

Arctic squabbles must end to ensure eco-balance

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Climate change and global warming are among the foremost concerns of this era. The earth is losing its polar ice caps at an unprecedented rate. Instead of finding solutions to avert this crisis, major world players are fighting to control and exploit the untapped hydrocarbon reserves of the Arctic.

Global warming is a major concern of this century. The earth's temperature has increased by 0.08 degree Celsius per decade since the advent of the industrial revolution. The 'Heat dome' over the Pacific Northwest and parts of Canada, formed during the summer of 2021, has resulted in the suffering of millions. Globally, 37 per cent of all heat-related deaths between 1981 and 2018 have been due to global warming. NASA reported that the decadal loss of Arctic ice was 13.1 per cent between 1981 and 2010. Scientific investigators recorded the lowest ice concentration in the Arctic in August 2020.

The only option available to combat this crisis is reducing global GHG emissions. There was a brief drop in emissions during 2020 due to Covid-related lockdowns. But these changes are brief and temporary. Oil demands are predicted to rise by 5 million barrels per day during the second half of 2021.

To make the situation even worse, there has been a battle over control of hydrocarbons made accessible by the melting of Arctic ice caps. According to rules set down by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Arctic-bordering nations can claim 22 km as their territorial waters. Another 370 km from their coasts can be treated as their 'Exclusive Economic Zone.' Beyond that point, the sea area is regarded as 'international waters' that could be conserved as the common heritage of humankind.

To turn the whole pristine Arctic into a hydrocarbon exploration zone, all the Arctic-bordering nations are



urging a re-ratification of the UNCLOS. After the re-ratification, nations would get ten years to file claims over an extended continental shelf. Upon approval, that particular nation would get the exclusive right over any above-sea or below-sea resources in this region. The US has signed but has not yet ratified the UNCLOS.

Another political problem that has contributed to the melting of Arctic ice sheets is the improved navigability of the northern oceans. Previously, though the major part of Arctic was designated as international waters, there was no navigation due to the ice barriers. Now with that gone, the international waters can be used

by any nation for navigation. This is putting pressure on the NATO countries as well as Russia, which boasts the world's most advanced naval power.

In 2014, Denmark claimed 895,000 square kilometres of Arctic continental shelf extending from its possession, Greenland, including the North Pole to the border of Russia's Exclusive Economic Zone. Canada is also claiming a chunk of the Arctic including the North Pole. Russia is trying to establish its claims in the region via its extended continental shelf as far as the North Pole. Canada and Denmark are competing over the jurisdiction of an uninhabited

Arctic island. This indicates how important every point of the Arctic is in this ongoing power and control game.

Ecologically, the whole Arctic region is suffering immensely: Global warming links the melting of permanent ice reserves, ongoing hydrocarbon explorations and increasing temperature. In the absence of food, polar bear attacks have increased exponentially over the Arctic. Polar bears used to hop from one ice cap to another in search of seals, their traditional prey. But with melting ice, the seas are reducing the navigability of the bears as well as making it easier for their prey to escape attack. Global warm-

ing is starving the bears to extinction. Exploration for hydrocarbons in the Arctic creates untold environmental damage. The Norilsk diesel oil spill on 29 May 2020 resulted in the spillage of 17,500 tonnes of diesel oil.

The polar regions play a crucial role in maintaining the balance in the biosphere. All Arctic nations should work together to stop this unprecedented Arctic ice cap melting and protect this habitat, instead of fighting over its control.

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100 YEARS AGO OCCASIONAL NOTE

A writer in the Indian Medical Gazette has described some cases of chronic lead poisoning which he has observed among printers in Calcutta. It is most common among those who are otherwise debilitated and who work in presses where the arrangements for ventilation are defective. He draws the conclusion that, now that India is fast developing into an industrial country, the Government should see that the subject of industrial or occupational diseases is not neglected. The Editor assures the writer that definite steps are now being taken to deal with the diseases that specially affect industrial workers. In connection with the School of Tropical Medicine in Calcutta the Jute, Tea and Mining Associations have already liberally endowed three research posts. One doctor is now engaged in the study of hookworm disease, with special reference to labour forces, and another is making a similar investigation into kala-azar. It is hoped that there will soon be another worker to undertake research in connection with diseases like cholera, dysentery, etc., among labourers. In the Institute of Hygiene attached to the same school it is proposed to have special lectures on industrial hygiene, and the Sanitary Reorganisation Committee has recommended that there should be a special bureau of industrial hygiene under the Sanitary Commissioner, who will probably be designated the Director of Public Health.

NEWS ITEMS

CALCUTTA ELECTRIC SUPPLY CORPORATION

At the Bengal Legislative Council yesterday discussion was commenced on a resolution moved by Babu Jatindra Nath Basu that the Council recommend to the Government that the amendment applied for by the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation, in the Calcutta Electric Lighting License of 1907, for altering the period after which the option of purchase could be exercised from 10 years to 20 years be not allowed. Babu Surendra Nath Mullick said that last year the company paid a dividend of 20 per cent and on the top of that they were putting on a 15 per cent surcharge. Yet the company said they were anxious to benefit the consumers. Nothing could be more ridiculous. Dr. Haridhone Dutt Rai Bahadur said the company did not deserve much consideration.

