Lessons to Learn in the Murky Water

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After secretly awarding the area to North Korean oil and gas exploration giant Daewoo, two Myanmarese Navy warships intruded into Bangladeshi waters at the Bay of Bengal last Saturday, to escort four hydrocarbon exploration vessels. The area is believed to be rich in mineral resources as India and Myanmar (formerly Burma), Bangladesh's two immediate neighbours, discovered 100 trillion cubic feet of gas and two billion barrels of oil, and seven trillion cubic feet of gas respectively two years ago.

Bangladesh Navy tried to thwart the intrusion by sending three ships to where the Myanmarese had started building a rig only to confront an obdurate Myanmarese Navy who told our men in uniform that it was actually Myanmarese water. Intense diplomatic manoeuvre ensued, which resulted in the Korean company dismantling the rig.

The issue, however, is refusing to die down, for news has started to come from Bangladesh's 173km-long remote border area with Myanmar that Nasaca, the country's border guards, infamous for their brutal human rights abuses, has deployed a unit on the other side of the fence. Myanmar has later deployed its army along the Naf, prompting Bangladesh to deploy its own troops. There are unofficial reports that the Nasaca is setting fire to the homes of the Muslim Rohingya minorities who live in its Rakhine (formerly Arakan) State, to forcibly push them into Bangladesh, like the way it drove 250,000 Rohingyas into Bangladesh in 1991.

The incident is indeed embarrassing for our foreign office as the recent Myanmarese intrusion is followed by a 'high-powered' delegation led by the country's General Maung Aye, senior vice general and seven other cabinet ministers. Even before the visit, Dhaka held two rounds of talks with Naypyidaw regarding the common usage of the Naf and its estuary in April and September, which the ministry then said produced 'good results'.

Even though the Myanmarese intrusion has visibly caught our foreign office off guard, it was not unexpected. The sea-boundary of the countries has remained undemarcated with Bangladesh asking for equity basis North to South demarcation whereas Myanmar wants an eco-distance system in East to West boundary. Given that the issue of establishing the country's economic rights over the area should be of utmost importance, Bangladesh's

Bangladesh-Myanmar row

