

Toxic ships in Bangladesh waters

Tough action must be taken against those flouting the law

THE entry of sixteen toxic ships into Bangladesh waters, despite clear High Court orders prohibiting such entry, is a matter which arouses the concern of every citizen. As a report in Friday's issue of this newspaper makes clear, the shipping and environment departments have obviously seen little reason not to let these ships in. It is here that one wonders: are these departments at all aware of the legal moves taken in the recent past to keep such toxic vessels away from Bangladesh or have they simply decided on their own that High Court directives matter little and can easily be flouted? The sixteen ships in question have been given no objection certificates (NOCs) by the shipping authorities and are therefore now busy with the task of scrapping. Perhaps the issue would not have come to light had the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) not kept track of circumstances. The organization has served a legal notice on those responsible for issuing the NOCs despite the clear, unambiguous High Court orders relating to the issue.

We are of the opinion that the matter warrants the serious attention of the government, to the extent that it swiftly and effectively takes to task those guilty of making light of decisions aimed at ensuring the safety of Bangladesh's people from unwarranted and dangerous intrusions. BELA has meanwhile made it known that of late the officials on whom it has served the legal notice have in cavalier manner gone against judicial moves regarding the entry of toxic ships into Bangladesh and have been charged with contempt of court. Now, if circumstances are such that the authorities feel little or no compunction in engaging in activities that are a clear threat to the health of people and if we need consistently to go back to the courts to ensure that everyone falls in line with regulations, it only shows how poorly we are all served by those whose job is to make sure that we are safe in every sense of the meaning. Note that in March last year, the High Court served a directive on the government to the effect that it must not allow any scrap ships in without first making sure that these ships are de-toxified outside Bangladesh territory. Two months later, the HC further made it known that no ship should be imported or brought in for scrapping purposes without first ensuring that the toxicity is not there and that pre-cleaning certificates have been obtained vis-a-vis the ships from the place of origin of the ships.

Given that this is the judicial position that should complement government action guaranteeing a compliance with the rules, one cannot but infer that the sixteen ships in question have been let in without the necessary guarantee that they have been freed of their toxic elements. We urge that the authorities institute a proper and quick inquiry into the issue and have the results revealed to the public. Meanwhile, it is necessary to make it known to the shipping and environmental agencies or departments of the government that they or their staff and officials cannot get away with any more flouting of the rules relating to ships coming into Bangladesh. And that can be done through a tough handling of those who have so far been committing the offence of looking the other way as these toxic vessels have sailed in.

For lasting peace in the CHT

Fresh resolve to implement the accord is not enough, new initiative imperative

WHY is the CHT region still a place of occasional violence and discontent, so many years after signing of the peace accord in 1997?

Shouldn't have peace been established in the region by now, since the political party that was in office in 1997, is now again in power with a massive mandate from the people? But situation on the ground speaks volumes for the rather unsatisfactory status of implementation of the peace accord in the CHT.

It is not surprising then that even the leaders of the Partbattya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity (PCJSS), who had signed the treaty as the representative of the indigenous CHT people, are now also raising questions about the fate of the accord.

Though the government is harping on its pledge of implementing the accord, the situation obtaining in the region has been in a state of flux. It is however agreed on all hands that on the full implementation of the accord depends realisation of the rich potential for CHT's development and their mainstreaming into the national economy.

The government and the PCJSS need to take stock of the whole situation afresh and take necessary steps to speed up the process of implementing the accord. On this score, the first step on the part of the government will be to empower the indigenous people by vesting in their local representatives the power to administer their day to day affairs through holding elections for the district councils and the regional council. These are at present being run by nominated representatives which takes away from the true representative character of the bodies.

As titles of ownership of the lands in possession of the indigenous people have so far been determined orally by tradition, and there are many returnee refugees from the Indian state of Tripura to be allotted lands, the government needs to find a way through discussion with the local leaders to settle their land issue before going for any fully-fledged survey leading to land documentation.

Any more foot-dragging on the issue of fully implementing the CHT peace accord will only contribute to complicating the problem further. The indigenous CHT people do still pin their hopes on the incumbent government as the co-signatory to the peace accord.

So, the government would do well to hold a fresh meeting comprising representatives from its highest political level with the PCJSS leaders. That will inject renewed hope among the indigenous CHT people towards a lasting peace in the region.

No cheeky diplomacy please!

