

Saving the Buriganga

The government must draw up plans for other rivers as well

OUR heartiest congratulations to the government for re-starting the cleaning drive on the bank of Buriganga River. The task is far more important and complicated than perhaps one would think of it in the first instance. It is not only a question of saving the river but with it the capital itself. If the river were killed the city's ecological balance would be so fundamentally distorted that Dhaka would become literally uninhabitable.

While we commend the authorities for starting the work we must caution them that just physically demolishing the structures would not really solve the problem in the long term. We have seen similar demolition drives in the past which were immediately followed by re-occupation of the vacated spaces by the same illegal occupiers simply because the authorities had no plan as to what to do with the vacated land. It was kept undemarcated and unprotected and as such quickly went back into the hands of those very people from whom it was retrieved.

According to the latest information, 24 of the 267 illegal structures have so far been demolished. While the demolition work for the rest continues legal action against all those listed illegal occupiers must be started immediately. One of the faults of the past demolition drives was that no legal action was taken against them. In other words these breakers of law did not face any legal action for their action. This encouraged them to re-occupy the land once the authorities left, which would not have happened if legal action were taken.

As the demolition drive continues we urge the government to take up the following actions. First they should fence off all the recovered land and put up notices that any trespassing on that land would be punishable act. Second we suggest that a plan be prepared for alternative and economic use of the riverbanks. Taking cue from other cities of the world and how they used their river banks our plan should provide for various commercial, private and recreational uses of those lands. To the best of our knowledge such plans already exist. Private design firms could be invited to submit new plans. This newspaper once organised a workshop in which plans for alternative use of the Buriganga bank area were exhibited in the presence of the then environment minister Sajeda Chowdhury.

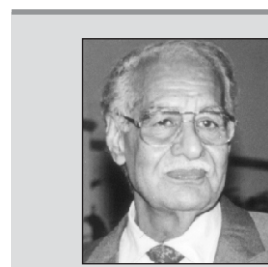
We also suggest that the private sector be involved in this initiative of developing the banks of rivers that flow around Dhaka. There is great potential for building recreational, commercial and residential facilities along the riverbank in accordance with environmental regulations. In fact the same plan can include the development of the riverbank on the other side so that we can generate a spate of environment friendly commercial activities on both sides of the river.

It is important to remember that demolition of the illegal structures is only the first step. It must be accompanied by a development plan for alternative use. The Task Force that has been constituted is a very high powered one and it has active civil society members in it. This body should immediately sit to chalk out the alternative plan. To do that private sector must be involved, both at the planning and the implementing stage. Government does not have adequate funds for all that is necessary and hence the need for the collaboration with the private sector.

While Buriganga has deservedly received most of our attention we would like to remind the government that there are three other rivers that surround the capital city from three other sides and which are also under severe threat of encroachment. In some instances greedy and powerful developers have occupied riverbanks, low lands and wetlands and are trying to turn them into residential plots. These activities pose no less a threat to the city, as does the choking of the Buriganga. Task Forces similar to that of the Buriganga should be set up for all the others. Otherwise the mandate of the present Task Force be extended to include all the four rivers flowing around Dhaka.

We are acutely aware of the fact that vested interests would exert tremendous pressure to stop this work. We urge the government not to succumb to such pressures. We assure our complete support behind this work.

Modi brigade and starving millions



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

GUJARAT is not the end of the world. I doubt whether the voters would favour Chief Minister Narendra Modi who has lowered not only their spiralling economic growth but also their image. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's intervention to focus on issues "of development and governance" has stopped the BJP from harping on the recent carnage in the state. Modi himself says that he will not fight on the plank of the Godhara incident. Even if the BJP wins in Gujarat, it does not mean that the hate wave which the party rides will spread to other parts of the country. The Hindutva appeal does not sell beyond the Hindi-speaking states. In Bihar, Laloo Yadav's preserve, it does not. In fact, the caste factor determines elections in the Hindi-speaking states. Even in Gujarat, though it is not a Hindi-speaking state, caste has come to the fore.

True, left to the BJP, which is guided by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Gujarat, the Hindutva and the Italian birth of Congress president Sonia Gandhi would have been the party's poll plank. The anti-Muslim rhetoric, which has characterised Modi's yatra and his thought of displaying the replica of the burnt Godhra bogie, would have been grist to the

election propaganda mill. But Vajpayee has upset the appellation by pointing out that if "the Godhra or the post-Godhra violence" is recalled, "it will look as if there is no other issue and that the voters are being toyed with." This has created confusion in the Hindutva ranks. Modi may still play the Hindu card. He thinks he can harvest the Hindu voters after having sown the seed of hatred against the minorities, especially the Muslims. Reports are that

statements by different leaders say. But how can the two behave in the same manner? While the VHP thrives on irresponsibility, the BJP leads the coalition at the centre and carries on its shoulders the task of running the country.

