LATE S. M. ALI **DHAKA FRIDAY APRIL 9, 2004**

Hilsa going out of our lives?

Save the species before it's too late

ILSA, our emblem of a national delicacy; and tradition-ally, a source of 30 per cent fish supply, provider of liveli-hood to 4.5 lakh fishermen and a handsome forex earner, is teetering at the edge of extinction. What a tragedy looming large on our fauna heritage!

But there is hope. While the attrition within our shorelines, estuaries and rivers is evidently on, the trend is still reversible because it is largely man-made.

The problem of unavailability of the species within our borders is two-fold: first, indiscriminate fishing of adult and juvenile hilsa has caused a drastic depletion of the stock in inland waters. Secondly, high levels of pollution in Bangladesh waters in tandem with the choking of navigation routes by damming and shoaling have triggered a shifting of their habitats towards Myanmar and Indian

To the extent they are shying away from our inland waters and venturing out to the sea in search of new habitats, we can think of two options: one, we do what lies in our power to, insofar as reducing the incidence of pollution goes; and two, we bring to bear regional and international cooperation on the issue of rolling back the migratory shift into the historical pattern.

Something must be done to minimise the effect of 2750 tonnes of pesticides being used in our croplands annu-ally, which drain out to the waters adversely impacting on the aquatic life. The gurgling out of untreated industrial and other effluents into the estuaries and the rivers will have to be stymied.

The hilsa catching aberrations need to be radically corrected by recourse to vigorous policing, providing the laws with teeth and enforcing them in a stringent and failsafe manner. The indiscriminate fishing at the estu-aries and rivers will have be stopped by a strict applica-tion of two criteria: first, hauling up of fish fry -- jatka -- must be deterred; and secondly, there should be some kind of a moratorium on netting adult hilsa navigating from the Bay into the rivers to breed.

It is highly imperative that planners put their heads together; consult regional experts, if necessary; and draw up a comprehensive strategy in a serious bid to rejuvenate the diminishing hilsa population in our territory. The time is running out.

Arches for the PM

What happened to her directives against these?

RCHES are sprouting all over again in Dhanmondi, Mo-hammadpur and its adjacent areas in a display of adula-tion for Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. It was only a few weeks ago that the PM had ordered not to erect them on the roads during her visit to any place. Evidently, her or-ders have fallen on deaf ears. Or maybe the sponsors of such arches continue to erect them because they enjoy a certain kind of immunity since such activities center around the PM herself.

This was exactly the kind of sycophantic and ostentatious trait Khaleda Zia had taken a stand against when she came to power and emphasised her expectation for simplicity and austerity. But two and a half years down the line, this stands belied before her own eyes.

Putting up such arches in the middle of the streets is in no way a sign of showing respect. In fact, the local biggies simply seize the opportunity to draw the PM's attention, caring a damn for the safety of those using the streets. Aside from demeaning democracy by such an adulation of the party leader, this is a blatant violation of traffic rules. This isn't the first time that such activities have taken place, but we haven't seen anyone being punished or taken to task for the same.

How could the concerned authorities turn a blind eye to opportunist party enthusiasts digging a newly carpeted road to set up bamboo arches? Who will pay for the damage caused by the digging? Who will be responsible for the sheer waste of public money? After the BNP's landslide victory in the last election, where is the need for such deification of the PM? She knows better any-body else that these activities are actuated opportun-ism of a handful. We urge the PM to stick to the rules she had originally laid down for her party followers.

Time to focus on reality not image



ZAFAR SOBHAN

T has long been known that the political leadership in this country does not take kindly to hearing bad news. Any kind of bad news that is reported in the media is instantly and reflexively dismissed as being politically motivated or somehow reflective of deep-seated bias or prejudice. This kind of knee-ierk response is something we have come to expect from our leaders.

Unfortunately, this tendency to shoot the messenger is not a character trait that is limited to the political leadership of the country. It is a national characteristic. As a nation we are very sensitive to, and defensive about, anything that could be construed as a negative representation of our country. cannot even count the number of people I have met since returning to this country eight months ago who have told me how the media have a responsibility not to portray the country in a poor light.

