

# Hydrocarbon conflicts behind environmental degradation

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The energy sector contributes as much as 73 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. With burning forests, flooding cities and drying deserts, the impacts of climate change are apparent globally. Hydrocarbons play a major role in global politics as well in as destabilising the environment.

Hydrocarbons — oil and coal — are the pillars of modern industrial activity. The automotive and energy industries are intricately linked with oil and steel. Coal typically supplies 80 per cent of many countries' energy demand. Hydrocarbons and their extraction have directly or indirectly influenced global geopolitics for the last two centuries.

The role of hydrocarbons in conflicts became apparent in World War I. Then, the British had to promise Arab independence to instigate an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, an Axis power. The plan was to divide the oil-rich Ottoman territories of the Persian Gulf between the Allied powers, France and Britain.

'Black gold' also cast a shadow over World War II. Hitler had planned to capture the oil-rich Caucasus and Caspian basin from Russia through Operation Barbarossa in June 1941. This move may have been the worst decision of Nazi Germany. It brought Joseph Stalin's Soviet Russia into the war. Meanwhile, frustrated by the US blockade, which stifled the supply of oil to its shores, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 caused the US also to join WW II.

In the post-colonial era of the 1970s, the U.S allied with Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran, whose massive military armament was fuelled by Persian oil. But the tide shifted with the Shah's abdication in 1979. The succeeding Shiite revolution turned Iran anti-west. The Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s engulfed the whole region in conflict over a few acres of oil-rich land in the Persian Gulf. This war claimed a half million lives.

The Gulf War soon followed, with Iraq's advance into neutral Kuwait.



This necessitated the US-led international response to maintain stability in the oil-rich gulf. During the Gulf War, hostile forces leaked as much as 11 million barrels of crude oil, destroying the unique biodiversity of the region. The oil evaporated into thick black mud, causing massive environmental degradation. Uranium-tipped missiles used during the war contaminated the Arabian Desert with lethal radioactivity.

Reasons for forming the new nation, South Sudan, were rooted in hydrocarbon politics. After its inde-

pendence from Sudan in July 2011, oil reserves were discovered in its territories. Soon North Sudan aggravated the issue by seeking to control the flow of land-locked South Sudanese oil through its Red Sea ports. This conflict caused mass starvation, displacement and civil war, resulting in the loss of 400,000 lives. Sudan lost 11 per cent of its forests between 1990 and 2005. The main reason for deforestation has been hydrocarbon extraction.

Even during the pandemic in July 2020, two nations — Armenia and Azerbaijan — fought a bloody

war over the Nagorno-Karabakh region in the biodiversity-rich Caucasus. Azerbaijan is a key player in recent hydrocarbon politics as it sits in the oil-rich Volga-Caspian basin.

The world's largest oil reserves are now in Venezuela. But the recent civil war in this South American country, along with US sanctions on Iran, seem responsible for the Saudi monopoly in the crude oil market. Sitting as it does at the doorway of the Amazon rainforest, unrest in Venezuela is alarming news for environmentalists.

The world needs renewable energy to free it from the shackles of hydrocarbon politics. The environment needs to be safeguarded and all nations must join hands in this fight against greenhouse gases and climate change. Before hydrocarbon reserves are depleted, they are likely to cost enormous losses of life as well as the irreversible degradation of the Earth.

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100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

It is thoroughly characteristic of Germany that it is only when the Allies have, after much heart-searching, agreed upon a form of indemnity payment which the French have all along considered inadequate, but which the British were almost afraid would ruin her, she should be discovered to have paid away sixty million marks to the ex-Kaiser, and should be subsidising her aerial enterprises to the tune of eleven million marks per annum. At the same time her industrial condition is found to be amazingly healthy, and a somewhat urgent question has arisen as to how long British industries will be able to compete with German. It is of course too late now to reopen the decisions of the Paris Conference, but the latest far the Huns can be trusted to pursue it. It is probable that the next war will be decided in the air, and, knowing the German proneness to treachery can the Allies afford to give Germany even the semblance of a start by way of preparation? On the other hand, the Allies have a pledge which should tend to stiffen their control over the Germans in their occupation of the left bank of the Rhine. Whether that will ever be restored to the Huns is at least doubtful, but in the event of any indulgence in trickery which would place the Allies at an unfair military disadvantage as compared with Germany during the next ten years.

