

Editorial

Beautiful game

Clash of continents in danger zone

THE Rainbow Nation has proved sceptics worldwide terribly wrong. When South Africa was awarded the right to host the 19th World Cup there were apprehensions that how such an unruly nation conducts the event in a 'civilised' manner. Many even went on to portray how unsafe it would be for foreigners to venture out on the streets of Johannesburg. However, not only has South Africa hosted the first-ever World Cup in the dark continent with aplomb but also has stolen the credit of being represented in the Group of Eight when Ghana rubbed shoulders against South Americans Uruguay. This was the first time an African nation reached thus far in this greatest show on earth. That they lost to Uruguay by a whisker is another matter. But the indomitable spirit of the continent was there for the whole world to see. Though the continent was represented by six nations including the hosts, only Ghana reached up to the third stage of the tournament. It was an irony of fate that their best bet, Ivory Coast, was bracketed with football powerhouses such as Brazil and Portugal in Group G. No wonder the group was promptly given the sobriquet: 'The Group of Death'. Moreover, the Ivorians were hampered by the injury of their captain, Didier Drogba, arguably the world's best striker today. The hosts may have lost out on the pitch, but its bubbly supporters with their vivuzelahs, a plastic blowing horn that produces a loud, distinctive monotone note, on the stands caught the imagination of the soccer world.

If it was electrifying in the stands, at the ground level it was fever-pitch. As the clash of continents and styles progressed, favourites and giants fell on the wayside. This was the first World Cup when the finalists of the previous one exited in the first round itself without opening an account to their credit. Before the tournament, both France and Italy were among the top four to lift the Cup. But their opponents have different ideas and off they went, much to the national shame. So was the case with England, an all-time favourite. At least they had the solace of stumbling awkwardly into the next round. That was that. Portugal with its icon Cristiano Ronaldo was expected to progress further. Though Spain put a spanner to that, Portugal at least had the solace of putting up a brave front. But the poetic justice to the beautiful game lay elsewhere. Germany with a young team had lost against minnows Serbia. But they shrugged that off and are threatening to mow down the rest. Strange are the ways of history. Two of Germany's prolific goal scorers, Lukas Podolski and Miroslav Klose, are Polish by origin. Does any one talk of the Holocaust? And their 20-year-old hero Thomas Mueller wears a No. 13 jersey! That is football for you.

'Super skimmer' set off operating for Gulf oil spill



MATTHEW BIGG

A SUPERTANKER adapted to scoop up oil from the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico began tests on Saturday amid a report that some major investors expect the energy giant to replace its top executives. The vessel named "A Whale" and dubbed a "super skimmer" is operating just north of the blown out well as part of a two-day test watched by the US Coastguard, said Bob Grantham, spokesman for TMT Shipping Offshore, which owns the ship. If all goes to plan TMT hopes to sign a clean-up contract for the ship, which can remove up to 500,000 barrels (21 million gallons) of oil and water mix from the sea surface a day, according to crew members.

Efforts by BP to contain the damage returned to normal after a hurricane and the British company said its oil-capture systems at its leaking well collected or burned off 25,290 barrels of oil during operations on Friday. The storm passed through the spill area off the coast of Louisiana without doing major damage. But the cor-

porate fall-out from the worst offshore oil spill in US history appeared far from over.

The *Financial Times* newspaper reported BP investors expected to see a change in the company's leadership, possibly once the leak is capped, with both Chief Executive Tony Hayward and Chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg in jeopardy.

"When this is over there will be a full investigation, and we would expect some action to replace the top team," the British newspaper quoted a top 10 UK shareholder as saying in its Saturday edition.

Without steps to steady the ship, BP could become a takeover target of companies like ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell or PetroChina, the FT said, citing a source working on BP's strategy. A BP spokesman declined to comment. BP's market capitalization has shrunk by about \$100 billion and its shares have lost more than half their value since the spill began. Company executives have been under intense pressure since an April 20 rig explosion killed 11 workers and unleashed the torrent of oil now

threatening wildlife and the tourist and fishing industries in the Gulf region.

The Obama administration has also criticized the company's response to the crisis, now in its 75th day.

The U.S. Interior Department, one of the departments spearheading Washington's response to the spill, could issue a revised offshore oil drilling moratorium for U.S. waters in the coming week.

A federal court last week lifted a six-month drilling ban imposed by the Obama administration as a result of the spill. The new moratorium is expected to be more flexible and could be adjusted to allow drilling in certain subsea fields. In a related development, a US presidential panel to probe the cause of the spill and recommend new rules to prevent future disasters will hold its first public meeting in New Orleans on July 12 and 13, its co-chairs said on Saturday.

