



MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/DRK NEWS

## HC move on entry of toxic ships

*Swift action is necessary to implement directive*

**A**GAINST a background of reports on the entry of potentially hazardous ships into Bangladesh, the High Court directive regarding the framing of rules relating to import of ships for purposes of scrapping is surely welcome. It is regrettable, though, that where the authorities should on their own have ensured that measures of safety relating to the entry of foreign ships were in place, it has now taken the higher judiciary to make it obligatory for the government to make certain that everything is in order. Be that as it may, we are happy to note that the High Court has clearly spelt out the details on the measures that must be taken about the entry of ships, especially in light of reports that vessels with clear toxic content have been making their way into the country.

It is to be noted that there are already six laws relating to the entry of vessels into Bangladesh's territorial waters. These laws should have served as an effective deterrent against the kind of threat the country is at this point faced with. Why these laws have been ignored or why they have not been observed in their totality in the broader interest of the country is a question that remains to be answered. But, of course, part of the answer lies in the fact of the HC's directive, which must be seen as complementary to the six existing laws. The HC move makes it mandatory for the government to frame new rules over the next three months over the issue of ship import. And with that comes the order for the formation of an expert committee, within the next one month, for the purpose of keeping a watch on ships, carrying in-built hazardous materials, making their way into the country's waters. The specifics regarding the committee have been made clear: it should comprise a meteorologist, a nuclear scientist, a chemical engineer, an environmental activist, an environmental lawyer, a journalist and a medical professional. In other words, the committee will have members who represent broad sections of society, especially in terms of how they are expected to keep tabs on potentially dangerous ships headed for Bangladesh. Let this committee be set up at the earliest, after a thorough study of the background and professional competence of those who will constitute it.

The HC's directive that no ship will be allowed entry into Bangladesh's waters unless there is the guarantee that it is free of hazardous materials makes sense. So does its belief that the government should not issue any ship importer with a 'no objection certificate' (NOC) unless a pre-cleaning certificate has been issued by the exporting country or any agency nominated by such country. Finally, there is the all-important caveat that the health of the labourers engaged in ship scrapping must be ensured.

It is our expectation that the action by the High Court will now logically lead to an improvement in the situation. Reports of the arrival of toxic ships in Bangladesh last week were naturally alarming. We will expect the authorities to have taken action against the ships and especially against those who failed to prevent the ships' entry into our waters. The bottom line is obvious: our coast and indeed our country must remain free of any health hazards emanating overseas.

## Garment fire and unanswered questions

*Deeper management malaise needs addressing*

**T**HE devastating fire at the Ha-meem Group's sportswear factory at Ashulia of Savar has added yet another sad episode to the unending series of miseries and tragedies in the star-crossed garment industry. The blaze, the cause of which is still under probe, has taken its huge toll of 26 lives and injuries to at least 100 people.

We express our deepest condolence for the dead and commiserate with the bereaved families. At the same time, we would urge the owner of the garment factory, the apex body for the industry and the government to arrange adequate compensations for the families that have lost their beloved ones as well as sole bread earners.

While writing this editorial on the victims of another fire-tragedy at a garment factory, we wonder, how many more such tragedies this highest export earning sector will have to sustain? How many more years will the hapless garment workers have to wait to finally find a safer workplace to do their job?

Strangely, piecing together the circumstances of each such garment fire, one would find more or less a familiar pattern. As reported, some surviving workers of the burnt factory said that they found the security men had closed the collapsible gates at the staircase by which they could escape. Many workers even complained that the front doors of the factory rooms under fire were also closed, a situation that forced them either to jump through the window or climb down water pipes to safety. However, unlike in the past cases of garment fire in which victims were mostly burnt to death, the overwhelming number of the casualties at the Ha-meem group's garment unit were due to fall from the 10th and 11th floors of the 11-storey building.

However, the factory authorities denied any closure of the exit gates. The story is familiar even with the in-house preparedness of the factory to fight fire. Though in this case, the authorities claimed that they were equipped to fight fire and that the workers, too, were familiar with the necessary drills, the workers spoke in the negative. Similarly, about the cause of fire, while some are blaming it on a possible electric short-circuit, some among the factory management are quick to point at an act of sabotage.

We would be waiting for the findings of the probe committees constituted to look into the fire to come out. But the nagging question will continue to pester us all as to when would our garment industry reach the desired standard of safety to obviate such tragedies and own responsibility for any such unintended hazard.

