

Tapping nature for sustainable development

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE global atmospheric clock is ticking. Since 1950, the Antarctic Peninsula experienced a warming of about 3° Celsius. The annual melt season has increased by about 2 to 3 weeks in just 20 years, and Arctic Sea ice thickness has decreased from 3.1m in 1958-76 period to 1.25m today. Although 70% world is covered with water, only 2.5% of it is fresh, and more worryingly, only a fraction of that is accessible.

Each person requires about 50 litres per day. At present, 1.1 billion people lack access to clean drinking water and more than 2.4 billion lack adequate sanitation. The problem can be solved through efficient use of water and by freeing the rivers, lakes and wetlands from pollution. Agriculture accounts for about two-thirds of the fresh water consumed. The World Summit held in 2002 at Johannesburg endorsed the "more crop per drop" action, which calls for more efficient irrigation techniques, planting of drought and salt resistant crop varieties that require less water, and better monitoring of soil humidity levels. Improving water delivery system would also help reduce the amount that is lost en route to the consumer.

Energy need and climate are two factors that are likely to bedevil developmental programmes in future. About 2.5 billion people have no access to modern energy services, and the power demands of developing countries are expected to grow by about 2.5% per year. If those demands are met by burning fossil fuels more and more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases will hit the atmosphere, which scientists assert, will lead to severe climatic disruptions.

Of more immediate concern is the air pollution caused by combustion of wood and fossil fuels. This highlights the problem of meeting energy needs through cheaper and cleaner sources. That will necessitate providing incentives for alternative energy. In India, there has been a boom in wind power because the government has made it easier for entrepreneurs to get the necessary technology and has then required the national power grid to purchase the energy thus produced.

Although Bangladesh has a coast line of 710 km, hardly any effort has been made to tap this natural bounty. The wind-battery hybrid power project at Kutubdia was running well since commissioning in 2007. It used to supply 1 MW of power daily, enough to meet the needs of Kutubdia sadar upazila. But sources close to PDB circle said that both Feni and Kutubdia wind power plants are not in operation now.

On the road to enlightened energy policy, a few countries offer models of reform. More than a decade ago, Denmark required utilities to purchase any available renewable energy and pay a premium price. Today, the country gets one-fifth of its energy from wind power. Germany and Spain offer lucrative incentives for renewable sources. Europe today accounts for 70% of the world's wind power.

Dire predictions, apocalyptic talk and doom-and-gloom scenarios are not enough to inspire people to change either politics or their day-to-day behaviour. But neither can we afford to downplay the problem



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we face nor think that sustainable development will happen of its own accord. When the world leaders took stock after Rio '92 on successive World Environment Days, it became apparent that they had not followed up on their Rio rhetoric. Environmental protection, while still a popular slogan, is receding as a political priority. Much of the fund pledged by rich nations to help poor countries meet environmental goals has yet to reach them.

However, some countries and cities have been moving forward taking their own actions and setting their own standards. Entrepreneurs and companies are developing clean technologies of the future. They are motivated not by the fear that all nations will eventually impose tougher environmental restrictions, but by the knowledge that the "Save-the-Planet" movement offers boundless opportunities for making money as well as ensuring a happy and pollution-free life.

Hydropower is considered a renewable clean energy source and is necessary for the assurance of life on earth. Hydropower produces 24% of the world's electricity and supplies more than 1 billion people with power. Micro-hydroelectric plants are operating in numerous nations. The systems divert water from streams and rivers and use it to turn turbines without complex dams or catchment areas. Each plant can produce as much as 200 KW -- enough to electrify 200 to 500 homes and businesses -- and last for 20 years.

The momentum toward clean renewable energy is increasing. Globally, solar and wind energy is growing by more than 30% annually, far faster than conventional fuels, and their cost is plummeting. Solar thermal system uses a series of parabolic dishes to focus the sun's rays and superheat steam, which in turn drives turbine generators. These modest-size systems can produce power for as little as 4 cents (Tk.3.2) per kwh, and are preferable to polluting gas and diesel generators.

