musharraf stop supporting militants who are crossing over to Kashmir and causing mayhem there. It has increased global anxiety.

Vajpayee's position is being interpreted as rigid by many as he has refused a chance to negotiate. Since the US and other global bodies are seeking a way to avert what has become a real possibility-a nuclear nightmare-this refusal will draw criticism.

Part of the reason why a solution seems so far is that the problem was allowed to become so big. The condemnations, sanctions and persuasions have been half-hearted because conventional wisdom said no one could use nuclear weapons knowing what they could do. Again, it was a cold war model based logic. As various events show, models have a habit to go awry and political behaviour is at best unpredictable. Now things may have gone very far.

The Indo-Pak situation is a global problem and it has now grabbed attention with their nuclear fingers. It does mean that the world will have to be actively involved with the production of peace in the region. If Vajpayee has refused to avail a window of peace at this moment, he is only following global political culture. And India knows that the world has very few leverages with it unlike Pakistan.

Almost everything is wrong about the handling of South Asia by the power giants. The peace seekers are better at war than peace mongering and that's what makes creating environment for negotiations difficult. Nobody remembers or knows how it's done. By refusing peace talks at Almaty, the Indian PM is unfortunately following the behaviour models set up by the big powers. But we hope the two countries will seek peace because the flag won't mean much when the state isn't physically left to celebrate it.

# We, those who are to die young, salute you

# A gladiator called Hansie Cronje is dead



**AFSAN CHOWDHURY** 

IS death brought a tragic end to a tragic life. For most of his living days, he stood taller than others, the king among captains, the unblinking, unsmiling leader who always brought his team and his people home. At the last World Cup, the South Africans played like warriors but in the end lost in a memorable semi-final, far greater in substance than the final which saw Australia romp home over a strangely docile Pakistan. But there was smell of match fixing already in the air and most fingers pointed to South Asia. Hansie was too steely jawed to be a cheat but within months he was stalked, shadowed and ultimately speared by the very people the cricket world pointed fingers at. And Hansie Cronje was first assassinated as a player and then killed this week in a plane accident. Like they did to many gladiators, he had no weanons on him when he died. They had taken his bat away for life.

had mutual friends we found.

"Apartheid is going but not white way the society is managed. Living

F one is looking for balance and

consistency in a nation's foreign

policy, the United States of

The US was greatly exercised

over the May 14 carnage at

Kaluchak, in which 30 people were

killed. President Bush even called

Prime Minister Vajpayee to express

concern. But there was hardly a

squeak from Washington over the

butchery of 900 people in Gujarat

which has shaken this society far

India's foreign and strategic policy.

Under the Vaipavee dispensation, it

has become India's principal

adviser, ally and partner. The

reverse is not true. The one-sided

nature of Indo-US relations should

To be blunt, the US increasingly

treats its allies shabbily, sometimes

worse than neutral powers. Never

before has the US cared less for

their views on a range of issues:

from global warming to the "anti-

terror" campaign, and "missile

On each of these, America takes

Today, the Europeans have

replaced once-Non-Aligned Third

World countries like India as the US

defences", to the West Asian crisis.

unilateral, adversarial positions--

The US is the cornerstone of

America will be a weak candidate for

"But you have a cricket team now?" I was light hearted.

"We white people like cricket Black people like soccer."

We talked about some hideous experiences of apartheid I had had while crossing over to Namibia through his country. Nothing is scarier than a South African segregated airport or a newly freed Mos-

"It will take long for us to become normal human beings. We are all still

just listen to the thoughts. It could be as much about Hansie.

success as he is by failure, by how he faces up to the possibility of both physical and mental, to turn failure, near-failure, into a glorious

This is not only something that is character-revealing but also, more significantly, a defining process that

simply because he responds to crisis first like a fighter and then like a cricketer." (Nirmal Shekar, The Hindu)

It's Hansie's profile too.

DO we seek the quenching of our blood thirst or the pleasure of sports? Hansie Cronje did a terrible thing. He got caught after taking money. Worse, he got caught in India taking money from Indian hands. Those not familiar with South

criminal if you are caught in India.

