

Dying Buriganga

Save it to avert an environmental disaster

THE river Buriganga is taking in such a heavy dose of industrial effluents and other wastes on a regular basis that the badly shrunken trickle of basin water cannot really absorb. The result is that it is now an almost stagnant river with black, slimy, stinking water.

Statistics should make the point clear: at least 35,000 cubic meters of untreated, highly toxic industrial wastes is being dumped into the river every day. The problem has been made worse by the fact that the flow of current is now almost non-existent in the river. So the heap of garbage and wastes are getting stuck, which means pollution is taking place on a much larger scale.

The river is used as a dumping ground by the huge number of people residing on either side of it. And planners, more so the overseer agencies, have failed to do anything in this respect. Though it is now an accepted truth that immediate steps are needed to check pollution to save the river, what we watch in practice is extremely disquieting. Even the Department of Environment, which found in a survey in 1997 that the river was devoid of oxygen, is still giving clearance to new industries with no effluent treatment plants to be set up along the river banks. So there is a serious gap between the theoretical stand adopted by the government and the developments at the field level.

Anybody cruising along the river can see how it is being squeezed from both sides as more and more illegal structures are being raised. And there is a corresponding increase in the total volume of sewage and other wastes going into the river.

The government response to the issue reflects a laid-back attitude, to say the least. Several wake-up calls have been ignored, and the existence of the river is now threatened in a number of ways. However, we would like to draw the attention of the agencies concerned once more. They should realise the gravity of the situation and formulate a well-thought-out strategy for giving the river a new lease of life. Experiences of some major cities nestling by river-side may be drawn upon. The time factor is crucially important since great damage has already been done to the river. Its death, the policy-makers must not forget, will mean drying up of an important lifeline as far as the city is concerned.

Bangladesh cricket in World Cup

High time for a turn-around

THE latest performance by Bangladesh cricket team against the mighty New Zealand at the World Cup may have inspired some viewers, who had already lost all hopes, to say a few nice things about the players. But on a closer look, the doubt remains -- was it really a game to be proud of? Apart from some inspiring batting by Muhammad Ashraful and later the pair of Khaled Mashud and Mohammad Rafique, were there any other good facet of the performance that springs to mind instantly? Well, not really. The team, as always, failed in the top-order batting; bowling was not also any great shakes; and the less said about fielding, the better.

But we cannot also ignore the fact that the batsmen held on to the wicket till the end of 50 overs, giving the Kiwis reasonably a tough time. It showed, if they put their mind to it, the players could play responsibly and with considerable determination. Many had originally appreciated the induction of new players in the team, but the management should realise that fresh blood alone does not necessarily ensure good playing. The lack of experience on their part was quite evident except for the last match with the Kiwis where some older guards played. We believe the authority should concentrate more on training before despatching our team for prestigious outings.

As it is, even since getting the test status, Bangladesh have been playing against teams who are far superior in the field; thus the burden of playing well is getting heavier on the players. It would be rather unfortunate if the International Cricket Council decides to rethink about the test status of Bangladesh. We have to come good soon other minnows are improving. The millions of cricket lovers in the country look forward to a quick turn-around.

We would like to see some consistent cricket from our players; they don't have to win all of them, but there should at least be some evidence of gradual improvement on playing tactics. For how long, would we keep wondering whether games like the one against Pakistan in the last World Cup and that against the Kiwis this time around were just a flash in the pan?

Faces of evil



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

tatters in a country that supposedly epitomises those ideals. The continuous build-up to unleash the awesome destructive power of electronic warfare by the mightiest military power seem not only unprovoked but also disproportionate. The actions already taken in the name of protecting 'good' against 'evil' evoke the age-old issue of the conflict between ends and means. If end (eliminating evil) justifies means (limits on civil liberty, rule of law and death of

spective of the nature and intensity of actions taken. Ultimately, the proof of good or evil is in the attitude of mind and postures made in public. Since George Bush is so much steeped in the folklore of wild west he may be entertained with the Clint Eastwood western, 'Unforgiven', where a dictatorial sheriff metes out justice in the way he deems fit, arbitrary and authoritarian. When excesses committed in the name of dealing with bad guys cross the tolerance quotient

Like the sheriff in 'Unforgiven', Bush is the subject of vitriolic attack and hatred by millions in the world.

If the corruption of absolute power is ominously evident in the behaviour of America under George Bush, the difference in the interpretation of evil between America and the rest of the world is equally glaring. The world was taken aback when America all on a sudden launched its diatribe about

countries, America reluctantly accepted a UN resolution that provided for inspection of disarmament in Iraq. Even before inspection was completed America continued to bluster against Iraq for material breach and intimidate countries to toe its line. This tactics of arm twisting, blackmailing and open bribery became counterproductive. Both Europe and NATO have become riven with serious division over the Iraq issue. The war of words across Atlantic

pendence of all member states of the UN. America and her few allies thus have become isolated over the Iraq issue. It is very likely that if a resolution is placed before the security council that specifically provides for war against Iraq veto will be used by France or Russia or China. America never suffered such ringing diplomatic defeat in the past.