Still the two are so enmeshed that it is difficult to say which person is a member of which organization. It looks as if the VHP comes to the fore when the law is sought to be violated or when the purpose is to

programmes, but not pogroms.

The ruling BJP has to ensure that the extra-constitutional authority which the VHP and the Bajrang Dal are assuming, is curbed for the sake of governance, if not the country. From the point of view of the BJP, there is another factor it must guard against. If the extra-constitutional authority of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal is not curbed, they will become a Frankenstein's monster which may devour the BJP one day.

reminds me of McCarthyism, which swept America in the fifties and the sixties. Senator McCarthy ousted liberals from academic institutions, human rights activists and independent people from top government positions. The hullabaloo that the "communists" were dictating America's policies and programmes made people afraid of their own shadow.

The Hindutva zealots are trying to create the same type of atmo-

Year Plan!

Worse are the reports on starvation. The centre, with 60 million tonnes of food grains in its warehouses, cannot escape the responsibility of starvation deaths either in Orissa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. That the states have not a proper distribution system does not condone the negligence in not providing the alternatives. The government has been hiding the truth on the ground that dietary preferences of people come in the way of sending food grains to some states. The centre can use the NGOs. They are the ones who forced the government to send its teams to these states. The teams have now confirmed deaths due to starvation.

The Supreme Court's directive to the states remains unimplemented. Nearly one year ago it asked them to set in place the required administrative machinery to implement welfare schemes, particularly midday meals to school children. But Orissa is busy with politicking in the ruling Biju Janata Dal, Jharkhand with the Congress party's infighting, Madhya Pradesh with its chief minister Digvijay Singh's essays in ego and Rajasthan with chief minister Gehlot's efforts to prove that the deaths were due to malnutrition, not starvation.

The BJP would do better if it were to pay attention to the basic problems, "governance and development," as Vajpayee puts it. If he cannot mend the ways of the party, who can? Once in a while he breaks his silence. Both people and his party notice it. Were he to do it more often, both will gain -- the country as well as the BJP.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

What is disturbing about the BJP-VHP strategy is the manner in which it is vitiating the atmosphere. Those who are against it are dubbed anti-national or ISI agents. It reminds me of McCarthyism, which swept America in the fifties and the sixties. Senator McCarthy ousted liberals from academic institutions, human rights activists and independent people from top government positions. The hullabaloo that the "communists" were dictating America's policies and programmes made people afraid of their own shadow...The BJP would do better if it were to pay attention to the basic problems, "governance and development," as Vajpayee puts it.

he does not want any central leader to campaign in his state because he believes he can win single-handedly.

And if he can do so, he will be able to stake one day his claim to the prime ministership. He is mistaken. He cannot take the Gujaratis for a ride any more because they can see through him. He does not enjoy even a fraction of the respect which Keshubhai Patel, his predecessor, commands. For obvious reasons, Modi has the support of the VHP which openly says that it prefers him to Vajpayee. That the BJP should be on the side of the VHP is understandable. They are members of the same parivar, no matter what press

abuse the critics, denigrate the opposition or threaten the authorities. The BJP takes over when it comes to presenting a case a bit cogently since belligerence does not go down well. Their masks may be different, but they have the same faces. The VHP says that the chief election commissioner (he is a Christian) has a "religious bias." The VHP dubs him anti-Hindu. The BJP blames him for lack of restraint. The VHP says it will defy the ban on the yatra. The BJP defends the VHP's right to launch the Vijay yatra to commemorate the demolition of the Babri masjid a decade ago. The BJP has the right to assert that every organisation is free to carry out its

Bhindranwale during Indira Gandhi's regime is a case in point.

The BJP and the VHP cannot wipe out the impression that they are two sides of the same coin. To call the VHP a religious or social organisation is to hoodwink the public. The BJP leaders were hand in glove with the VHP in the demolition of the Babri masjid. The two are together, arm in arm, in the election campaign. The two have jointly selected the candidates for the Guajrat poll.

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sphere in India. Fear is what they are trying to instil. To some extent they are succeeding. People are afraid to protest even when the treatment meted out to them is unjust. They increasingly believe that it does not pay to speak out.

