

# Go green

*That's what a Calcutta-based conservationist group tells the media*

**M**ore than 50 lakh metric tonnes of fly ash are deposited on the vegetation each year, raising the content of mercury in milk by 50 per cent; the coliform count in the Ganga at Varanasi is 4.2 million per litre when above 500 makes it unsuitable for bathing; there is no sweet water left in 3,000 villages of the country...

Such statistics appear in the newspapers almost every day, without making the desired impact on the reading public. Otherwise, why would the National River Commission, which made a mess of the Rs 500-crore Ganga Action Plan be given Rs 2,500 crore for a similar project? Why did we not take a lesson from the Bhopal gas leak and allow the tragedy at Vishakhapatnam to happen?

These were questions posed by eminent Supreme Court lawyer M.C. Mehta, who summed up the situation like this: "We are a nation expert in disaster management, but we lack the will to prevent it."

This is exactly where a 'green page' in newspapers and periodicals can make a difference. A nation-wide campaign for a green page was launched recently by The Jungles, a Calcutta-based conservationist group, with Mehta as the chief crusader.

The idea is to have a page dedicated to news, views and

images related to nature and environment. The write-ups will focus on areas like forest ecology, wildlife conservation, poaching, indigenous people, victims of disorder, pollution control, global warming, public interest litigation, eco-tourism, etc.

The introduction of a green page, say its advocates, will set a new order in environmental journalism and could help create a group of environment-conscious citizens and better-informed policy makers.

A green page is also an economically viable option. It could be done by re-orienting the page layout — getting the environment-related articles, features, photographs, even letters together — without adding on an extra page.

**NATURE CLUB: M.C. Mehta leads the campaign**



And then, it could be an ideal vehicle for environment-related ads and public awareness campaigns.

At the launch ceremony in Calcutta recently, Justice (ret'd) Chittatosh Mookherjee, chairman of Human Rights Commission of West Bengal, pointed out that the media was only interested in dishing out news which is "more sensational and of a more momentary interest which often results in a blissful ignorance in many of us". As if on cue, Mehta reiterated, "Journalists are concerned with politics, unfortunately, issues linked with life are lost." He argued that the print media, being "the largest guzzlers of trees in the form of paper", was duty-bound to give a page to environmental issues.

Mehta, who won the Ramon Magsaysay Award this year for his sustained struggle to protect India's environment, went on to say that, "No political party has environment on its agenda as there is no such thing as a 'green vote-bank'." Referring to the powerful lobby which constantly opposes the movement to protect and preserve the environment for its own vested interests, he said, it is the constitutional duty of the press to take up related issues.

"The green page proposal is our challenge to the print media," said Raja Chatterjee, secretary, Junglee. "It is a challenge to the ingenuity and innovativeness of the editorial in different newspapers."

To find out if Chatterjee's impassioned plea has had any takers, one will have to wait till December when the group meets decision-makers from the media, the government, corporate groups and advertising sectors for an exchange of ideas. •

**Chitralekha Basu/Calcutta**