The two-day meeting will "hear directly from the people of the Gulf Coast whose lives and livelihoods have been so profoundly affected by the BP Deepwater Horizon spill," said Bob Graham, a former US Senator, and William Reilly, former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, in a statement.

The seven-member commission, which has six months to do its work, will also seek expert advice on "regulatory, technical, legal, scientific and risk-management issues to ensure that any offshore drilling is done safely," they said. The super-tanker works by allowing polluted water to enter 12 horizontal slits near its port and starboard bow. The liquid then enters a series of tanks where the oil is decanted and then stored for later transfer to a separate vessel. —Reuters

A game changer (I)

The Women's Reservation Bill is an attempt to decimate gender discrimination, writes Surabhi Goyal

THE Women's Reservation Bill, which has been hanging fire for well over 14 years, is meant to be a progressive charter but it has touched a political raw nerve since the time it was conceptualised. Some headway was made on March 8, 2010 when this historic legislation was passed in the Rajya Sabha with a thumping majority. But after some initial euphoria and lot of celebratory rhetoric, it again seems to have faded from public memory. The Bill awaits presentation in the Lok Sabha and with the monsoon session of the Lower House set to kick off soon, all eyes are glued on the sincerity (or lack of it) of the political class to take up this legislation. The political inconsistency over this controversial legislation is bound to raise anybody's curiosity to understand what are the key drivers that led to the Bill and what has been holding it back.

Way back in 1996, the proposed Women's Reservation Bill conferred upon women the power of decision making by ensuring 33.3 per cent reservation at all the stages of legislative bodies, right from the Lok Sabha, the supreme legislative organ, down to the state and local agencies. This was intended to endow the fairer sex with greater political power but unfortunately it was not quite palatable to the male dominated polity and it was put on the backburner.

The Bill seeks to cast a "level playing field" to secure an equal status for women in the political field with their male counterparts. In India, the representation of women in politics has, hitherto, been negligible and, in any case, it has been highly disproportionate.

As per a www.quotaproject.org report, women constitute just 18.4 per cent of the Members of Parliaments around the world and many countries are taking recourse to the quota system for augmenting their number in legislatures. Women constitute 50 per cent of the world population and in India with 48 per cent female population, their representation is hardly about 10.8 per cent in the Lok Sabha and a meagre nine per cent in the Rajya Sabha. It is evident from these figures that women have been marginalised in politics and often been denied the power, respect and dignity in society.

The Women's Reservation Bill is an attempt to decimate the long continuing gender discrimination in society

by way of active participation of women in politics. Nonetheless, it is customary to have protests and resistance to every progressive movement or an idea. Likewise, the Bill too was attacked with a volley of opposition which stemmed from man's dominating position conferred by religious



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scriptures. It stems from the belief that women need protection from the day she is born by men, in the role of a father or a brother or a husband. It is, therefore, unthinkable for a man to assume a secondary position. Though such conservative ideas cannot be displayed in public in the 21st century, they continue to rule man's decision to accept ideas that benefit his weaker counterpart. Besides, politicians from the male bastions staunchly opposed the measure as it would exclude men from contesting a third of the constituencies in Parliament and state Assemblies. They tried to stifle the Bill by giving an unfounded criticism that it will help women of only the elitist and influential class and won't make any difference to the poor, illiterate and deprived women of the society. The argument is easily demol-

ished by gauging the results of the decade-old reservation policy instituted by late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986 for Panchayats and local bodies. This electoral reservation brought many women in power at the grassroots level and their success stories speak a lot about efficiency, performance and integrity of women as political leaders. The comment of a woman Panchayat member says it all: "When I walk into villages I go inside people's home. Men stop at the door." A woman leader can empathise and understand the woes of the deprived women better than their male equivalents. But one has to give time for the old order to be replaced by the new, till the purpose is fully or nearly realised.

Yet another assertion which the opponents of the women's Bill have advanced is that it is likely to hit the women of backward and religious minorities hard, and, therefore, they are clamouring for a quota within quota for Dalit women or those belonging to Muslim, Christians and other religious minority categories. This too appears to be a phoney suggestion as one cannot lose sight of the fact that there already exists reservation in favour of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The proposed 33.3 per cent reservation is in addition to the reservation made for the above classes of people. The interest of the SCs and STs is already well protected. A sub-quota for Muslim or Christian women is likely to violate secularism, a signature tune of the Constitution. To provide a quota within the specified quota to accommodate religious minorities would be against the spirit of the Constitution and may not be ultimately sustainable. If once such a demand is conceded there is likely to be no end and in every field voices of the kind may be raised. It is better to put a full-stop to such a demand here and now.