Maybe, the noise is meant to push into the background the government's failure on the economic front. More than half the population is poor and only a fraction enjoys the facilities which any country in the West takes for granted. India's growth rate last year was around five per cent against the promised eight. It proposes to achieve one per cent of world trade in the next five years. What a target for the 10th Five

Generational loyalty

MEGASTHENES

THE booming resonant voice calling out to someone was unmistakable, even after a lapse of over two decades. Otherwise I might have missed him in the crowded conference hall in a distant land, especially so, as I was not expecting his presence there. He was my old international law professor, an alumnus of Yale and Harvard. The years had been kind to him; only an extra 3 kgs or so perhaps and some thinning of hair at the top. Of course, he could not place me immediately. How could he, after so many years and so many students, a lucrative law practice and a wide array of interests that took him to the fringes of politics, mostly in support of deserving but often lost causes. He had that rare gift though of being able to relate instantly to people and was, I think, happy to meet an old student.

For the next hour or so we caught up with lost time, brought ourselves up-to-date about each other and then proceeded to resolve a fourth of humankind's afflictions! So simple in theory! He had always taken his work but never himself too seriously. As we parted, he said, as he was wont to years earlier also, something simple and yet not without nuance or a certain complexity. "You know, I think that of all loyalties that drive, motivate or persuade individuals, the strongest is the generational loyalty. Singers in our time had the most melodious voices, the heroines were paragons of elegance and beauty and the heroes, the most manly and hand-somest".

I did not disagree but was left to ponder the exact scope of generational loyalty. Does it cover only a person's own generation or does it also include earlier generations, whose ways, virtues and values

may have touched the person's life - a celebration, as it were, of times past, seen through the prism of intervening years?

Recently yet another film version of Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's classic and much read novel, Devdas, was released. It starred Sharrukh Khan, with Aishwarya Rai and Madhuri Dixit in the female leads. The film was an extravaganza with an element of prolixity, not in respect of the basic theme but with the story structure. Film-goers of a certain

same ship was Sir Basant Kumar Mallick ICS, a judge of the Patna High Court, on his way to Geneva for a League of Nations meeting. The judge was elderly, nearing superannuation. Annada Shankar called on him as a courtesy to a senior. Sir Basant reminisced about his own youth, when a young ICS officer could contribute meaningfully wherever he served: build a stretch of road, dig a pond or well, construct a town hall, plan a park or set-up a school. He regretted that

era of the past, one which interested Sir John deeply? Curiously enough, John Barrymore, a great actor by any criteria, was never nominated for an Academy Award, although he did act in films well into the age of academy awards.

The prince of cricket writers, Sir Neville Cardus, who elevated cricket reporting to an art, had sometime in the 1930s, I believe, drawn up what he considered to be an all-time best cricket team. Most of those included, if I recall correctly,

resources of skill and variety of style" in keeping with the Cardusian philosophy of the game. After a pause Cardus made only one change and observation. "I don't suppose", he said, "that Don (i.e. Bradman) would mind taking over the captaincy" and proceeded to drop the captain of his team, Stanley Jackson, and put in his place Garfield Sobers at number 5 or 6 in the team. Only one change over a period of perhaps three decades! Generational loyalty yet again, this

events for example. Does this also hold true for all fields of human endeavour, thought and innate ability? In the 19th century there was an almost dogmatic belief in the inevitability of human progress. Progress is certainly possible, even probable but not, I should think, inevitable. Scientific advances may not necessarily or at all times impinge on certain intrinsic abilities of the individual, in particular those pertaining to creativity and the mind.

If Sir Isaac Newton were to be miraculously resurrected and driven straight to attend a seminar on higher physics, it is fair to assume that he would need to grope for some time before being able to contribute meaningfully. And yet Sir Isaac would remain Sir Isaac, one of the foremost scientific intellects of all time. Genius in one set of circumstances should be equal to adaptation in an altogether different set. Shakespeare still remains the acme of achievement in English poetry, play and literature, as does Tagore in Bangla. The generations of literary giants which followed them have not, in the minds of most people, matched their achievements or even come reasonably close. This is something that transcends generational loyalty.

It would certainly not be correct or constructive to praise only the past and neglect the joys of the present. And yet generational loyalty remains a potent factor in human relationship, in understanding people and their attitudes. What is past and frozen in time and history, is after all simpler to adapt to and live with than the more fluid present. Old may not always be gold and the good old days might not have been all or only good but every generation will still "look back to its predecessors and imagine a world where stern reality gives way to romantic imagination".

age-group were not enthused or amused. What was the need for another film version when the definitive interpretation by Dilip Kumar and Suchitra Sen was already there? We were in high school in the 1950s when Bimal Roy's Devdas, with Dilip Kumar in the title role was filmed. A good number of older film-goers had expressed similar doubts at that time. Should something immortalised by the legendary PC Barua be re-made? Generational loyalty at work?