With awareness created to build a green century, time for solar energy is fast approaching. In Bangladesh, one company had installed one million solar home systems in rural areas by 2012. Another company has introduced solar power irrigation system that, when fully commissioned, will save 760 MW power and 800 million litre diesel every year.

Power from solar-thermal systems costs less than that produced by photovoltaic cells that convert sunlight straight into electricity. Advocates of photo voltaic (PV) cells point out that the gap is narrowing and PV cells have other advantages. Solar thermal systems require direct sunlight, while PV cells can work in cloudy weather.

We can meet our energy needs without fouling the environment. "But it won't happen," asserts Thomas Johansson, an energy advisor to the United Nations Development Programme. *World Energy Outlook* says that fossil fuel subsidies totaled \$520 billion in 2012. Around \$88 billion was spent worldwide for supporting renewable energy.

If the world had gone for exploiting solar, wind, hydropower, geothermal, and even hydrogen fuel, on a mass scale, it could have avoided dependence on oil imports or oil exploration.

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Shades of justice

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

THIS summer our literature group decided to read two classics -- William Faulkner's "Intruder in the Dust" and E.M. Forster's "A Passage to India." Some may wonder: "What's the connection?" The question is a relevant one, since Faulkner was an American Nobel Laureate raised in the South and Forster an Englishman whose writings exposed the hypocrisy of early 20th century British society.

Interestingly, there is a common thread running through the two novels. Both are metaphorical representations of racial tensions and depict the struggle of a coloured man fighting for equal rights in society. "Intruder in the dust," published in 1948, is the poignant story of an African American who is wrongfully arrested for the murder of a white man, but is finally exonerated due to the efforts of a conscientious white teen-age boy. While the story unfolds as a literary mystery, Faulkner deftly captures the prejudices of the American South's racist past.

In "A passage to India," (1924), set in the Raj, an Englishwoman accuses an Indian of attempting to seduce/rape her. However, when questioned under oath, the woman retracts her accusation and the man is vindicated. Through his depiction of the cultural differences between Indians and the British, Forster illustrates that, in the backdrop of a colonial India, the two races can never coexist as equals.

By a strange coincidence these fictional tales from the past century have an uncanny resemblance to a current real life drama -- the tragic killing of a black teen-ager, Trayvon Martin, in Florida early this year. Unfortunately, in this case there was no Faulkner or Forster to craft a happy ending.

While the moral aspects of the Florida teenager's senseless killing have generated heated arguments, the facts are indisputable: an unarmed African American boy, Trayvon Martin, was walking home from a 7-Eleven store on a rainy evening. George Zimmerman, the armed neighbourhood watchdog, began to stalk him because Martin appeared "suspicious-looking," like "one of those guys." Martin told a friend on the phone that he was being followed and the man could be a sexual predator. There was a confrontation between the two and a fight ensued. In the scuffle Zimmerman shot and killed Martin. When the police arrived on the

scene, Zimmerman acknowledged killing Martin but was not arrested. It took a national outcry to force the Florida police to finally arrest Zimmerman, charging him with second-degree murder.

Because of its strong racial overtones the trial proceedings were televised nationally, with scores of legal experts weighing in on the case. Last week, Zimmerman was found "Not Guilty" by an all-woman jury. The acquitted unleashed street protests and debates on the merits of the verdict. At the heart of the legal wrangling is Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law which gives individuals the right to use force to defend themselves without requiring them to retreat from a dangerous situation.

Zimmerman's defense team successfully argued that in the physical encounter between the two, Zimmerman feared for his life and shot Martin in self-defense. The fact that Zimmerman instigated the tragic chain of events was considered legally irrelevant. That an innocent, unarmed 17-year old black boy was killed by an armed, adult white man, merely on the basis of "suspicion" had no impact on the outcome! While this is a sad commentary on the US legal system, for me, the larger than life question is: why is it that Zimmerman -- armed and white -- had the legal right to "self-defense," but Martin -- unarmed and black -- did not?