The media is giving the country a bad name abroad is the accusation I hear again and again. I am told that we should consider the reputation of the country before we publish our reports of extortion and child rape and acid attacks. I am told that it is counter-productive to write reports that highlight the country's many iniquities and

Now, it is not that I don't under-

stand this impulse. I do. No one likes to hear bad news. It is also true that Bangladesh has traditionally suffered from a poor image abroad, that outside of Bangladesh we are still a by-word for disaster, and that this is not the most flattering of portrayals.

But actually this is not the whole Alongside the pieces on cyclones and arsenic and floods and ferry disasters that one has become accustomed to, of late there have also been pieces about micro-credit and the positive role of

which we are held abroad, but surely the fault should be placed at the doors of those who commit the crimes or are otherwise responsible for the unfortunate state of affairs that we find ourselves in.

reserve our wrath for those who make life here a living hell, but for those who write about it.

That makes a whole lot of sense. The problem is not that minorities are burned to death or

country director Christine Wallich, who in a speech last December blamed the country's poor image overseas on this kind of badmouthing of the country.

Dr. Wallich pointed out that the "social indicators" of the country were fairly positive "but the problem lies with the external perception of the country. Really?

It is true that many of the country's macroeconomic indicators are guite strong, but is it really the case that foreign investors should thereBNP that I am concerned about. The fact is that a lot of people in the country share this point of view. They are many people who appear to think that it is more important to touch-up the image of the country than to actually do anything that would merit a positive image.

It is thus that the latest piece about Bangladesh in Time magazine, titled "State of Disgrace," has been received. The consensus is in -- the piece is a shoddy and unfair hatchet-iob that will only succeed in further tarnishing our

image. It does not matter that the picture of Bangladesh drawn by the piece is depressing -- what is mportant is that once again Bangladesh has been maligned in the international media, and the suggestion is that it is our duty as proud Bangladeshis to circle the wagons against this affront and to dismiss it out of hand as an unfair and one-sided piece of "parachute iournalism.

The impulse is no different from the response to the unrelentingly bad news that we read every day in the local media. The focus is more on the image of the country than on the reality of the situation. In fact, the blame for the unflattering Time magazine piece is even being laid at the feet of the local media. After all, where would Time get the idea to run a piece on Bandladesh's dysfunctions in the first place, if not from the negative reports in the local media?

It is high time for us to stop fretting about the image of the country and to start concentrating on the reality. If we have a poor image abroad, it is because we have done very little to change our reality. If the government does not want bad news to dominate the headlines, then it is up to it to make sure that there is less bad news to report.

It's really quite simple. If the media -- be it local or foreign -- is to print positive stories, then give us something positive to print. Don't shoot the messenger. What hurts our country's image is the fact that we are mired in crime, corruption, and political instability, not that the media impolitely points this out.

Zafar Sobhan is an Assistant Editor of The Daily

In Bangladesh, we do not

that women are gang-raped or that

STRAIGHT TALK

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NGOs etc

The depiction of Bangladesh in the foreign media has become a little more balanced in recent years, but that simply reflects the fact that there has been slightly more positive news to report than any decision made by editors around the world to cut Bangladesh more slack

The point is that it is the job of the media to report what the situation in a country is. The Bangladeshi media is not a propaganda organ for any political party or for the country itself, nor should

It is our job to report on the truth of what is going on as best we are able. If what is going on is a crisis in law and order and a breakdown of the political system then that is what we will write about. It will most likely lower the esteem in

businessmen are hacked to pieces -- the problem is that the media has the temerity to write about such things and to stir up trouble both at home and abroad

This has been a constant refrain of the BNP since they came to power in the last election. They have taken a page right out of the George Bush play-book and seem to think that if you are not with them you are against them. The BNP is constantly complaining that the opposition is busy running down the image of the country overseas for its own political gain, and it was only earlier this week that the Prime Minister admonished a media group she was addressing not to print stories and pictures that might harm the country's image.

Interestingly enough, this point of view seems to have been more or less endorsed by World Bank

fore be in a rush to throw their money to us or that the problem lies in the perception of the country and not the reality?