NEWS ITEMS

FIGHT BETWEEN COOLIES AND DURWANS

A riot was reported at about 10 A.M. yesterday near Chetla Bridge, in which there was a free fight between a number of coolies and durwans of the Port Commissioners, with the result that about fourteen persons, including coolie women, were injured. European sergeants and armed constables from Lall Bazar and constables from the Alipore thana promptly turned out. The rioters were dispersed and about a dozen arrests were made, while the injured people were removed to hospital. It appears that there was an altercation between some coolies, who are employed by the contractor for the purpose of unloading mud from railway trucks, and the Port Commissioners' durwans, because the latter reprimanded some of the coolies for throwing the mud into the canal which passes alongside, instead of unloading it on the land which is some distance off.

AMIR AND AFGHANISTAN ADMINISTRATION

According to a Kabul newspaper the Amir has issued a proclamation explaining administrative divisions of Afghanistan. These divisions, as now arranged, consist of nine, provinces five of which are ruled over by Governors and four by Lieutenant-Governors the former divisions being termed Vilayets and the latter Hukumat-hi-Ala with the exception that the Vilayet of Kabul is without a governor. The provinces are further divided into chief commissionerships and ilaqas, the last named consisting of a number of villages. In addition to this the Amir has issued a directory of rules under which these provinces are administered, giving the powers and duties of the administrators. For the villages and commissionerships of the Kabul provinces there are no ilaquadars or commissioners, as affairs in those areas are directly managed by the Home Ministry.

EGYPT AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Addressing the British Cotton Growing Association at Manchester, Mr. Churchill declared that in spite of steady progress the Empire still had only one-fortieth of the cotton needed to keep the hungry mills active. A formidable fact now was the amount America was now consuming of her own cotton crop. Mr. Churchill advocated the location and development of supplies within the Empire and deplored the neglect to develop our tropical possessions during the past twenty years. He urged the application of scientific apparatus as a remunerative investment, also the development of inter-imperial trade both between tropical Dependencies and the Dominions. Mr. Churchill dwelt on Egypt's growing importance as a cotton-growing country, but stated that affairs there were hampered by political instability which he hoped would soon be terminated.

MONEY AND MARKETS IN BOMBAY

There was a good enquiry for three-and-a-half per cent Government Paper at Rs 57-8 during the week. Five per cent War Loans were quoted at Rs 87, and tax-frees at Rs 89. Five-and-a-half War Bonds were available at par. Six per cent Tax Free Loans were placed in small lots at par, and six-and-a-half Development Loans were selling at three rupees premium. The share market was open for two days only. There was some activity in Cotton Mill shares, which closed a little weak owing to profit taking. Piecegoods markets report a decided improvement. Wholesale and retail enquiries were very encouraging. Local piecegoods are moving steadily and better prices are offered.

## Is Pakistan losing touch with reality?

KHURRAM HUSAIN

Pakistan is now hurtling towards a state of isolation reminiscent of what we saw in the aftermath of the Abbotabad raid. Doors are closing and demands are rising. Meanwhile, at home the prime minister seems to have launched into election mode, cutting ribbons for development projects, rolling out programmes for farmers and promising more growth to come in the year ahead. The two developments seem at odds. Either the prime minister is oblivious to the enormity of the challenges the country is facing, or all that is about to happen to another Pakistan, not the one he is prime minister of.

Consider some of his remarks while launching the Punjab Kissan Card programme in Bahawalpur on Wednesday. "The health card and Kissan card are the biggest things you have accomplished," he said to Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar while addressing a farmers' convention. "This will be the turning point in our history when it is written. That [was the time when] this country changed its direction for the purpose for which it was made."

So real tabdeeli has only just begun. And then he said this change will be the path to the "country's greatness" and described the scheme as a "revolution". Nothing less will do in Naya Pakistan. But then he added an odd little sentence, saying "wherever there is a PTI government — in Azad [Jammu and] Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan — or a coalition government as in Balochistan, we will talk with them to provide these cards



to farmers so we can directly subsidise them."

This came right after his visit to Karachi where he reviewed the Rs 1.1 trillion Karachi Transformation Plan in a meeting to which his own ministers were the only invitees. Why hold such a meeting in Karachi in that case? Couldn't it just as easily have been held in Islamabad, especially considering all the main attendees were members of his own cabinet who had flown in with him? The meeting reviewed projects like the cleaning of three storm-water drains, the Bus Rapid Transport projects, the K-IV water supply project for the city and the Keamari Pipri rail freight pro-

ject among others. Later, Asad Umar tweeted that one of the bus lines would be operational by October and projects relating to drainage, sewage and roads will be completed by end of the fiscal year.

