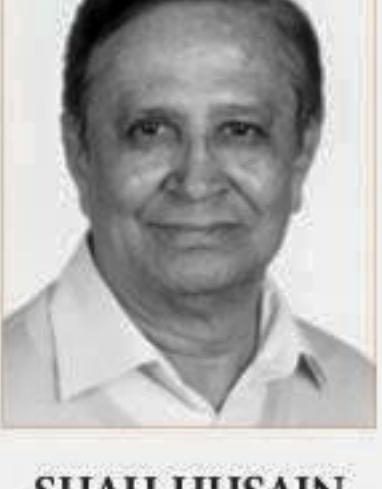


# Economic Nirvana

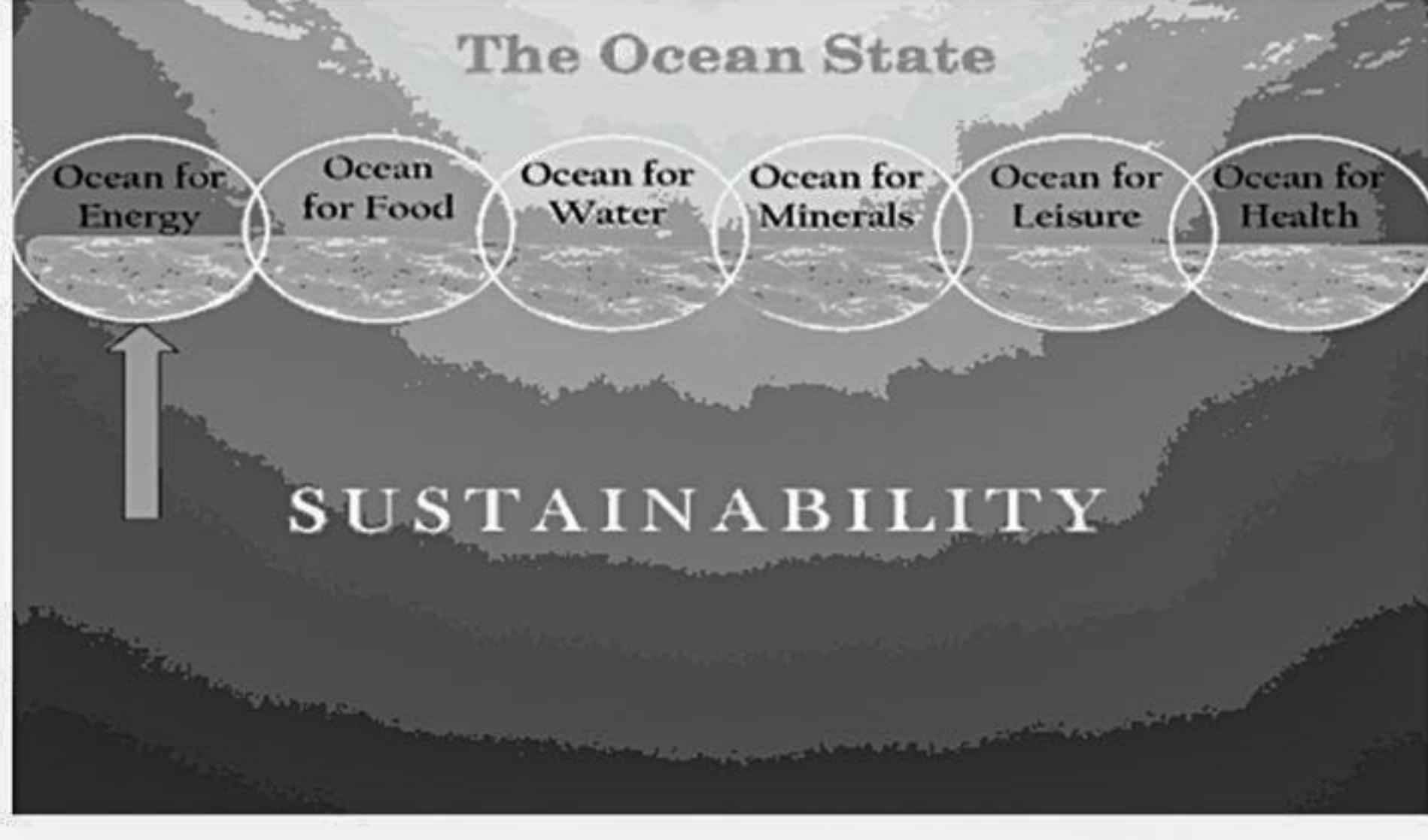
**PLEASURE IS ALL MINE**  
  
**SHAH HUSAIN IMAM**

WHEN the Board of Investment (BoI) invited me to a dialogue on the State of the Economy, it used a trump card of a huge sell-point we have acquired by virtue of a sizeable success through the recent maritime boundary delimitation along

the Bay. It was an irresistible invitation for many in spite of the heavy traffic one had to negotiate to reach the venue at the heart of Motijheel business district.

For the centerpiece of the interactive session was a presentation on the 'Blue Economy of Bangladesh' by Rear Admiral (Retd) Md. Khurshed Alam MPhil, ndc, psc, Secretary, Maritime Affairs Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, our astute protagonist in the international arbitration process.