## Dazed in patriotism

*The air is still redolent with the hopes of millions who exhaled their dreams as they celebrated another anniversary of victory. They remembered those who died for it. They remembered those who suffered for it.*

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**Y**ESTERDAY we celebrated the 39th anniversary of our Victory Day. The streets are still warm from the exuberance of people, who poured out of their homes to honour the memory of a glorious day. They wore badges and head wraps emblematic of the national flag. They attended cultural shows, rallies, and discussions. The newspapers ran commemorative pieces. The politicians laid wreaths on memorials. The televisions were abuzz with talk shows. The national flag fluttered on cars, rooftops and street corners. It was one day, which, if multiplied by the number of days in a year, should find us in the Guinness Book of World Record for being the most patriotic country on earth.

But it was also one day, which had the ring of Emersonian cynicism. "When a whole nation is roaring patriotism at the top of its voice, I am fain to explore the cleanness of its hands and purity of its heart," Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote nearly 150 years ago. Yesterday, this nation roared

patriotism at the top of its voice.

Thirty-nine years ago the same thing had happened. Our people had roared with patriotism and they fought for freedom. But that roaring was different from now. It was more in the heart than in the mouth. Then the heart was filled with passion and the hand was occupied with guns and grenades. On this Victory Day the patriotism roared more in the voice. Our hands were busy holding mikes and flags.

Lots of things have changed in thirty-nine years. Then we fought for freedom, now we have the freedom to fight. Then we fought against others, now we are fighting amongst us. Then others plundered this country, now we are doing it ourselves. Then our collective ambition was victory, now we are looking for victory in our individual ambitions.

The times have changed, but the scenes have not. We still have got agitations on our streets. We still have got the clashes. We are still angry. We are still worried. Thirty-nine years later we still remain a politically exasperated nation.

We are also a divided nation. Lump sum, one half of the country belongs to either side of the divide. We fought and won a single war in 1971, but opened many fronts since then for many more battles. While we have been celebrating the Victory Day every year, we are being defeated in its purpose. We are celebrating the shell, the substance slipping through our fingers.

One could be misunderstood as unpatriotic for asking the obvious. How could we be such a corrupt nation if there is so much patriotism in our hearts? How could we be so callous if we are so proud of our victory in 1971? How could we be so violent if we resent the brutal killing of our countrymen in that fateful year?

Things don't add up. The recent public opinion survey conducted by Transparency International suggests that people believe the police, judiciary, parliament, media, and military in Bangladesh are corrupt in that order. But we can't deny that these professionals are also people in the ultimate sense of the word. Mutual suspicion and contempt festering in our hearts, how could this nation celebrate victory with so much fanfare?

Not to deny the ordinary folks rejoice over the Victory Day because they love this country. For them, this is the only country, the only home they have on earth. They don't have fortunes stashed away in foreign countries or homes and offices in the USA, UK, Australia, Singapore or Malaysia. They don't have immigration or citizenship of

another country secured in their back pockets. A recent report says that the children of 74% of our politicians are studying abroad. God knows what percentage of them have already settled there.

Karl Marx had stunned the world when he said that religion was the opium of the mass. Our politicians must have taken cue from that statement and modified it to their advantage. Patriotism is the opium of the mass in this country. No matter what the politicians do, they still get the people to vote for them. Again and again, the politicians are taking the people for a ride.

Yesterday made that tragedy more poignant for today. The empty streets, desolate memorials, dismantled stages and withered wreaths ring out the vacancy of a few patriotic holidays against the profligate despair of rest of the year. The air is still redolent with the hopes of millions who exhaled their dreams as they celebrated another anniversary of victory. They remembered those who died for it. They remembered those who suffered for it.

Between the businesses sponsoring the events and the politicians organising them, how much of the celebration was meant for the people? Punch-drunk on patriotism, nobody is bothered to answer that question.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is Editor, First News and a columnist of The Daily Star.  
E-mail: badrul151@yahoo.com

## Global warming and civilisation

*Curbing global carbon emissions by 25-40% by 2020 and 50% by 2050 is definitely within range. Ambitious though this might seem, it is commensurate with the threat that climate change poses to our earth and civilisation.*

ROKHMİN DAHURI

**A**DVERSE impacts from global climate change on the earth's ecosystem and human well-being have unequivocally been felt in the last half century. According to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) data from 1970-2004, the earth's temperature has increased by an average of 0.2 degree Celsius per year.

The years from 2001-2010 have been the warmest 10-year period since the beginning of weather recording in 1850. The heat of the oceans increased in the second half of the 20th century.