The style and subjects of reporting would perhaps undergo change too. The cavalier picking of subjects to report would end. Cheeky assessments by diplomats would be out. Hard-nosed analysis by the embassies would now be in. The present world war is likely to end soon. But not before it has damaged reputations and decapitated much diplomatic repertoire.

ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

A new war has broken out in the world. Its cause is not clear and its effect is yet to be understood. It cannot be called a cyber war. Yet cyberspace is the domain which is used to carry out all the belligerence. The war so far looks asymmetric. Here, the big powers looks the weakest and most vulnerable. On the other hand, a single organisation called Wikileaks is the Empire which is striking with full force. The pace at which Wikileaks is striking is simply phenomenal. The world powers are seemingly dazed and in a cyber stupor.

So who or what is Wikileaks? Basically it "is an international non-profit media organisation that publishes submissions or otherwise unavailable documents from anonymous sources and leaks." In plain language, the organisation publishes contents in the internet, obtained by any means, which expose delinquent behaviour of individuals, institutions or governments worldwide.

Launched in 2006 it is reported that it was "founded by Chinese dissidents, as well as journalists, mathematicians and start-up company technologists from the United States, Taiwan, Europe, Australia and South Africa." Its director is an Australian internet activist, Julian Assange.

Over the last three years, Wikileaks has been responsible for publishing several sensitive materials obtained from "whistle-blowers," that is leakers of this sensitive information, worldwide. Take the incident of April 2010, when Wikileaks posted a video from a 2007

incident in which Iraqi civilians were killed by US forces.

The next big incident was release of more than 76,900 documents about the war in Afghanistan and called Afghan War Dairy. Flexing its muscles further, Wikileaks published in October 2010, 400,000 documents called the Iraq War Logs, documenting US

delinquency in Iraq.

The biggest and the most telling offensive of Wikileaks has been in November this year, when it started submitting United States diplomatic cables from 270 US embassies and consulates worldwide in the internet. US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton described this set of disclosures as "not just an attack on American foreign policy interests, it is an attack on the international community." The Chairman of Homeland Security Committee in the House of Representatives has called Wikileaks a "foreign terrorist organisation."

Wikileaks, as is known till today, consists of five people working full time and about 800 part time workers, none of whom are paid. The organisation has no official headquarters. Its total expenses are about \$300,000 per year. The interesting part is that the organisation does not even pay for its lawyers as it receives donations in legal support from media organisations. It receives other donations for hardware, travelling and bandwidth.

The drama that is being enacted around the world by Wikileaks is unprecedented. The countries directly affected are now hitting back. After posting one of the largest intelligence leak of 250,000 documents, it found itself hit by a "denial of service" attack on its website. It quickly shifted to another website, ensuring that the leaks remain accessible to all. But it was booted out from there too.

It has now moved to a new cluster of internet servers. Thus, the internet's flexible architecture is allowing it to survive. Like a fly, it is being whacked by those powers who are scandalised by the leaks, and like a guerrilla it is moving from a safe house to a safe house, from an internet server to another internet server to live to fight another day. How long it can continue can only be a matter of conjecture.

But what has Wikileaks revealed that is upsetting many powerful governments? In

the 250,000 cables sent by US diplomats from its embassies abroad, including the US embassy in Dhaka, they relay information that would be undiplomatic to say publicly. Thus, secret conversations between US ambassadors and leaders of host countries recorded in some of these cables have been revealed.

Opinions expressed by US diplomats on a range of topics, from the sublime to the ridiculous, have found their place. Even the weaknesses of US allies are subjects of these cables. The limitation of US policy on certain critical matters has been made public knowledge. But nothing in the cables so far reveal any plan or conspiracy by US to change or overthrow governments. The revelations only degrade US effectiveness in the conduct of its foreign policy.

Among the dump of revelations a few are stellar. They are:

- A dangerous standoff with Pakistan over nuclear fuel;
- Thinking about an eventual collapse of North Korea;
- Bargaining to empty Guantanamo Bay prison by making deals with small countries like Slovenia to accept only one inmate;
- Suspicion of corruption in the Afghan government;
- A computer hacking effort on Google by China;
- Mixed records against terrorism with Saudi donors remaining chief financiers of Sunni militant groups;
- Clashes with Europe over human rights;
- Saudi Arabia speaking scathingly about leaders of Iraq and Pakistan.