THE browns, right in the middle, are

neither wholly trusted nor wholly

denied. It's simpler to be a black or a

white but if you are coloured, you are

nowhere. In apartheid's Johannes-

burg, it was different but in recently

liberated South Africa, it's all mixed

up. Hansie was part of a mix up, a

cheat caught in a land of people

thought as exploiters also. Where

even Gandhi is an ambivalent figure.

asked me. "You are an Asian, Mus-

that seemed to be spread larger

than the heat bleaching the poorer

"HE was honest and not like the

others who were not caught. He

admitted that he had taken money.

He was brave." This was a colleague

"I admired him so much. He was

lim or Guiarati?'

parts of the town.

A young waiter at the hotel had

I had no answer to his confusion

money in Bangladesh vet they were both doing so for a cricketer in South

There were many other voices elsewhere. Newspapers have given long pages to it. On BBC Online it was story number one. On BBC World it was the no 1 headline even as the Indo-Pak war was hotting up.

Cronje had been banned but he seemed to have conquered the ban. Had we forgiven a thief and a

Or had we forgiven ourselves?

THE gladiators were professional

sportsmen who provided thrills to

the Romans and more their society

decayed greater was the demand

for thrills and variations. The gladia-

tors who survived the fights lived out

a decent life with a pension. They

were the exact replicas of the retired

It seems we don't want the

sports, we want the fight. We want

the betting, the blood letting, the

gush of hate and joy, the pleasure of

the kill, the ecstasy of conquest and

the self-pitying and self-hating

pleasures of defeat. We don't mind

the cheating, we mind being found

out and disturbing our world. And

Cronje was caught. If there is any

anger that's because of taking our

illusions away. We demand to be

told of real injuries; that the crunch-

ing hit of the ball against the helmets

and the twisted ankle and the dislo-

cated shoulders are all real. At least

gladiator even in their playing gear.

MILLIONS are spent on adverts

showing stars jostle to drink colas

and dance on the stage and ride

The cricket player resembles the

sportsmen of today.

Life is no longer real but something that has to be watched from a distance through a camera into another world miles away so that we can cheer and applaud in safety and imagine ourselves in a commercial selling a soft drink in our own cricket

YES, Hansie was a fantastic captain and a player but in the end he was just a cheat and a thief. We think he did nothing wrong because that's what we all do. Even the confession of a crime is thrilling to us. We can't condemn him because we can't condemn ourselves. If we did we would have to say that it's not all right

We are saying- read the papers we have already said it -- don't get caught and even if you do we are going to cheer you for saying so. We shall find reasons to cheer our hero even if we run out of reasons.

pain. Because we can't win any-

is the metaphor of our second-hand virtual existence. The most demanding thing we can dare to do is to decide whether to watch Sri Lanka or India getting bashed. But we don't deny, that in this life, that's the most significant thing we can do. As

the field. We are condemned to be observers only. And so we cheer those on the field, those who can get involved, even in faking, cheating, black money making, winning

 $gear \, to \, a \, lovely \, girl \, who \, never \, was.$ 

to cheat.

It's not about theft at all. It's about watching paid gladiators. Not cricket but the thrill of watching winners and losers without getting involved. And blood and death and disgrace and

AS gladiators would say before a bout began: "Those of us who must die young salute you.' Goodbye Hansie Cronje, our

counterpart, our brother.

Afsan Chowdhury is a Senior Assistant Editor of



BEAUMONT House is the name of the BBC hostel in London and it serves a typically continental breakfast of juice, cereals, margarine, yogurt and jam but the company that assembles each morning at the table is even nicer. BBC people from all over the world descend there and you meet people you would never meet elsewhere even by chance. I met an Afrikaner journalist who was also an anti-apartheid activist. We

man's rule. You will not understand apartheid unless you have lived under it. It's not about laws but the under it, you become part of it."

PRAFUL BIDWAI

writes from New York

a high rank

more gravely.

worry us.

ignoring its allies.

"Man is not defined so much by

failure, by how he deals with crisis, how he stretches his resources, triumph.