Consequently, glaciers, ice caps and ice sheets from the Arctic and Antarctic Oceans have recently been melting, which resulted in a mean sea level rise from -20 centimetres in 1950 to +5 centimetres in 2000.

This year the earth experienced extreme weather, such as a deadly summer heat wave in Russia with temperatures soaring to a record 38.2 degrees Celsius; heavy rains and floods in Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Australia; droughts that afflicted the Amazon basin and southwest China; floods that devastated Pakistan; and drastic changes in oceanic and atmospheric conditions in the California Current Ecosystem brought about summertime hypoxia, anoxia and massive fish kills.

If the earth's temperature cannot be maintained and increases more than 2

degrees Celsius, a number of catastrophes will occur in various parts of the globe. These will include rising sea levels by 1 to 6 meters, which could inundate coastal areas around the world, increased flooding and altered rainfall cycles.

Dry seasons will get longer and wet seasons will be shorter but more intense. Heat waves will be more frequent and dangerous. Shifting weather patterns could destabilise the world's food supply and access to clean water, and lead to mass migrations as farmers and fishermen flee drought or flood-prone regions.

Global climate change and its concomitant negative impacts have mostly been a result of increasing global emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) originating from the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation and extreme changes in land use and land cover.

Yet, few nations, except Indonesia, have taken serious action to curb global warming by legally binding themselves to cut GHG emissions as prescribed by the IPCC.

According to the IPCC, if we were to avoid unmanageable catastrophes from global warming, the emissions rate of GHG should be cut by 25-40% in 2020 and 50% in 2050 from 1990 levels. Developed countries should reduce their emissions by 80% by 2050.

During the 2009 COP-15 conference in Denmark, President Yudhoyono pledged that Indonesia would reduce carbon emis-

sions by 26% from the business-as-usual estimate of emissions in 2020. Unfortunately, Indonesia's heroic commitment has not enticed other nations, particularly the two largest emitters of GHG, the US and China, to follow suit.

European countries, the US, Japan and Australia are reluctant to slash their GHG emissions because emerging nations with high economic growth in the last 15 years, especially China and India, have not legally committed to reducing their carbon emissions. In the meantime, developing and poor nations are worried that cutting emissions could hamper economic growth they badly need to deal with unemployment and poverty.

Such rationales, from both rich and poor nations, are depicted in Garret Hardin's "Tragedy of the Commons" story, which applies to almost all common-property resources. In the story, medieval English herders keep increasing the size of their individual herds, eventually exceeding the capacity of the village commons with everyone losing their entire herds.

At the time Hardin's paper was published in 1968, many people found the "tragedy" metaphor insightful and applicable to the world's fisheries. Fisheries provide a telling example of the common dilemma: The resource is fragile, and the fish you do not catch today may be caught by someone else tomorrow.

But since each fisherman operates with the same rationale, the users of the fishery-common resource are caught in an inevitable process that leads to the extinction of the very resource on which they all depend. Because each user ignores the cost imposed on others, individually rational decisions accumulate to result in a socially irrational outcome.

It is, therefore, time for all citizens and

governments of the world to join hands to significantly reduce GHG emissions. Although stabilising atmospheric CO2 levels is a staggering challenge, it is certainly doable.

Recent environmentally friendly technological innovations in forestry, agriculture and fisheries, and in mining, transportation, energy and industrial processes have made it possible to reduce GHG emissions as recommended by the IPCC and, at the same time, maintain economic growth.

With advances in wind turbine design, more efficient solar cells, geothermal, bio-energy and fuel cells, we now have the basic technologies needed to shift quickly from a carbon-based to a hydrogen-based energy economy. The fuel cell is a device powered by hydrogen and uses an electro-chemical process to convert hydrogen into electricity, water vapour and heat.

Hydrogen can come from many sources, including the electrolysis of water or the reformulation of natural gas or gasoline, a process that extracts the hydrogen from hydrocarbons. If the hydrogen comes from water, then electricity from any source can be used to electrolyse the water. If the electricity comes from a wind farm, hydropower stations, geothermal power stations or solar cells, the hydrogen will be clean and produced without carbon emissions or air pollutants.

Curbing global carbon emissions by 25-40% by 2020 and 50% by 2050 is definitely within range. Ambitious though this might seem, it is commensurate with the threat that climate change poses to our earth and civilisation.

Rokhmīn Dahuri is Professor, Center for Coastal and Marine Resource Studies, Bogor Institute of Agriculture.

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