

Auspicious development

Hindrance to maritime exploration removed

THE judgement of the Permanent Court of Arbitration at Hague has upheld what we consider to be the legitimate maritime boundary of Bangladesh. Through this verdict, justice has been done to both sides truly marking a triumph of international legal instruments.

We thank India that is has taken recourse to arbitration which requires all parties to concur in the process. Delimitation of maritime boundary through arbitration has basically removed the possibility of casting a shadow over bilateral relations on this issue. All the countries can now peacefully exploit maritime resources without fear of overstepping others' boundaries. With the tribunal clearly delineating which part of the Bay belongs to which country, the stage is now set for Bangladesh to explore potential hydrocarbon resources that are thought to exist offshore.

We congratulate the government of Sheikh Hasina for the deft handling of the case for arbitration and bring it to an auspicious conclusion that has been favourable towards Bangladesh. This is a credible act of the government. The litigation part of the process was handled by a group of maritime experts hailing from leading Western universities and a capable team of internationally renowned solicitors helped enormously to sway the argument to Bangladesh's favour. The verdict has rightfully acknowledged our claims, i.e. Bangladesh's claims to a full 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone in the Bay of Bengal. The tribunal has also awarded to Bangladesh a substantial share of the extended continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

Highways in disrepair

A pre-Eid concern

LACK of maintenance coupled with fund constraints has rendered large sections of the six major highways connecting the capital with the rest of the country hazardous for communication. Even so, the public have no other option but to take the risk, while using these highways for traveling. The communications secretary's assurance that the inconvenience is temporary and that condition of 70 per cent of the highways will improve by the current financial year, however, is of little comfort for them in immediate terms.

The Roads and Highways department in a report last December said that only 20 per cent of the highways across the nation is in good condition, while 41 per cent of them is in a state of dilapidation. The situation was better in 2012 with only 38 per cent of the highways in such a bad shape. That means, far from improving, condition of the highways is worsening with the passage of time. One wonders with the Eid festival round the corner, what is awaiting the homebound Eid travelers on the cratered and potholed highways.

Clearly, the entire roads and highways administration is in a state of disarray. The amount earmarked for road maintenance in the current budget is only Tk. 1300 crore. This is only 16.66 per cent of the total amount of Tk 7700 crore necessary for the purpose. What is then the basis of the government's optimism that things will improve shortly?

Roads and highways being the vital physical infrastructure for the country's development, the government must put its house in this sector in order. The sooner it is done the better.

Politically correct: Why Parliament needs a Leader of Opposition

EDITORIAL, Hindustan Times

THE first day of the budget session of Parliament started off on Monday on a predictable note: The Opposition protested against the price rise and the rail fare hike in and outside the House even though the government had agreed to debate both issues. For those watching the proceedings, the adjournments and the aggressive posturing were hardly surprising: This is how the last few sessions during UPA 2 had gone and so the NDA was being paid back in its own coin. This time, however, the protests were not only motivated by the price rise and rail fare hike but also the fact that the ruling coalition is silent over granting the Leader of Opposition (LoP) status to the Congress, which won 44 seats in the Lok Sabha elections. While the NDA has thrown the 10% rule in the Congress' face, the latter is not ready to buy that argument because the rules are not clear on the issue and has threatened to go to court to resolve the matter. On Monday, the Congress president made a strong pitch for the party being given the post of LoP, contending that it is the single largest party in the Opposition.

The fight between the BJP and the Congress over the LoP issue has become a political prestige battle: Other than the 10% rule, the BJP's contention is that in 1984, when the Congress came to power with an overwhelming majority, no LoP was appointed even though the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, which still forms the basis for recognition of the LoP, was in place. And so, it contends, there is nothing wrong in following the same procedure now. The Act, in fact, says nothing on any criterion that must be used to recognise an LoP. The 10% rule is created from the General Direction 121 of the Lok Sabha Speaker that stipulates 1/10th of the total MPs as a requirement for the recognition of party/group in the House. As things stand now, the ball is very much in the Speaker's court. The LoP's position is not just an ornamental post; the person is a key member on various crucial House panels.