I'm sure that Dr. Wallich's own personal portfolio is just filled to the brim with Bangladeshi investments. She knows as well as anyone that economic or social indicators are not the only measure of a healthy investment climate and that there is a reason why foreign investment has dried up. Lots of reasons, actually. Crumbling infrastructure, political instability, corruption, crime -- I could go on indefinitely. Let's get it straight. The prob-

lem is not the perception, but the reality And, of course, lest we forget,

the AL made the same complaints hen they were in power But it is not just the AL and the and most dysfunctional country in

image abroad.

Like we are not the most corrupt. Or not the most violent for newsmen. But that is not the point. The piece is a well-written and well-reported one that concentrates on the crime, corruption, and political turmoil that are tearing the country apart. The piece does a good job of explicating the toll collection system, cataloging

People might wish to take issue

with the heading and the second

heading of the piece, and argue

that we are not a state of disgrace

and fear that dominates the coun-But already the chorus denouncing the piece has begun. The issue at stake is our national

the reach of corruption, and cap-

turing the climate of uncertainty

The honour of killing



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

have killed, I must confess. I have killed with both hands, taking lives of many roaches, rats, flies and mosquitoes. I have squelched roaches under my heels like squishy fruits, and finished rats by hitting them as if they were little sacks of sand. Mosquitoes and flies popped dime a dozen between my clapping hands. I have been a killer of a sort, a serial killer who did away with one life after another and didn't think it was wrong.

Until I realised at a matured age that those tiny lifers were not much different from us. A life is a life, difference being in the size of the container. Compared to my teenyweeny victims, humans are life in bigger space. It somehow works like a house or an apartment. The more the space, the bigger the rooms, dining areas, balconies, toilets, so on and so forth. The tail of a whale weighs more than an elephant's rump. The trunk of elephant weighs more than all the limbs of a single man taken

Perhaps humans are the most efficient size of life and that is why they are so intelligent. Think of the elephants and whales, you would think much of their space has been such a waste. But then it is the work of nature. We have government officials occupying spacious offices, doing little work. Don't' ask why. Every thing is part of a grand

Although I haven't been able to stop killing altogether. Once in a while a nagging mosquito still comes between my hands, but rats I haven't killed for a while. It's not because my killer instinct is gone. I fail to keep up with those feisty

But I had a new realisation last

hands, heels, intestines, heads, ears, two human lives disarticulated and distributed as if to bring offerings to some wicked

How could they do it? It was eviction of life from its abode, two lives from two abodes. But then why would they pulverise the house once its occupants were gone? The forensic experts found no blood in the flesh, because it was removed from the bodies after the victims were dead. We would

Yet Lady Macbeth couldn't handle it. She lost her mind wiping the stains of blood, which kept recurring before her eyes. The pilot of Enola Gay, the American plane, which bombed Hiroshima, went insane when he learned about the horror, which was imprecated by him. There was a time when people believed that it was inauspicious to kill, because the ghost of the victim haunted the killer until he took his own life or went crazy. Taking a life was its own nemesis

It perhaps doesn't work for the

One of the reasons why taking a life unsettles the mind is that it bares the secrets of one's own flimsy mystery. And taking the life of another man strikes even closer to home. It is like smashing a mirror and then looking at your own fractured image. It is the same blood. flesh, skin and bones that constitute the lives of the killers and their victims. How could anybody take apart another body without having the sense of being broken up

May be professional killers are

How could they do it? It was eviction of life from its abode, two lives from two abodes. But then why would they pulverise the house once its occupants were gone? I have also thought of the moment when the killers first sank the knife into one of the victims to peel off the skin or carve out the flesh. How could they not have felt part of that knife sinking inside them as well? How could they not have been reminded of their own futility by the futility of lives, which perished in their hands?

week, when they killed a father and his son, then chopped their bodies as if a large order of meat waiting delivery from butcher shop. These luckless men were skinned, their flesh separated from bones like kernel of fruit scraped from the shell. I just thought of one thing. How could men so brutally kill other men, if killing rats and mosquitoes bothered me?