It is good that Pakistan has a prime minister focused on delivering such results for the people. But the heightened urgency attached to these affairs since the fiscal year began, at a time when the economy is running heavily on borrowed money and the country is hurtling towards isolation, creates a sense of disconnect. Leaders usually become this obsessed with schemes and projects when they have entered election mode.

Does the economic picture support heightened spending by the state? The IMF holds the answer. Without it, budget allocations cannot be sustained without creating massive imbalances in the macroeconomic framework. The external requirements to sustain the growth momentum are too large for the economy to afford on its own strength. And the IMF loan is currently in limbo, with renewed discussions to start later this month. They're feverishly trying to come up with a plan to manage the circular debt that involves withdrawing another Rs 42 billion in subsidies for consumers, meaning at least some people will receive increased bills. And their revenues are growing mainly on the back of growing imports, meaning you get more revenues but face a rising trade deficit.

Remittances are programmed to rise by 10 per cent this fiscal year, but the first month has not produced encouraging numbers. Latest data shows remittances fell by 2.7 per cent in July, which the State Bank attributed to the reduced number of working days in that month due to the Eidul Azha holidays. Be that as it may, the massive gap between what is expected and what actually showed up cannot be explained as simply due to the holidays. For every month they fail to make the target of 10 per cent growth, it means the remaining months need to show an even higher growth rate. Anything less than 10 per cent growth in August will mean growing discomfort on the external front.

The government is joyously trumpeting the export numbers, but

what they're not telling you is that the trade deficit is rising faster still. The trade deficit in July jumped by more than 85 per cent compared to the same month last year whereas exports rose by 16 per cent. This is where the bulk of the revenue growth is coming from — collections from imports. In a normal economy rising imports need not be a source of worry. But in a country like Pakistan, that has a long history of depleting its foreign exchange reserves on the back of high trade deficits (coupled with debt-servicing obligations) and landing up at the doorstep of the IMF for a bailout, it is indeed a source of concern.

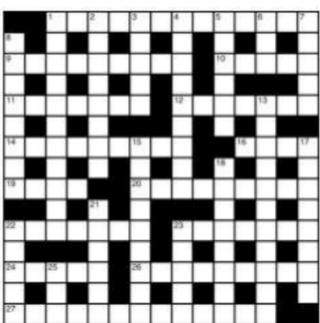
It's still not clear what expectation to maintain regarding the external sector as the months wear on, mainly because the government itself has not yet made up its mind. According to news reports, the finance and commerce ministries are working off wildly varying estimates of what the current account deficit will be by the end of the year, with the gap between the two ministries' projections being as large as 60 per cent as per some reports.

What is clear, though, is that the country's economy will not be able to grow if its isolation continues. The prime minister is going around the country doling out hundreds of billions of rupees in projects, but will he have the wherewithal to foot the bill? And does he realise that growing isolation means strained relations with multilateral creditors, especially the IMF? Pakistan is losing the battle of narratives that has broken out in the wake of the Taliban advance in Afghanistan. It cannot afford to lose its connection with reality.

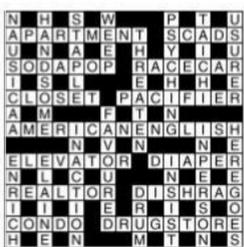
Dawn/ANM.

CROSSWORD

NO 29002



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- Peculiar dictionary is unreliable — head for Chambers (13)
- Prince with severe expression covering front of curious old coin (4-5)
- Hand round recipe that's original (5)
- King, for one, blocking distasteful pope (7)
- Article to say rather too much about one's pain (7)
- Person overseas, seeing abdication of Queen, is to say more (9)
- Father engaging in kinky sex? I don't want that in my inbox (4)

DOWN

- Irritable idler wandering around ruined temple (3-8)
- Rudimentary measure of grain not complete (8)
- Men in foul conditions in newspaper article (5)
- Navy getting new cut in fuel, greater than any previous? (9)
- Official replacing top of substantial shelter (6)
- Three stripped — feature of Glastonbury? (3)
- Disadvantage to hear a song (5)
- Take to court, involving one embracing mostly violent activity (8)

- One million continue accepting one saint's beliefs (11)
- Excellent to beset castle I supplied with soldiers, having stronger reason (1,8)
- Wine, one inspiring line about tiger? (8)
- Lines in sonnet? There's support for us in folio note (8)
- Being aboard very large boat (6)
- Designation of fighter plane brought in to fly until now (2,3)
- Beer half-heartedly provided for nipper (5)
- Some theatre clearly is place for play (3)

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