It is difficult to describe the leaks as spying. Technology and subterfuge have combined to create this situation. It is suspected that one US army intelligence analyst called Bradley Manning, who had access to classified documents, had downloaded from a military computer system and delivered these documents to Wikileaks. In turn, Wikileaks uploaded the information and revealed all.

It may be noted that US diplomatic cables have several security classifications. The one from where the revelations are taking place has the "secret" classification. The circulation of "secret" cables had recently been widened by the US government to include many other of its agencies so that information could be widely shared for coordinated actions abroad. The US State Department

has other higher security classifications of its documents with much limited access.

Some of the most sensitive revelations are the cables sent by US ambassadors in various posts on their conversations with host country leaders. The leaders had expressed their views candidly so that they could be conveyed to the powers in Washington. They were under the impression that the content would not be told to any other person, as this could jeopardise their position in their own country. They had never imagined that their views would be sent around the world. All of them, including the US ambassadors, knew that this was what is known in legal jargon as "privileged communication."

The effect of the Wikileaks revelations could be gargantuan. Diplomatic norms have been violated and there would be great changes taking place here. The means of communication between embassies and their headquarters or among themselves would be further restricted. The form and method would change. We may go back to the days of reporting by hand and conveyed through diplomatic bags, which cannot be violated as per international law. But this would obviously be slow.

Diplomatic alignments throughout the world could change also. The revelations have made known to the world that some important leaders maintain differing public and private postures on critical issues. Hence, public opinions are going to change and give rise to campaigns for change.

Finally, the means of collecting impressions about leaders is going to change. There would be limited circulation of the impression collected and whatever is gathered would not necessarily be through conversations. It could, therefore, be less accurate and not always reliable. The leaders would definitely not be forthcoming to express views candidly.

The style and subjects of reporting would perhaps undergo change too. The cavalier picking of subjects to report would end. Cheeky assessments by diplomats would be out. Hard-nosed analysis by the embassies would now be in.

The present world war is likely to end soon. But not before it has damaged reputations and decapitated much diplomatic repertoire.

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82ND BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF S.M. ALI

S.M. Ali -- The man and the journalist

His journalistic aptitude was equally matched by this uncanny ability to sense the movement of the tectonic plates in the global geo-political dynamics. He was a gentleman in its truest and fullest form -- polite in manners but firm in principles, compassionate in his dealings but unshakeable in his ethics.

SYED MUNIR KHASRU

HERE are some among us who impact our lives through their thoughts, while there are others who inspire us with their deeds, while the bravest and wisest both think courageously and act diligently. Late S.M. Ali was one of those rare people who belong to the third category. Even though he spent a significant portion of his life outside Bangladesh, it never had any effect on his ability to envision a future for Bangladesh, which not many had the sagacity to foresee.

Starting from his timely departure from the Bangladesh Observer, at that time the largest circulated English daily, to his drive and passion to jump start a new English newspaper that would be run on the highest standards of professional acumen and journalistic ethics -- he never dared to dream and treaded paths that not many before had the confidence to embark upon.

Today's Daily Star is a testament to his ability to visualise a time when people would increasingly want to access quality information and objective reporting and yes, of course, "Journalism Without Fear or Favour." During this critical juncture of the nation, when the forces of insanity are again rearing their heads, the voice of sanity of people like S.M. Ali is missed and needed more than ever.

To me, he was "Khasru Mama." In spite of his nickname being the same as my family name, he came from my mother's side of the clan led by literary giants like the late Syed Mujtaba Ali, who was the maternal uncle of late S.M. Ali. From my early childhood days, I developed a strong bond with him that would see letters exchanged between a senior journalist living abroad and a school-goer slowly stepping into the world of news and knowledge. We wrote to each other on a whole range of diverse issues, from politics to sports, from philosophy to technology, and never did I feel the difference in age or the barrier of geography.

He was so gentle in his approach, no matter how old or how young the person on the receiving end was, and so generous in his overtures, no matter how deserving or not the other person was, that anyone would feel instantly comfortable with his words, either spoken or written. That

explains how a wise man from a distant land could transmit values to a student growing up in Bangladesh at a time in the late eighties when the society had started sliding towards decaying values and low morale with an unethical dictator at the helm of national affairs.