RAIL AND STEAMER STRIKE THREAT

It is reported that a section of the non-cooperators have decided to attempt to bring about a complete strike of the employees of railways and steamers all over Bengal. Emissaries left Calcutta last night to work in Northern and Eastern Bengal, and it is stated that others will leave Sealdah for various districts today. Nural Huq Chowdhury, who describes himself as the secretary to the Inland River Flat Employees' Association, and who figured prominently during the steamer strike just over, is reported to be taking an active part in this attempt to bring about a complete traffic deadlock in Bengal.

PIECEGOODS BOYCOTT FAILS IN PUNJAB

From enquiries made among piecegoods importers and dealers regarding the boycott of foreign goods it appears that almost all the dealers are convinced of the ultimate failure of the boycott campaign, but hold that the failure of the monsoon in the Punjab may bring about a temporary and qualified success of Mr. Gandhi's boycott movement in the province. One importer, however, said that he and his brother importers would not mind boycotting foreign goods provided Mr. Gandhi is prepared to arrange to help them to clear their present liabilities. It is, however, stated in certain circles that the grave anxiety caused by the failure of the monsoon in the Punjab may have a direct effect on the Gandhi movement.

FATAL ACCIDENT AT RANGOON

A fatal accident occurred on board the British Indian Steam Navigation Company's steamer Ekma, on Wednesday. Shortly after she was berthed at Sule Pagoda Wharf one of the workmen was sent down to see whether everything was right in the "tween decks" of No. 2 hatch before unloading could start, but he soon staggered and lay motionless. Another workman followed to help him, and he, too, was overcome by fumes and fell senseless. Both died from suffocation due, it is said to the men going down too quickly after the hatches were lifted. An enquiry is being held.

B'desh fire exposes lax enforcement

MONIRA SHARMAN

Between 8am on July 10 till 8am on July 11, a record 230 people had died of Covid-19 in Bangladesh, while 11,874 had been infected during the same time. In the midst of the unfolding Covid-19 crisis, we received the news of the devastating factory fire in Ruppangj, Narayanganj. The blaze began on the evening of July 8 on the ground floor of the six-storey factory building of Hashem Foods Limited (which is a wing of Bangladeshi multinational Sajeed Group).

The recovery efforts are still on. Victims in white body bags were heaped in a fleet of ambulances first, and then in the morgue of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), as relatives could only stand by and lament. Weeping family members waited outside the charred remains of the factory for any news of their loved ones. For those with family members still missing, the wait is now only for their remains, with no hope of finding their loved ones alive.

It is said that many workers jumped from the first two floors of the factory in a helpless bid to save their lives and at least 26 suffered injuries. The most devastating bit of information is that the only exit on the third floor of the factory was locked, and many workers only died because they had been trapped inside.

Due to the frequency of such incidents involving fires, Bangladesh can now be named "a hub of firebombs". An old adage by Georg Hegel states "The only thing that we learn from history is that we learn nothing from his-



tory." If we look back over just the last three months, we will be able to recall another fire accident at a chemical storage facility on the ground floor of a six-storey building in Old Dhaka's Armanitola, which caused four deaths and injured 23 in April.

From that, we can also remember the heart-rending chemical warehouse explosion that took place in February 2019 in Chawkbazar, Old Dhaka that killed nearly 70 people. At this incident's second anniversary this year, the relatives of the deceased lamented that they have not yet gotten the promised compensation from the government. What is most disquieting is that the

government has failed to relocate chemical factories and warehouses from the over-populated, residential alleyways of Old Dhaka. This is despite the fact that Old Dhaka residents have been demanding the factories' relocation since the fire tragedy at a Nimtoli chemical warehouse on June 2, 2010, which claimed the lives of 123 people.

Disasters that occur due to fragile fire and building safety standards are obviously not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh and lead to accidents and hundreds of deaths every year. Though the millions of workers involved in the chemical and textile sector contributes largely to the economy, the factory

owners' and government authorities' apparent disregard for their safety is cruel and criminal, to say the least.

Another recent fire incident is from March of this year, also in a chemical warehouse in Sreepur upazila, Gazipur. In this case, one factory worker died while 42 others became unwell after inhaling toxic gases from the burning chemicals. The workers alleged that the authorities had initially refused to open the main entrance so they could leave the factory during the fire - which is similar to how the gates of the Hashem Foods factory had been kept closed (allegedly by the owners' instructions), trapping the workers inside the burning building. There is undeniably a tendency among factory owners to not prioritise the safety of their workers (especially in garments and chemical factories), treating them like cogs in the wheels of the country's economy and not as human beings.

With the Covid-19 pandemic increasing overall socio-economic vulnerability, people working for low wages are also becoming poorer. Such incidents at times like these, which display the neglect of authorities (both private and public) towards the lives of workers, only act as insult to injury.