Annada Shankar Roy, who passed on recently, wrote in one of his books about his first trip abroad in the 1920s. He had topped in the ICS examinations and was going to the UK for training. Travelling in the

times had changed and there was little scope for such constructive activities for young officers any more. Generational loyalty again or merely a statement of fact?

The late Sir John Gielgud, certainly one of the foremost Shakespearean actors of the last century, once named six actors, who, in his view, best performed the role of Hamlet. His six included Richard Burtage (1567-1619), Thomas Betterton (1635-1710), Edwin Booth (1833-1893) and also John Barrymore (1882-1942). Modesty would have precluded the inclusion of his own name. There was no scope for Sir John to have seen Burtage, Betterton or Booth perform on stage or in films either. Were they then named out of loyalty to an

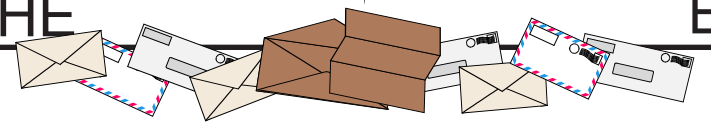
begin their careers before or soon after World War I. Sir Neville has written with verve and affection, especially about cricket and ricketers of the 1920s and the 1930s. He continued to write avidly and evocatively about the game and players up to the 1960s. His great passion, I suspect, was for the Golden age of cricket, before World War I, when he was at his most impressive and beginning a life-long association with the game. Sometime in the 1960s or perhaps early 70s, someone discovered the Cardus all-time eleven and asked him if he wished to make any changes in the light of the years that had elapsed since the team was selected. The Cardus team presumably summed-up "all of the game's

time from one of the most knowledgeable aficionados of the game?

Stanley Jackson had played for England between 1893 and 1905 and later, as the Rt Hon Sir Stanley Jackson PC, GCSI, GCIE, had served as Governor of Bengal in turbulent times. I was told by a very respected senior colleague that in that capacity he once narrowly escaped assassination by a most improbable assassin, a student of Lady Brabourne College!

There have been tremendous advances in science, technology, technique and tool over the last century and more. Where human performance can be gauged by measuring tape or stop watch, there has been corresponding progress over the past in track and field

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Markets, load-shedding and traffic jam

One cannot help but wondering why the Power Development Board and the DESA are allowing the markets to be illuminated in the evening while the city dwellers are still victims of load shedding.

During the last few months there has been a mushroom growth of markets in the city and more markets are being constructed -- particularly on the Mirpur Road. I have never seen so many markets at such close proximity. Do we really need so many markets and do we have such a large number of buyers? It is already difficult to move on the Mirpur Road, and the traffic congestion will be worse with the opening of under-construction markets. Can't the authorities do something to control such mushroom growth of markets? The cause of load shedding can be attributed to a large extent on the electricity consumed by these markets.

May I request you to please arrange to conduct a survey of the markets covering the electricity and other utilities being consumed by them vis-a-vis the load sanctioned and whether such markets will bring bane or boon?

Enamul Huq Dhanmondi, Dhaka "It's not about oil"

This is in reference to the letter "It's not about oil, stupid" by Mahmood Elahi. The gist of his letter is that the US wants to change regime and disarm Iraq for the sake of world peace and not because they want to control Iraqi oilfields. Mr. Elahi wants to disprove the popular belief that it is the oil giants and defence corporations of USA in collusion with Zionist media, are presently in the driving seat in USA. They have targeted the oil rich Islamic countries for control of the oilfields on the pretext of elimination of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Mr. Elahi can be rest assured that USA would never disturb a dozen or so other countries having nuclear weapons because they do not have oil. Even North Korea won't be disturbed much because they do not have oil. By the way, Iraq is at least two years away from making a nuclear weapon according to recently published British papers. It is also not understood by many as to how Iraq is a threat to the USA, which is half a world away, when it can't even reach Israel. And to our knowledge no Iraqi neighbour is on record to have asked USA for protection from Iraq!

Early in his career Mr. Bush could not succeed in oil business. But Mr. Elahi is no doubt successful in oiling both USA and Mr. Bush.