The LoP issue has all the ingredients of becoming a political controversy and the NDA must be well aware of that. The NDA's plate is full with multiple problems and so opening another front will be foolhardy and without an LoP, questions could be raised about the legitimacy of the decisions that it takes during its tenure.

TIB report and state of denial

GROUND REALITIES



Syed Badrul Ahsan

pointed out to us the extent of wrongdoing which has, layer by layer, eaten away at the vitals of the state.

Yes, of course the TIB report on private universities could have been more specific. It could have, since it has evidence in hand to support its findings, gone for a naming and shaming of the universities engaged in malfeasance. It could have, where bribery is the issue, cited instances of where such corruption has taken place and who were the individuals involved. But none of that detracts from the thought that TIB, being the public interest organization it has always been, was serious when it made its report on private universities public. For those who have felt aggrieved at the report, in this instance the ministry of education, the University Grants Commission and the private universities, it ought to have been their responsibility to go for soul-searching rather than being brashly dismissive of the report.

There is the responsibility that Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid should have carried out but chose not to. As the nation's education czar, he could have demonstrated his objectivity by opting for an inquiry into the points raised in the TIB report. He chose to be reactive. TIB, he declaimed, must prove the veracity of its findings; but if it does not or cannot, it must apologise to the nation. That is no sign of governance. And administration cannot be conducted on the basis of peremptory orders. Arrogance in the corridors of power only leaves the state drained of vitality. The minister has seen in the report a conspiracy to undermine the nation's private universities. And now the education ministry, the UGC and the private universities have in a spirit of solidarity informed the country that the TIB report is baseless, that it is aimed at harming the higher education sector in Bangladesh. Do note that the three organisations did not feel it necessary to call TIB to their meeting. The object of their ire was not deemed worthy of making its case before them.

The attitude is one of denial. None of the three bodies affected by the TIB findings has deigned to observe the positive sounds made by TIB about the private education sector. They have chosen to focus on the negative aspects of the administra-

tion of private universities. That is fine, except that they have not been able to step back a little and mull over the entirety of the report. If in the TIB report there are allegations of money changing hands at the private universities and in education-related government offices, if there is suspicion about the falling standards of teaching, if there are questions about grading, it makes sense for everyone involved to take a deep breath, step away, pause and then look into the findings. Being dismissive of a report, especially when it comes from TIB, is in essence a looking away from reality. Governments based on the popular will do not pretend everything is well in the territories they hold sway over. They plumb the depths of criticism in all humility.

So there you are. But that is not all. The vice chancellor of a private university is rattled that the media have published TIB's 'sweeping' report. The media, by his reckoning, have been causing more harm to private universities than TIB. The conclusion that you might draw is simple: both TIB and the media are the enemy. And the enemy, because it points to wrongs committed in society, because it smells things of a foul nature in the public domain, must be swatted down.

In the current debate over the contents of the TIB report, the education minister should not have jumped to conclusions. It is always bad practice shooting the messenger. The message needs to be read. If it remains unread or is swiftly cast into the fire, agony is prolonged.

Things do not have to be this way. There are other ways of looking at, and handling, circumstances. And they do not have to be of the kind that stifles dissent.

In the current debate over the contents of the TIB report, the education minister should not have jumped to conclusions. It is always bad practice shooting the messenger. The message needs to be read. If it remains unread or is swiftly cast into the fire, agony is prolonged.

The country needs a good academic debate on the TIB report. The private universities as also the UGC need to go into a state of introspection over the report. The scope of the debate may be widened, to raise questions about the systematic leakage of question papers across a large swath of examinations.

The perspectives ought to be clear. The question today is not why TIB has thrown up the report on private universities. It is one of why the education ministry, the UGC and the private universities are loth to acknowledge the realities in the region of higher education.