The ground swell of public opinion throughout the world is based on the conviction that evidence has not yet shown Iraq to be a threat to peace and that war will mean deaths of millions of innocent civilians. Iraq is not seen as being a malevolent evil, as is made out by America and its motley allies. Countries opposing war against Iraq and the world public opinion behind this stand, however, make a distinction between Saddam and Iraq. Saddam may be evil himself, but the objective conditions in Iraq at present and the state of surveillance in the world to-day are such that it will be almost impossible for his evil acts to see the light of the day, the argument goes.

millions) then the distinction between the two becomes blurred when actions taken as means assume the same ferocity and malevolence as that of 'evil'. It is in this sense that good and evil, while being moral absolutes in the abstract, become indistinguishable in the concrete real life experience. The meaning of 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions' can be found in this pitfall of blind and vengeful self-righteousness.

If absolute power can corrupt absolutely, excessive and blatant use of power must be its manifestation. Power freed from all restraints and used wantonly, can become the tool of oppression even when used on behalf of the 'good'. Both in its arrogance and consequences such overriding power becomes evil. In such a situation good and evil take leave from the world of moral clarity. Power exercised is then to be examined through the lens of relativism to locate it on the moral scale. Good and evil may exist externally as absolutes but no one exercising power can be seen as belonging to either side irre-

grevied in the film revolt. In a reversal of role, Clint Eastwood, the one-time gun stinger, appears as the saviour of the oppressed and does the sheriff in. The film shows that even in the mythology of the wild west good sometimes turn bad and ugly, while the bad can put on the mantle of the 'good'. The concepts of good and bad don't change, neither do the moral values. Only the images of people undergo transformation through the chemistry of what they do in actual life.

There is a moral in the story for George Bush and his cohorts. Their campaign against evil (terrorism, Saddam) has become so obsessive, one sided and ruthless that like the sheriff with the messianic zeal they have started losing moral authority. This is not surprising. Absolute power inevitably goads the wielder of power to become arbitrary, dictatorial and even diabolical, creating a moral vacuum in the process. It is unfortunate, but true nevertheless, that to-day many consider America, the only superpower in the world, in this light

'the axis of evil'. So long evil was seen in acts of terrorism and a worldwide consensus for the campaign against it was reached on this basis. Nothing happened in the course of this campaign to justify broadening its scope. There is no doubt that Saddam as a person epitomises evil in many ways, particularly by the example of his past conduct. But his regime has been so weakened by the Gulf War and the decade-long sanction that it cannot reasonably be seen as constituting a clear and present danger, either in the region or globally. Evidences of Iraq's connection with terrorist groups, on the other hand, are at best anecdotal or circumstantial and at worst, concocted. These have not

been well with world opinion.

Given the suddenness of the campaign against Iraq by America and the insistence to start war even without UN resolution, the outside world suddenly woke up to the danger of allowing the 'only kid in the block' to have his way. In the face of combined pressure from major European allies and other member

countries, that is going on since the split

became public is unprecedented.

It threatens the edifice of western alliance that was erected after the Second World War with serious

damage, if not collapse.

Most tellingly, world public opinion has also gone against American policy on Iraq. Millions

have taken to the streets, demon-

strating in favour of peace and

criticising the continuous drum-

beat of war coming from America.

Even in New York, ground zero of

the September terrorist attack,

people have demanded that peace

be given a chance. The overwhelming

view coming from the anti-war

quarters is that UN inspection can

ensure disarmament of Iraq peace-

fully and force of use is unneces-

sary. The recently concluded NAM

conference, attended by heads of

states from 116 countries, viewed

with alarm the rise of unipolarity

and the trend towards unilateralism

as seen in the Iraq crisis.

The statement issued at the

end of the NAM summit called for

respect for the sovereignty, territo-

rial integrity and political inde-

Period of trial and tribulation

MEGASTHENES

JACK Fingleton is not exactly a household name even in cricket-playing countries. He played Test cricket for Australia from 1932 to 1938, usually as an opening batsman. He would not be placed alongside the likes of Trumper, Ponsford, Barnes, Morris or Simpson and Taylor of more recent years as an opener for Australia. He was a competent enough player though -- who once scored four centuries in successive Test innings -- fully deserving of his place in a competitive side at a time when fast bowlers abounded. By profession, Fingleton was a journalist and also wrote a number of books on cricket. His journalistic interests, however, went beyond cricket.

The late and long-serving Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Menzies, in a foreword to one of Fingleton's books on cricket wrote with modesty that Fingleton honoured him "with his friendship". The two were, in Menzies' words, also "occupational enemies" in their daily lives, as journalists and politicians usually vie with one another in the moulding of public opinion. He recounts with relish that frequently enough, after a tough press conference, Fingleton would linger behind for a chat exclusively on cricket. As a cricket writer, Menzies rated him highly; his style of prose neither "barren nor over-decorated", with an intimate perception of the techniques and subtleties of the game". Menzies was clear that among writers on cricket, Sir Neville Cardus was the supreme stylist. I would, without qualification, concur, as would most people with the acquired taste for cricket literature. Fingleton the writer, I would place at par with a few others, a short

distance behind Robertson-Glasgow and possibly CLR James. His books are eminently readable, remarkably free of partisanship. In one of his essays, he expressed satisfaction that with the passage of years he was becoming less and less nationalistic in outlook. This comment related not so much to politics as to cricket. He continued till the end, I should think, to root for Australia but felt that the outcome of a game, though certainly

not today accept readily the relegation of a match result to a place of secondary importance. The sense and substance of what they sought to convey, however, is not difficult to appreciate. Cricket is a game, not a branch of any religion. It is meant to be played, straining to the utmost every resource of skill, sinew, nerve and limb; to be enjoyed and meant to give pleasure to players and spectators alike. A century by Brian Lara -- when on

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