SFA Roomy New DOHS, Dhaka

"Death of a father"

Once I was at Chap-Lap-Kok airport, Hong Kong standing on the queue with other fellow unknown Bangladeshi (I could see their passport) citizen to collect my boarding pass. My Bangladeshi brothers (who were in front of me) were not standing on the queue properly and were creating confusion among other passengers. So the young Hongkongese lady came out from her airline counter and requested them to stand on the queue in a proper way, but seems they did not understand or did not want to listen to her. So, finally she hit them with her walkie-talkie to force them to stand on the queue. Then they listened to her like a good schoolboy. Soon after we boarded the Biman Bangladesh Airlines and these passengers' attitude also changed. They started to ignore the instructions from the Bengali airhostess, even uttered abusive words as well. What a drastic

change within a few minutes!

In your editorial you mentioned that we should analyse what has gone wrong to our society. Bangladeshi people are usually very well behaved abroad because they know that severe punishment awaits them and they don't follow the rules and regulations properly.

It is sad that our religion, family and education system failed to teach us how to become a good human being. We are reluctant to follow the rules at home cause it's very unlikely that we'd be punished for any wrongdoing. Jahangir Alam's death proves it once again.

Sohel Hasan Singapore

Prohibit smoking in public transport

Time and again we have tried to attract the attention of the authorities concerned to issue a directive prohibiting smoking in public transport. But so far nothing positive has happened.

It is really very irritating and uncomfortable to see your co-passenger smoking cigarettes without paying any heed to the other passengers' plight. In a suffocating transport it becomes really unbearable.

Would the authorities concerned please do something about it? I am not asking to ban smoking everywhere. But please spare the public transportation.

Sultan Mahmud Dhaka

Mosquito strikes back

A couple of days ago, I have read in your daily that mosquito has strike back and we are short of insecticide!

Mosquito menace is one of the most common problems in our country. For the last couple of years, dengue, a deadly disease caused by mosquito bites, has been breaking out almost as an epidemic form and took its toll on many. The same thing happened at the early part of this year. Still the authorities are nonchalant about it! What would it take to wake them up from their slumber and store enough insecticide so that we can fight this mosquito problem whenever needed?

Reshmi Das Gupta Old D.O.H.S., Dhaka

Ban the banners

Dhaka has almost become a city of banners. Banners are everywhere. Be it in the city parks, road islands, pavements, across the roads, in

front of educational institutions, in residential areas and commercial districts. Nobody appears to be concerned about the nuisance they pose. These old, tattered, outdated, discoloured banners and festoons give the entire city a dirty look. They often obliterate the address as well as the beauty of a building. Sometimes they pose a hindrance to normal movement of traffic. There appear to be no rules and regulations for proper display of these banners.

The city fathers are not concerned about this nuisance. But isn't it their responsibility to beautify the city?

Neelima Chowdhury Dhaka

Politics and people

Who are more powerful, politicians or ordinary people? From the present political state, it is obvious that the politicians are the sole authority in the country. The political regime though depending on people to come to power, soon forgets people's contribution. And till the next elections, the citizens remain in oblivion and politicians rule the country the way they please. Why don't our leaders realise that they have been voted to power to

ensure peoples' rights, not to look after their own welfare?

Moonmoon Khan Dhaka

Our leaders always talk about democracy but follow the opposite path. The so-called democratic governments come and go one after another but we are not able to escape from their tyranny. Who will rescue us from the grip of these so-called politicians?

Shobuz Shamol Nakhal Para, Dhaka

Ordinary people, who have always been pawns in the hands of our leaders and politicians, are being held hostage, watching their beloved country bleed to death. The education system is in ruins, the economy is spluttering, society is rotting, the law and order situation is in the most deplorable condition.

Are we ever going to put the nation before the self?

Akram Khan Shonkor, Dhaka

Rickshaws rule the roads

Whenever an accident occurs, we

are always quick to blame a motorised vehicle but we allow accident-prone vehicles like rickshaw to ply through busy roads. Most rickshaw-pullers are from the villages and have no sense of how busy and dangerous the roads and streets of Dhaka can be. They cannot read the road signs, have a vague idea about traffic rules and are completely bewildered in a busy city. They take suicidal turns in front of speeding vehicles, make the most audacious moves and carry any number of passengers. They often go the wrong way, and manoeuvre recklessly at intersections.

The road in front of New Market was made one-way, but then the authorities decided to allocate a separate lane for rickshaws. Now the rickshaws occupy their designated lane as well as the main road!

We must decide whether we will continue to allow this transport to ply on our roads. Let's have more buses and other public transports. Let us walk more. The government should help rickshaw-pullers find alternative means of income. The possibilities are endless, all that is needed is the will to change.

Aman Khan Dhaka