African society will not understand separates not merely boys from men but men themselves from gladiators. that in that deeply cleavaged land, And Steve Waugh is the greatest the colour of skin is also the flag of your enemy. In South Africa, you are more an embarrassment than a

times -- and certainly no active cricketer -- could have faced up to failure with quite the same gladiatorial intensity and single-mindedness as has Steve Waugh time after time

laboratory for observation as well as a cruel business because the situations it creates strip a man to his essentials. There is nowhere to hide, nothing to cover yourself with. It is both a great professional's

response. When you are playing for your life, you first minimise and then eliminate the risks. Then, suddenly, it is the enemy who is running for his Simply put, it is a great fighter's

Foreman in one of the most aston-

honest. He took the money but said so. And he never threw any matches." This was another. They

Relying on a hyperpower: The trouble with America than former National Security

> This increase is explained by the USSR's collapse, relative decline of Western Europe and Japan, and by US superiority in information tech-

> US economic might is built on great inequalities of wealth and income. It has ecologically disastrous effects, including global warming, deforestation, and ocean pollu-

Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski who sees the post-Cold War world as consisting of only two categories of states: America's "vassals" and 'tributaries". In this world, the US will brook no

restraint, respect no authority, follow no discipline

The US' first response to September 11 was to declare war, not on a particular state, but on "global terrorism". The operative goal here

universities have, through vast financing, moved into a new superleague of world universities that is leaving everyone else... in the dust... However, America's clout is

group of 12 to 15 US research

premised upon relatively robust economic growth through the 1990s. Should growth falter, or other powers emerge, America could become a victim of "imperial over-Until this happens, the US will

remain an overwhelming, imperious War, it arrogantly intervened in countries as varied as Afghanistan and Brazil, Chile and Greece, and Panama and Zaire.

It is on this overpowering "ally" that India's leadership now relies Tomorrow, the US could just as easily turn against India as it has recently tilted in its favour. It is unwise to put all of India's eggs in the American basket.

Yet, so obsessed are Vajpayee, Advani & Co with settling scores with Pakistan--without convincing

proof of its involvement in the Kaluchak outrage--that they won't rethink. We will pay the price for their follies--through "limited war". or "covert operations"

# STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

Yes, Hansie was a fantastic captain and a player but in the end he was just a cheat. We think he did nothing wrong because that's what we all do. We can't condemn him because we can't condemn ourselves ... We shall find reasons to cheer our hero even if we run out of reasons ... It's about watching paid gladiators. Not cricket but the thrill of watching winners and losers without getting involved. And blood and death and disgrace and pain. Because we can't win anymore.

a part of apartheid even though it's over. His face had a pall of grimness, of losing a strange innocence. As if segregation had stolen part of his humanity away.

YET to us it didn't matter. Hansie was the supreme leader. He would go out, play his game, never yielding and made us cheer for him and his boys even when we didn't support South Africa. He was the ultimate joy-giver, the entertainer: the man who let us feel like warriors because he was so courageous and wonderful. It was only later that it struck me as I watched a BBC documentary on "Female Gladiators in Roman London" that cricketers and gladiators were of the same kind. The gladiators risked it all including life and body and future to provide us the crowd, the vicarious pleasures that were so wanting in our vapid, purposeless life. Just as the ancient crowd cheered every thrust, every bleeding cut, so do we, hoping that the next ball will devour the batsman or decimate the bowler. It's the prime time of the most ancient sport that has finally found its true moment in

searched the net and found an article that so strangely mirrors my thoughts. It's on Steve Waugh but

principal critics. India is replacing

once-loyal Western Europeans as

America remains unmatched in

history as a global power. Equally

unparallelled is the disparity of

power between it and the rest of the

world. Says Paul Kennedy, historian

and author of The Rise and Fall of

the Great Powers: "Nothing has

much smaller than European

armies, and even the Royal Navy

was equal only to the next two

navies." Similarly, the Roman,

Persian or Chinese empires were

military reach, political clout and

economic might. Take one illustra-

tion. Today, the US has 12 armadas,

each based on a giant aircraft

carrier, like the Enterprise, which

The Enterprise is as high as a 20-

storeyed building and 330 metres

long. It houses a crew of 5,600 and

70 state-of-the-art aircraft which can

The US empire is truly global in

geographically limited.

patrol the seven seas.

The British Empire's army "was

ever existed like this disparity"

What makes the US special?