The writer is Executive Editor, The Daily Star.
E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

Asia's Military Revolution

THE ASIAN CENTURY



Yoon Young-kwan

A vast revolution in military affairs is taking place across East Asia. The latest signs are Chinese President Xi Jinping's purge of General Xu Caihou, an ex-Politburo member and former vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission, on charges of corruption, and Japan's "reinterpretation" of Article 9 of its constitution to permit the country to provide military aid to its allies.

Despite the rising regional tensions that inspired these moves, China's relations with its neighbors and the United States are not fated to lead to direct confrontation. But the relentless march of new initiatives to meet the perceived "China threat" will require the region's political leaders, including the Chinese, to address their disputes in new and more creative ways if that outcome is to be avoided.

In general, there are three ways to foster international peace: deepening economic interdependence, promoting democracy, and building international institutions. Unfortunately, because East Asia's political leaders have failed to pursue the latter objective, they now find themselves playing dangerous balance-of-power games reminiscent of Europe a century ago.

Deepening economic interdependence in the wake of Asia's 1997 financial crisis has not generated political momentum for peace and cooperation. The region's business leaders have been unable to prevent deteriorating foreign relations from harming their interests. By contrast, military lobbying now deeply influences foreign and defense policies – witness China's double-digit increase in defense spending and rising US arms sales in the region.

What explains this failure? International-relations theorists since Immanuel Kant have held that democracies rarely (if ever) fight one another; as a result, political leaders, such as US President Woodrow Wilson, have tried to promote democracy as a means to spread peace. Until recently, the US seemed to have assumed that China's engagement with Western democracies would bolster peaceful ties.

But, since the 2008 financial crisis, China's confidence in its authoritarian development model has grown stronger. Its leaders now increasingly appear to believe that a new "Beijing Consensus" of mercantilism and state intervention has replaced the old "Washington Consensus" of free trade and deregulation.

China's ideological incompatibility with the US thus is making the shift in their relative power difficult to achieve peacefully. In the late nineteenth century, a rising US was able to cooperate with a declining Britain, owing to their shared culture and values. China's leaders, however, tend to suspect that the US is deliberately trying to undermine their country's political stability by questioning its record on human rights and political freedoms. Meanwhile, Xi's domestic policies seem to be taking the country ever further from Western norms.

It is this ideological divide that is undermining the development in East Asia of institutions that establish principles, rules, and decision-making procedures for the region. While much of the West is bound together by institutions like the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe and NATO, East Asia's main body, the ASEAN Regional Forum, is too weak to play an analogous role, leaving the region beset with unregulated rivalries.

to be constrained by international rules or norms.

Instead, East Asia's leaders resort to realpolitik. Unfortunately, unlike Europe's nineteenth-century political masterminds – figures like Talleyrand, Metternich, Bismarck, and Disraeli – who crafted durable international alliances, Asia lacks leaders willing and able to look beyond their narrow national interests.

For example, China's leaders seem to believe that the 2008 economic crisis and the high costs of two foreign wars have left the US in no position to exercise international leadership. That may explain China's recent foreign-policy assertiveness, particularly in its dispute with Japan over control of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which could be intended to probe the strength of the US-Japan alliance.

Testing US power in this way could prove to be a dangerous miscalculation. Though weakened economically, the US remains a military superpower. Its interests in East Asia date back to the late nineteenth century. Just as Britain refused to concede naval supremacy to Germany a century ago, the US will not easily accept any Chinese challenge to its strategic position in the western Pacific, especially given that so many East Asian states are pleading for US protection.

China and the US need to talk. Despite their economic interdependence and some 90 inter-governmental channels for bilateral dialogue, the two superpowers are caught in a perilous tug-of-war over interests in the East and South China Seas and the western Pacific.



Sino-Japanese relations are particularly fraught, with two decades of economic stagnation in Japan and rapid growth in China fueling nationalist overreaction on both sides. Having become accustomed to outsourcing its security to the US, and despite having the world's third-largest economy, Japan neglected to develop its own constructive diplomatic vision. It remains to be seen whether Abe's constitutional reinterpretation, cloaked in the language of regional cooperation, advances such a new vision.