Bangladesh has a saddening and long-standing history of industrial and chemical disasters wherein workers are locked inside and practically killed by the negligence of company owners. If we want to stop such incidents from occurring anymore, strict fire and building safety measures must be imposed, with the help and oversight of law enforcement agencies. Fire extinguishers need to be provided on each floor of an industrial establish-

ment. Most importantly, workers need to be involved in regular fire drills in order to make them aware of what needs to be done in times of emergency, how fire extinguishers are operated and so on. Factories must also ensure proper emergency exits are in place so that workers can promptly and safely escape the premises if accidents occur.

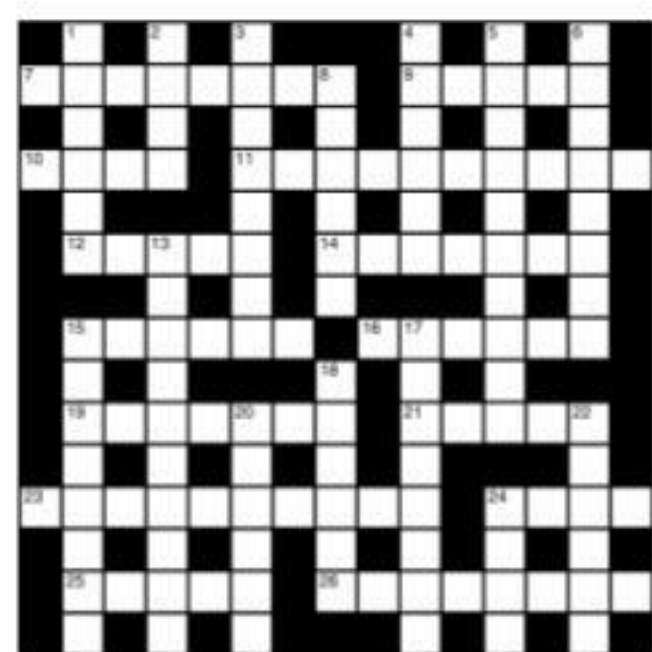
Lax enforcement of regulations, and the corruption that leads to government officials and bodies looking the other way despite this lax enforcement, must be stopped. Though the authorities tend to introduce tougher safety rules after such disasters, they remain widely unimplemented and tragedies continue to take place.

We should remember that the country's garment industry became largely compliant only after the horrific Rana Plaza tragedy, where 1,134 workers were killed, and that too under the watchful eyes of domestic and global watchdogs. However, it cannot just be the export-oriented industries; local industries need to be made to maintain safety compliance more strictly as well, especially by government bodies such as the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE). A complete relocation of chemical warehouses is needed to ensure the safety of the people living in residential areas, as they are highly exposed to such disasters. The government must also compensate and rehabilitate the families of the victims and the injured, immediately and adequately. Such unimplemented initiatives of the government are what have turned our cities into firebombs and devalued the lives of our workers.

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CROSSWORD

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

POST REFLECTION
E C L A O G E
STROPHIE DERANGE
T O R V L R I D
T N O N E S E L E M E N T
L G V N S E E A
ENEMA STAMPEDED
N R E T O U
COMMISSAR NOBEL
E A G S D R T
T O A D I N T H E H O L E
O A T N R N W R
PUDDING ESTONIA
U O O O A I T
SPRINGTIME PEKE

ACROSS

- Initially mysterious pseudonyms shifting one's anxious feelings (8)
- Influential American wants one of Groucho's kin sent into retirement (5)
- Church stands next to empty Russian laboratory (4)
- Unusual chemise and odd robe regularly stained (10)
- Someone in The Imitation Game, perhaps? (5)
- Made from denim, Rodin's first couple of pieces took subject less seriously (7)
- Lines going around the world will snub Luther's latest theses (6)
- Parasite essentially libels

- Effortlessly quirky Dalí bored by a certain piece in Spain? On the contrary (7)
- Urge some lesser Pentagon characters to turn to the other side (5)
- Desperately stir acidic bits of crème fraiche? (10)
- Greek character placing ring on yours truly - much obliged! (4)
- During chorus, trumpeters play strings (5)
- Soprano picked up yeti, perhaps, as a bit of theatrical action (8)

DOWN

- Gadget for film or photography that's part of

- the machine age (6)
- Forest dweller still in its youth's a horny spirit, we hear (4)
- CIA meeting with Boris for a change, levelly maintaining pressure (8)
- Fancy peccadillo finally committed away from home (6)
- A pair of experts tackling sort of dog that can be secured (10)
- One's learned to be vigilant about roaming charges (8)
- US representative drills through ecclesiastical site (it's a source of oil) (6)
- Performers of one kind or another taking lead from tempo instead of libido (3,7)

- Cockney's extremely vigorous when holding up flight, ultimately making you the last to arrive (8)
- Big reveal sees English banker trap unknown figure by safe (8)
- Certain philosophers revolutionised science with big apple (6)
- Litter had visor and mask lifted now and again to deliver some vernacularisms (6)
- Post for Methuselah? (Letters for 26 others are enclosed here too) (6)
- Little monkeys and little apes scratching skin on crotch (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