Being raised in the family of an honest civil servant with rather limited income, I did not have much access to things which would fall outside the purview of the regular household expenditure. Mr. Ali was an alert and sensitive soul who would do things without being asked, and so discreetly that hardly anyone in the family would know. Seeing my penchant for reading, he started paying the subscription for a monthly publication titled South, which was a quite popular international journal at that time when most of others were coming out of the West -- like Time, Newsweek, and Economist. He used to urge me to develop greater insights into Asia at a time when the world still could not foresee the economic miracle that would be unleashed by the tigers and dragons in the decades to come.

His journalistic aptitude was equally matched by this uncanny ability to sense the movement of the tectonic plates in the global geo-political dynamics when the main focus of the media and news during those times were the cold war divide and tension emanating from the Middle East. Very few at that time could see the dawn of an era with an ever-assertive China, with its rising economic prowess, and the tiger economies outperforming their counterparts in US and Europe.

Today, as the Berlin wall lies flat, the US struggles to create jobs, and Europe sweats in bailing out one member state after another, China marches forward and Asian economies bask in their resilience. Mr. Ali could foresee this at a time when very few would even care to think much about these countries. He had a profound effect on the subsequent interest that I developed in learning more about these countries and their success stories.

While at work, Mr. Ali was as much respected as he was loved by his colleagues. Whenever I had a chance to chat with his colleagues at the Daily Star, I was so impressed by the warmth with which they still recall his early days in the Daily Star

when it was struggling to have its rightful place in the world of print journalism as Bangladesh had just started its journey in parliamentary democracy.

He was a gentleman in the truest and fullest form -- polite in manner but firm in principles, compassionate in his dealings but unshakeable in his ethics, friendly in his interactions but very calibrated in his opinions. Most importantly, he treated people with respect, no matter from which strata of the society they came from or what income bracket they represented. His wide smile and shining eyes would put into instant comfort friends and strangers alike. There was this aura of charisma about him, which made a big difference to anybody who had the opportunity to know him.

Occasional dinners at Mr. Ali's place were a rewarding experience for me for two reasons. First of all were the wonderful dishes that his wife (we call her Nancy Auntie) would cook and the lovely company she herself was. Second was the exchange of opinions and views with a man who had seen so much and whose wisdom span across generations. The story will be incomplete if the role of his wife is not recognised.

Ms. Nancy Ali has been the true life partner in Mr. Ali's life, who stood by him during both good and bad times and until the last breath he breathed as he was struggling with the illness that was eroding away the body even as the mind continued to glow till the last moment. Nancy Auntie has been a wonderful addition to the family with her ability to relate so well to a country and culture which she came to know only when Mr. Ali decided to return home after his long career abroad.

Given the type of ownership of media houses that we have been seeing lately, and how easily some intellectuals and journalists are lured by unscrupulous businessmen, even the memory of giants like Mr. S.M. Ali still sends a gentle breeze across



S.M. Ali

the horizon. Particularly during a period when sometimes morality is being preached by people who themselves lack it, and journalistic ethics are being sacrificed at the altar of money and muscle.

Dear Khasru Mama, journalists of your character and caliber are missed as much in 2010 as you were needed in 1991 when the people of Bangladesh broke the shackles of autocracy and embarked into democracy. All of us thought that as a nation we finally had crossed that threshold to be on the irreversible path of a democracy that delivers its promised goods to the people. During that period of celebration and rejoice, we had very little idea of the confrontational politics, intolerance, and national disunity that were to surface in the years to come. Had you lived long enough, being the visionary you were, you probably would have known better as to what lay ahead of us. Sleep in peace as you really haven't missed much after all.

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Life-sketch of S.M. Ali

TODAY is the 82nd birth anniversary of Syed Mohammad Ali, founder editor and publisher of The Daily Star. He was the nephew of famous writers Syed Mujtaba Ali and Syed Murtaja Ali.

Educated in Kolkata, Dhaka and London S.M. Ali was one of the few Asian journalists who enriched regional journalism. He started as a reporter with the Pakistan Observer during his student days at Dhaka University. He went on to hold important positions in various regional publications in Pakistan, Hong Kong,

Thailand and Singapore. He joined the Press Foundation of Asia as its executive director in the '70s. In 1981, he became United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) regional communication advisor for Asia and the Pacific. Ali returned to Bangladesh in 1989 and had a brief stint with the Bangladesh Observer as its editor. He launched The Daily Star in 1991 and worked tirelessly to establish the paper as a leading independent daily till the day he flew to Bangkok for medical treatment. He died there in 1993 at the age of 65.