I have tried to think about it in my mind, recreating the gruesome acts, which reduced two full-bodied men into oodles of meat. It wasn't enough to take their lives, it wasn't enough to cut them up. They had to be hacked into many pieces and then scattered around the city, the

like to believe so, because that would ensure they weren't cut up until they were dead

I have also thought of the moment when the killers first sank the knife into one of the victims to peel off the skin or carve out the flesh. How could they not have felt part of that knife sinking inside them as well? How could they not have been reminded of their own futility by the futility of lives, which perished in their hands? May be it has to do with the nerve; some have it more than others. The pest control guys kill roaches all the time. The butchers cut animals. and forensic experts dissect bod-

professional killers. They are like a spaceship; they crash over the gravitation of guilt and then cruise in the orbit of cruelty with a natural speed. I have a theory about the whole thing. I think amateur killers go insane because they lose their sanity. But professional killers have nothing to lose because they are insane already.

So they tore up those two bodies with the ferocity of hungry wolves. They never thought how the family of those two men was ever going to reconcile in their minds that their loved ones were thrown in their graves like two piles of sacrificial meat. I have thought of it time and again. It bothered me.

desensitized people, who don't feel it when they kill. They are compulsive killers, who proceed to kill with the hunter's instinct. They kill under the same impulse, which engages acrobats in highwire acts. May be the fear in the face of the victim, the tears in his eyes, and the cry in his voice put the killer in frenzy in the same manner an artisan is driven by his work.

Guilt, like beauty, is a relative thing, which lies in the heart of the beholder. What I feel in the death of a mosquito isn't what others feel in the death of a human being. So killers kill with the same zeal which makes me avoid swatting a fly. The world has evolved by revolving

man's virtue being another man's Killing has been an integral part

around this contradiction, one

of living, let us face it. George Bernard Shaw said that nothing was ever done in this world until men were prepared to kill one another if it was not done. The wars, revolutions, feuds and hostilities have propelled history as the victor killed the vanguished, the strong killed the weak, the clever killed the idiot, the rich killed the poor, the armed killed the unarmed, the intolerant killed the tolerant. and the conservative killed the liberal. When a Japanese warrior was defeated, he used to perform seppuku to take his own life by kneeling on the ground while asking a confidant to behead him to sh the job. It was honourable for both men, one who died and one who killed.

Killing will never stop until the end of the world when the last star falls from the sky. But what has happened to the honour of killing? Last week that question haunted me as if it was the voice of two discontent souls, who were brutally killed and then disposed of like slaughterhouse rubbish. Man is like a gift that looks intriguing until it is unwrapped. To kill him might hold fascination because it destroys a mystery. But that mystery is given away if you undo his body. It dishonours him both as killer and

A least man deserves that nonour from man, while we may ignore rats, roaches, flies and

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker

David versus Goliath -- a political brawl made in America

RON CHEPESIUK

HOM shall we believe in the latest political brawl made in America?

On one side is Richard Clarke, the former bureaucrat and anti terrorism czar who served both Bill Clinton and George Bush, Jr. In his recently released best-selling book, Against All Enemies, Clarke says both heads of state -- but particularly the latter -- were asleep at the wheel while the country's mortal enemy snuck into the country to cause terrorist mavhem. Clarke charges that Bush ignored warnings about al-Qaida and pressured him to link 9-11 with Iraq

On the other side is George Bush, Jr. and his team of neoconservative ideologues, some famous (Condoleezza Rice and Dick Cheney) and some not so famous (Karen Hughes and Frank Miller). They are calling Clarke "irresponsible" and claim he doesn't know what he is talking about.

They are doing their best to fix an image of him in the American public's mind as a bitter ex-bureaucrat

whom Bush passed over for a top position and who is now out to help Senator John Kerry, the likely Democratic presidential contender.