America's faithful friend.

gladiator in world cricket today. No single cricketer in modern

Sport is at once a fascinating

response and a gladiator's

response. And the peerless Muhammad Ali turned it into stuff of sporting folklore in Zaire 27 years ago when he fought George Foreman for the heavyweight title. Fighting with his back to the ropes for the most part, the great man finally knocked out ishing upsets in sports history. The reason Steve Waugh is

operate by day or night. Accompa-

nying it are 15 warships, and 14,300

men. The rest of the world's navies

put together cannot remotely match

The US alone has mastered four

military technologies: precision-

guided bombs delivered from a

"safe" distance; Special Operations

groups with night-vision equipment,

working in any climate: and the

logistical capability to quickly deploy

The US military budget is a

staggering \$350 billion, of the same

order as India's entire national

income. This equals the defence

spending of the next 15 highest

countries. The current increase in

US military spending alone is \$48

billion, roughly four times India's

cent of global military spending

disproportionate to its own eco-

nomic might, which has grown.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, the

US' share of total world product

(India's share is one percent).

The US is responsible for 40 per

America's military spending is

defence budget.

troops in far-flung battlefields.

America's carrier force

declined. But since then, this proportion has grown, from 22 to 30 per

nology and biotechnology.

The US will remain an overwhelming, imperious and unbalanced power. In the Cold War, it arrogantly intervened in countries as varied as Afghanistan and Brazil, Chile and Greece, and

Panama and Zaire. It is on this overpowering "ally" that India's leadership now relies. Tomorrow, the US could just as easily turn against India as it has recently tilted in its favour. tion. But the might is unparallelled. is world domination Even the European Union--a Buttressing the military, economic and political clout is US group of mutually competing econo-

> without internal strife This unique might permits the US to behave imperiously, ignoring the rest of the world when it likes; using it when that is convenient.

> mies--is not about to overtake the

US. Only China could, in 30 years--if

it sustains eight per cent growth

The US is a giant who has not learned to wield his power lightly, with subtlety. It is a Hyperpower reshaping the world.

No one has summed up the Hyperpower idea more accurately

EDITOR TO

through Hollywood, Walt Disney, televised serials, comic strips and Equally important is US leadership in science and technology. The

domination of global popular culture

US accounts for about one-half of the global software market and 45 per cent of the world's Internet About three-quarters of the

world's Nobel Prize winners in the sciences and economics work or live in the US. Says Kennedy: "A

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

TO THE EDITOR

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE

#### Welcome home, PM Paramilitary death squads now seem to be roaming on Dhaka's streets. BDR murders with impunity.

Traffic held up for hours resulting in untold misery, inconvenience and loss of productivity to welcome the PM and her clans return. It's good to have her back The PMO is still silent about the

cost of her trip and expenses. But take a wild guess, how much do you think a suite in a five star hotel in Manhattan costs per day? About a couple of thousand dollars I'd say Then add the dozens of hangers on and the rest of her entourage for a month; several hundred thousand dollars. Then add the limousine hires, banquet halls and receptions for her entourage. Don't forget the

flight and the ticketing lost. Welcome home Madam PM, if you stayed much longer we'd have ended up with another devaluation. Bastiat

medical treatment with doctors

making house calls. Don't forget to

add the cost of the special Biman

## "Ban on cell phone use by children"

The news headline "Ban on use of cell phone by children soon" highlights the misplaced priorities of our government. Why not educate the public on the hazards of using cell phones first and then leave it to the discretion of parents on whether children should use cell phones or not? How is the minister planning to enforce such a ban anyway? So the child doesn't use the cell phone under penalty of law, but it's okay for the parent to use it until stricken with brain tumour or cancer and leave the child orphaned, huh?

There are many health hazards facing our children: lead poisoning, diseases, cigarettes (and secondary smoke inhalation), drugs, mosquitoes, unhygienic street food sold outside schools, and countless more. What is our government doing to address any of the issues that really count for the people's welfare? We are more caught up with the never-ending soap opera involving the top two leaders of the ruling party and the opposition and it makes up Dilkash Ahmed

### English medium schools

The Daily Star recently published several letters about the so-called "English medium schools". I am sure that with only about half a dozen such schools actually capable of preparing students to take exams in English successfully, the issue for debate surely must be regarding the returns from investment in such schools. I have lived in England for the last ten years and most of the students I know at graduate and post graduate levels do not come from a "English medium" background. Perhaps more students are attracted by the "land of golden opportunity" and it is unfair of me to draw conclusions or make comparisons. I would welcome statistical information regarding the representation of Bangladeshi students in higher education within Bangladesh and abroad and the subjects they study given their respective backgrounds.