Some parties have demanded that there should be a binding law to reserve 10 to 15 per cent of seats for women within the party itself. The suggestion is well-merited and there is no bar on a particular party if it concedes this much of percentage to women candidates by allowing them to contest on the party ticket.

To be continued
The author is Associate Professor at IILM Institute for Higher Education, New Delhi

UN warned over logging corruption

JOHN VIDAL

A REVOLUTIONARY scheme backed by the World Bank to pay poor countries billions of dollars a year to stop felling trees is the best way to stop logging and save the planet from climate change, according to wealthy countries and conservationists, yet documents seen by the *Observer* show the plan is actually leading to corruption and possibly more logging.

Human rights and environment groups yesterday called for a radical rethink of the United Nations scheme, known as Redd (Reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation), after it emerged that many countries were trying to cheat the system.

Under Redd, 37 mainly tropical countries have requested more than \$14bn in grants from rich countries by 2015 in return for cutting their carbon emissions from logging and other forestry activities. This is expected to lead to an income of more than \$10bn a year by 2020 when a global carbon offset scheme is running. The carbon money flowing from rich to poor countries will then theoretically dwarf international aid and could reduce global emissions by 17-20 per cent - more than that emitted by all the world's transport.

But analysis of the 16 forestry reform plans so far submitted by Redd countries to the World Bank shows that many intend to abuse the system in order to collect the money while carrying on logging as usual. Documents seen by the *Observer* show that the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Guyana intends to use some of its Redd money to pay a property dealer from Florida to build a road and a major hydroelectric plant in some of its most densely forested areas. Indonesia has said it will impose a moratorium on the conversion of its extensive peat forests to palm plantations, but only after 2013, allowing logging companies to ravage its forests until then. Other countries are setting the present rate of deforestation deliberately high or are ignoring all present logging, so that they can be paid to do nothing. The environment groups, which include Global Witness, Greenpeace International, Fern and Rainforest Foundation, also fear that Redd is being used by governments to victimise and steal the carbon rights of people who live and depend on the forests.

Last month police arrested a UK-based businessman alleged to have paid government officials and others in return for the emission rights on 20 per cent of Liberia's forests. Interpol said last year the chances were "very high" that criminal gangs would seek to take advantage. Peter Younger, Interpol environment crimes specialist and author of a report for the World Bank on illegal forestry, said: "Alarm bells are ringing. Redd is simply too big to monitor. The potential for criminality is vast and has not been taken into account." Simon Counsell, director of Rainforest Foundation, said: "Redd has been touted as the quickest and cheapest way of preventing climate change, but what we are seeing are expensive and ill-conceived plans that fail to address the underlying causes of deforestation, and might make things worse. Redd needs to be taken out of the hands of the World Bank, and a new global institution [must be] established to rigorously oversee payments to tropical countries on the basis of the actual amount of logging or deforestation that is averted." —Agencies

Afghan war at critical stage, says new General



ROB TAYLOR

THE nine-year war in Afghanistan has reached a critical stage, US General David Petraeus said on Sunday, as he formally took command of the 150,000-strong Nato-led force fighting a deadly Taliban insurgency.

"We are engaged in a tough fight. After years of war we have arrived at a critical moment," Petraeus told guests at a change-of-command ceremony at the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters in Kabul.

Petraeus was last week appointed to lead all foreign forces in Afghanistan after his predecessor, General Stanley McChrystal, was dismissed for insulting remarks he and aides made about the US administration in a magazine interview. The change of command comes at a time when the Taliban are at their strongest since being overthrown in 2001, with ISAF casualties mounting daily.

Petraeus, wearing camouflage fatigues and speaking near a marble column dedicated to ISAF forces who have died in the Afghan campaign, said his appointment sig-

nalled a change in command, not strategy.

Petraeus landed in Kabul on Friday after his appointment was confirmed by the Senate and the House of Representatives approved \$33 billion in funding for a troop surge he hopes will turn the tide of the war. The surge will bring to 150,000 the number of foreign troops in Afghanistan just as a new strategy takes root. It entails tackling the Taliban in their strongholds while relying on the government to simultaneously improve local governance and development. Petraeus's appointment could be a last throw of the dice for Washington to end an increasingly costly conflict that is draining Western budgets as they emerge from one of the worst global recessions in history.

He is charged with not only winning the war against a growing Taliban insurgency, but also with starting a withdrawal of US forces from July next year.

"We must demonstrate to the Afghan people and to the world that al Qaeda and its network of extremist allies will not be allowed to once again establish sanctuaries in Afghanistan," he said. —Reuters