At a glance, the brawl looks like a mismatch: a modern day David versus Goliath. But Dick Clarke has held his own since he went public with his accusations last March 21. Opinion polls are showing that, at this point, only a slightly fewer percentage of Americans believe

After watching all of Clarke's impressive testimony before the 9-11 Commission last March 24, reading his absorbing book, and reflecting on events since 9-11, I'm one of those dissident Americans who accepts David's version of events. Clarke's words, both in his book and those he's using on the public airways to defend it, reveal a presidential administration that is ideological, obsessive, close minded and distracted from the main business at hand, or, in other words, one driven by screwed up priorities. That's my assessment of a presidential administration that has consistently shown it doesn't know what it's doing in the War on

INSIDE AMERICA

The battle has made for interesting newspaper reading and television viewing, but in the end it won't as they say, amount to a hill of beans. Bush could pull American troops out of Iraq tomorrow and admit he made a mistake and it wouldn't change the opinions that many of his supporters and detractors have of him.

Learning from Clarke how incompetent the Bush White House was in dealing with the real 'imminent' threat is nauseating enough. But Clarke's confirmation that, in responding to 9-11, the Bush administration deliberately went after the wrong target makes me wonder why no one has dared raised the spectre of impeachment, given the stakes in the War on Terrorism and the growing mess in Iraq. Was Bush obsessed with linking 9-11 to Saddam? Clarke writes that soon after 9-11 Bush "gathered a few of us and closed the door to the conference room. Look " he told us..." see

want to know any shred." Bush doesn't recall that conversation, White House press secretary Scott McClellan told the press, but Clarke has witnesses Nevertheless, despite his doubts

if Saddam was involved, just look, I

about Saddam-9-11 link, the faithful bureaucrat went back to work to look again. He then completed a report. You guessed it -- no link. "We sent it up to the president

and it got bounced by the national security advisor or deputy," Clarke recalled in a televised interview. "It got bounced and sent back saying 'Wrong answer'.' Clarke is no dove or bleeding

tough for Team Bush to discredit him. He's a registered Republican who voted for Bush in 2000. He was a Cold War warrior who served that real cowboy, Ronald Reagan. He wanted to kill Osama Bin Laden, more so than his bosses in both the Clinton and Bush administrations did. A tough guy, who likes a fight, Clarke's friends reveal. In one of his first interviews Clarke predicted that team Bush would unleash the

heart liberal and that's making it

If you can't pulverise the message, you have to try and destroy the messenger An all out war on Clarke

really have a choice.

dogs" on him. But Goliath didn't

has to be launched. Bush, after all, is running in this year's election on his record of "leadership" in the War on Terrorism. And the lack of it is the point of Clarke's message and what has

compelled him to go public. By focusing on Iraq, he has ignored the War on Terrorism, especially in Afghanistan, Clarke charges, and this misguided focus has allowed Al Qaida to change its stripes, making it even more difficult to destroy the terrorist group. So team Bush has embarked on a vicious anti-Clarke campaign that has been described as "character assassination." "Every time somebody comes up and says like, they don't answer the question about it or show you the truth about it," John Kerry said last March 27. "They go into character assassi-

Previous victims of Bush character assassination campaigns include Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki. who dared to challenge the Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz gross miscalculation that the U.S. had enough troops in Irag. It includes Joe Wilson, who wouldn't give reality to Team Bush's fantasy that an Iraq-Niger-uranium-nuclear weapon connection existed. Then there is former Secretary of the Treasury O'Neal, the first Team Bush administrator to report on the Bush obsession with Saddam

And now the dogs have been unleashed on Clarke. Team Bush claims that what Clarke told the 9-11 Commission in earlier sworn testimony behind closed doors doesn't match up with what he wrote in his book and what he has said before the commission in open hearings. In other words team Bush is intimating that Clarke perjured himself. As has been pointed out, why doesn't Bush

administration try to bring charges against Clarke, if he has committed perjury? So far, there hasn't been a media whiff about such a move.

Team Bush has called for the declassification of Clarke's secret testimony before the 9-11 commission. Clarke has called their bluff by agreeing with them. But as Clarke's defenders point out -everything needs to be declassified, not just what supports one side or the other.

The battle has made for interesting newspaper reading and television viewing, but in the end it won't as they say, amount to a hill of beans. Bush could pull American troops out of Iraq tomorrow and admit he made a mistake and it wouldn't change the opinions that many of his supporters and detractors have of him. And that is real polarisation -- the true legacy of Bush's first term in office.

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