However, having studied in one such school in Dhaka, I can not help raise my concerns. The school I attended at the time did not have a library, most of the teachers spoke incoherent and incorrect English and some of us had tutors outside the normal school hours. However, most of us became confident, responsible and conscientious citizens eventually. A good school regardless of its medium of instruction should instil these core values anyway. In a society where accountability is virtually non-existent, it's about time that schools let parents

know how the fees are spent and

parents start playing a proactive role in the decisions that govern the lives of their children. Merely enrolling them to "The

School" is grossly inadequate.

Nahid Rahman

Oxford, England

Comments on the channel ban have been living in the States for the last 10 years, and still do not subscribe to cable. In fact, I have better things to do (go out to play cricket/football/walk), rather than

being a couch potato watching all

these Hollywood/Bollywood gar-

It is quite funny to see the outcry for MTV...this channel promotes the most unsocial behaviours even in western standard. Please, do not give the "freedom of doing everything speech". If anything is harmful to the society it needs to be addressed, and it is done through the mechanism of the government. If U.S., the bastion of freedom in the world, can censor Network television by not allowing nudity or obscene words, then why should we

get label as conservative mullahs?

what I want to see does not hold

ground in Bangladesh. Come on

We do not have the minimum level of

Also, the notion of right to see

without fear. Actually, you have to attain a certain level of sophistication as a society to play with the Genie of freedom. Look at our political leaders; do they have any sophistication, rather than being a bunch of big mouth thieves? Can you have a decent political discussion without having a fistfight in

rights to walk on our own roads

Please, know what freedom is. It is not the license to do everything one pleases. There is no absolute freedom, that freedom is called anarchy (sound familiar, our crime lords do have the absolute free-

TX, USA

Bangladesh?

### "Bad news zap the good one"

This should have been, "Bad news zaps the good one". Just because 'news' has an 's' at the end, doesn't mean that that we should use zap without an 's'. We say, "This is good news", not "This are good news." What a gross mistake in the very

A Mostafa "Failure of our diplomacy"

main headlines.

This is in regards to Mr Nafees's letter about the failure of our democracy. I am very grateful of him because while I was going on about Begum Zia's million-dollar knee surgery I had entirely forgotten that she achieved nothing in this trip. All this time she patiently sat in NY, Bush couldn't make half an hour for her, he did manage it for the Nepalese PM though.

Once again she has proven herself quite adept in the role of a third world tin pot leader.

I do not know much about our ambassador in the US, but I doubt if it would be fair to blame him for not arranging the PM to see the President. Begum Zia wouldn't have much to say to him. Anyway our Foreign Minister, a far more effective man, did see the Secretary of State and other important persons. At least someone from our government was at work.

Again, how much did the knee Don Quixote, Dhaka

"Let there be light"

This is in response to Farhan Quddus' letter "Let there be light". Mr. Farhan Quddus, I was reading about your situation and have

come up with a solution. Have you

thought about investing in a genera-

Since our government cannot provide basic living materials, we should take it upon yourself to resolve the situation.

If you need more advise or help on other unbearable situations in Dhaka please feel free to contact me at acemig2001@yahoo.com

New York, USA

#### For the PM Looking at the most anarchic law

and order situation in Bangladesh. I would like to quote a few lines from Lincoln's Inaugural Address for Prime Minister Khaleda Zia: "In your nands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you.... You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend

These words with some modifi-

cations she can tell to those crimi-

nals who are bent upon to destroy

the society. This criminal situation is

the product of a very corrupted

political culture. This is a desperate

work for the betterment of the people as well. Time has given Khaleda Zia a golden opportunity to claim a place for her in the history of Bangladesh. She must be courageous enough to take strong decisions at this time of trial and must be ready to make sacrifices. The posterity will not forgive anyone who will fail to deliver

time, which needs desperate mea-

sures. All the politicians must act

unitedly to curb the lawlessness.

they must show that politics can

### Star Sport I just love the Star Sport pages. But,

there's one thing that annovs me though. Most of the items are continued to "PAGE 15" but, unlike the Main Sections, the column number is not mentioned which is very inconvenient specially in these days when there's so much to read while the World Cup is on. A Distressed Observer