It does not help that the US wants Japan to shoulder more of the burden of maintaining Asia's security, a position that may make sense strategically and financially, but that betrays a lack of understanding of the political context. The US seems to underestimate regional concerns over Japan's potential remilitarization. By providing Japan with a diplomatic carte blanche, the US may find itself hostage to Japanese interests, with the result that Japan becomes part of Asia's security problem, not part of its solution.

Asia-Pacific leaders must shake off their complacency. Serious efforts and far-reaching compromises are needed to begin the process of building institutions for regional security cooperation. Otherwise, the much-heralded "Asian century," far from bringing economic prosperity and peace, will be an age of suspicion and peril.

The writer is former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea, is Professor of International Relations at Seoul National University.

Copyright: Project Syndicate/Europe's World, 2014.
www.project-syndicate.org
www.europesworld.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Tax on share income

We applaud the timely and well-justified stand of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the imposition of controversial and unjustified Capital Gain Tax on income from sale of shares in the just passed financial bill -2014. Some over-zealous officials, armchair economists and some ministers wanted to please the prime minister by theoretically collecting more taxes through the Capital Gain Tax instrument. Good that their efforts bore no fruit and good sense has prevailed.

Bangladesh share market is still limping; it is yet to be stabilised and become robust like in the Western countries or India or even Pakistan. Daily trade and transaction volumes speak immensely about the ground realities.

In the future, the competent authorities should also take into cognizance capital losses while considering Capital Gain Tax on sale of shares. In Australia, there are provisions for capital loss relief. The losers should also be given relief which may be 10-20 percent of the capital invested or on the actual amount of loss incurred.

Dr. SN Mamoon
Dhaka

Mother of all Thai coups!

This refers to the report, "Court issues warrant for anti-coup spokesman" (July 1). There is a new trend of abuse of courts by the military in coups in nations like Egypt and Thailand. Dissenters are harassed in the guise of "anti-corruption" and "moral cleansing".

The current coup in Thailand can be called the mother of all coups as it is different from the earlier coups; the nation has witnessed nine coups since 1932. The old and frail king in his 80s has endorsed the coup and has failed to strike a compromise between the military and the opposition, although the king is revered all over Thailand. Even though the ousted prime ministers (the brother-sister duo of Thaksin Shinawatra and Yingluck Shinawatra) are billionaires, they enjoy support among the rural and poor voters. The king has been unable to play the role of a mediator in the latest coup (May 2014) as he did in earlier coups. The king is from Chaksi dynasty and there is the old prophecy that this dynasty will not last nine generations and the current king is the ninth king. His heir-apparent son is unpopular.

Thailand's economy is facing a downturn with declining manufacturing output, exports and doubling of trade deficit at nearly \$1.5 billion. The future of both monarchy and democracy is uncertain in Thailand. The future is uncertain for Thailand's nearly 70 million people.

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "BASIC chairman bows out," published on July 6, 2014

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Why is ACC silent about Abdul Hye's unbridled corruption in the Basic Bank?

Deep Purple Blue

Can anyone enlighten us about Sheikh Abdul Hye Bacchu's connection with the powers that be? Why did the finance minister and the central bank have to wait for his resignation until he misappropriated Tk.4, 500 crores and ruined the bank? It's a Hall-Mark-Sonali Bank size scam! Nothing happened to the Sonali Bank board members involved in the Hall-Mark scam. He will go scot-free eventually, I think.

"Prices of vegetables fall on good supply" (July 6, 2014)

Abul Kashem

But we see different opinions of the consumers on TV, who have long been complaining about price hikes of all commodities. As we see in Bangladesh, businessmen always make unreasonable excuses to increase the prices of essentials.

"Words must be backed by action" (July 6, 2014)

Saint

Punishing players will not change the situation unless the board change themselves. Players perform badly because of poor management of the board. The recent performance of Bangladesh cricket team justifies it.

Aasfisarwar

Nobody is indispensable. Sakib should be banned for breaking discipline.

Deep Purple Blue

We must do away with Sakib; whatever the ramifications to our team. He is not above the law.