In today's politically correct world, most people may prefer to skirt the issue of race. But the fact remains that Zimmerman suspected Martin because he was black and conformed to the stereotyped profile of a "criminal." We will never know if race was a factor in influencing the jury's decision.

However, a juror interviewed on CNN said that she did not find the testimony of Martin's African American friend, who was talking to him minutes before the shooting, to be "credible." When asked the reason, the juror responded that the girl spoke a different language -- a language that "these people" speak as a result of the "type of life they live." One doesn't need to stretch one's imagination too far to fathom who she meant by "these people!"

The nation has been saddened by the meaningless death of an innocent teenager and many civil rights groups as well as individuals are incensed at the verdict. However, my feelings run deeper than grief and outrage. The episode has raised some disturbing questions in my mind. Questions about my own vulnerability as a brown person of Asian origin living in this country. It could have been my son walking home from 7-Eleven on a rainy evening ... What if it was him?

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Biggest travel mix-ups ever



Nury Vittachi

but internet haters brushed this aside as irrelevant. The ambassador had made the fatal mistake of expecting a modicum of reasonableness in web-based discussions, when in reality you'd be lucky to get an eighth of modicum, or even a jot, title or speck.

But at least Mr. and Mrs. Vo ended up more or less in the same hemisphere as their intended destination, sort of, if you hold the globe in exactly the right position.

The same cannot be said for a couple from Italy who boarded a flight in July 2009 intending to go to Sydney, Australia. They ended up in Sydney, Canada. This is quite possibly the furthest distance they could possibly get from where they meant to go, about 17,000 kilometers.

The only way the travel trade could make a bigger mix-up would be to accidentally send people into space. Virgin Atlantic boss Richard Branson is currently working on this.

A European reader tells me that so many people go to Austria instead of Australia that Vienna shops are full of t-shirts saying: "No kangaroos in Austria."

A pilot friend told me bad spelling was often to blame. The flight code for Dhaka is DAC, and the LA couple may have assumed it was short for Dakar. Recently, three Florida children intending to fly to Knoxville went instead to Nashville.

I was mulling over this when I got home and found my wife searching internet sites for cheap tickets from Asia to London. She was amazed at the variety of prices. I pointed out that there were at least 28 Londons in the world, including places of that name in Ontario, Belize, Limpopo and Finland. "How do I know I have the right one?" she asked. Typical female thinking! I told her to just pick the cheapest one.

Variety is the spice of life, right?

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BEETLE BAILY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



- ACROSS**
- 1 Former freshmen
 - 6 Squid squirt
 - 9 Doctrine
 - 12 Construction piece
 - 13 Cattle call
 - 14 IRS employee
 - 15 1492 ship
 - 16 SAT takers' equipment
 - 18 Pet rodent, often
 - 20 Warmth
 - 21 Second person
 - 23 More, to Manuel
 - 24 Portion of a repair bill
 - 25 Great Lake
 - 27 Amulet
 - 29 "Where the Wild Things Are" author
- DOWN**
- 31 "Night-hawks" painter
 - 35 Edition
 - 37 Genesis maker
 - 38 Sings like Ella
 - 41 Apprehend
 - 43 Promptly
 - 44 Sea eagle
 - 45 Downy ducks
 - 47 Necklace ornament
 - 49 "Psycho" star
 - 52 Commotion
 - 53 Tall tale
 - 54 Rod of tennis lore
 - 55 Actress Myrna
 - 56 Toss in
 - 57 Tools for duels
- Solution time: 25 mins.**
- Yesterday's answer 6-14**

CRYPTOQUIP

R N U Y H N Z S N Y P L I P J N R M Y
 U E S Z E Y Z S N R M S Y M Y Y V C V I N
 Z P G H T N M N T C Y N T L S Y E V R J
 J N G V R J S R O : O S G G N H S O Y .

Last Cryptoquip: I WOULD SAY SWINDLERS WHO USE LEGUMINOUS SEEDS TO PLAY THE SHELL GAME ARE TRAP-PEAS ARTISTS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: P equals O

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