What is a blue economy? The chief discussant Mrs. Ferdaus Ara Begum, CEO, BUILD, Dhaka, shed light on the question: 'Ultimate aim of a Blue Economy business model is to shift the society from scarcity to abundance "with what we have" (by way of a priceless value addition with extended territorial waters) ... Blue Growth is the long term strategy to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors as a whole. Seas and oceans are drivers for the Blue Economy.' Obviously, seawater is blue like the sky too, is. By association of thought, the phrase -- 'Sky is the limit' -- can perhaps be invoked to underscore the enormity of prospect of the venture we are hoping to embark on, hopefully, sooner rather than



later. It is known for a fact that 'deep seabed resources often contain higher concentration of valuable minerals than their terrestrial alternatives which are becoming stretched.'

Sea mining is more environment-friendly than land mining so that it is part of the green economy in that sense of the term. Yet, to be pragmatic, sea mining is highly technology-intensive and more costly than land mining. Given our expertise level and technological span, seabed mining looks like a distant dream.

At this stage, we must do first things first by way of having staging posts. Firstly, there is a much larger number of islands than have been listed and the list needs updating with the extended territorial waters. These islands including the sizeable accretions to the sea will have to be planted with mangrove forests to solidify the fledgling landmass. In fact, the soil capital of the islands need to be developed with the multiple purpose of accommodating new habitation, creating green belt to resist sea storm and encourage eco-tourism. And then, we use them as springboard for exploratory activities further

into the high seas.

Simultaneously, we go back to our seafaring history and replicate some of it in present day terms. Remember that foreign ships had used Mir Kadem in Munshiganj as a port of call. Also, between 15th and 17th centuries we were a recognised player in building sea-going vessels. That seems to be replaying now as we receive orders from developed countries to build them sea-worthy vessels. We have to take it forward from there if we are to save \$6 billion as freight charges every year for using foreign carriers to transport our total trade volume worth \$65 billion across the globe.

Those are within a doable range but as the solidity of the gains of the arbitration verdict sinks in, we realise the great need for striking strategic partnership with countries in the region experienced in and co-traveler with us as far as rapid exploitation of the sea resources goes.

Now that the areas have been demarcated for Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, there should not be any cause for friction or fierce competition between them. Most likely choice for a strategic partnership

would be India first and then Myanmar. 'Under the framework of BIMSTEC and BCIM, all the three countries are members and cooperate with each other,' as pointed out by Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali. Also, we have potential choices in the ASEAN countries to tape in on.

There we need great articulation, commitment and tenacity. India has been exploring hydrocarbons in Saudi Arabia for quite sometime now. What is however exemplary to note is Great Britain's consortium with Norway, Sweden including many private companies to extract North Sea Oil, a massive exploration undertaking in off-shore drilling history.

BoI's Executive Chairman Dr. S. A. Samad raised his expectations saying, 'We are looking for new investment opportunities in the sector.'

It is understood that top IOCs are swerving towards Myanmar as 'their terms and conditions are more acceptable to the IOCs.' Energy Advisor Dr. Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury explained away the trend in the following terms: 'Myanmar's intention is to monetise the resources while Bangladesh wants to inject the resources to the economy. We have different objectives.' All this needs elaboration.

Sounding a hopeful note he said Bangladesh would be redesigning its blocks for bidding and revising production-sharing contract accordingly.

These are the big tasks ahead of the government. It is commonsensical to expect though, that a calmer political climate will be conducive to leapfrogging in materialising Blue Economy. The new opportunities should unite a nation confident of its future rather than divide it being caught up in avoidable squabble and despair.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.  
 E-mail: [husain.imam@thedailystar.net](mailto:husain.imam@thedailystar.net)

## Sandal Scandal

**HUMOROUSLY YOURS**  
  
**NAVEED MAHBUB**

**IND** your shoes. Interesting that it is only at mosques that you see this sign. So, the clever me places one sandal at one far end of the mosque and the other one at the other end. But even then, one day I walk

back home with one bare foot – a male Cinderella in a panjabi. I guess the FIFA method for protection won't work – wearing one red and one yellow sandal to the mosque.

And now, it's the digital age. Another sign goes up – "Mind your mobile phones." Oh yes, I do have a mind... to SMS or even take a sneak peek at Facebook while the Imam recites the Khutba during Jumma prayers. Such is my submission to the Creator away from all worldly matters.

Then I start my prayers with the commitment to Him to shut off from the whole world. The Imam starts the *Sura Fatihah*, and the mind then takes two trips around the world in eighty seconds. I even wonder if the Imam has done his calculations right with two *rakaats*, as I seem to have had a little less time today to do the standard intricate planning for the coming week.

And then there is the sudden interruption in my train of thought. Someone's phone goes off with a shrill Bollywood song, drowning out the Imam's melodious recitation. My mind races to identify who was expecting a call on this weekly holiday and in this holy hour. And then, the ruffling sound of the frantic, one-handed fumbling inside the panjabi pocket, trying to locate the 'Call End' button while the other hand is still on the belly button.

Now I know why there is this third sign, "Switch off your mobile phones".

Wonder if it is divine intervention to teach us a lesson that the number of mobile phones entering a mosque is greater than the number of mobile phones leaving with their rightful owners. As it seems to be a norm to hear at least one panicked scream, "My phone, my phone!!" every week.

This time, it's me. My Samsung Note III vanishes in a split of a second. A helpful gentleman offers to call my phone to locate it, but it is already switched off, and has made a relay race through several pairs of hands and out of the mosque at warp speed.

I notify the authorities of my phone's International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number. This is the electronic ID of a specific device. With the IMEI, the phone can be traced once it is turned on, no matter what SIM.

But I wait for no Godot. For we are smart, we can now change the IMEI number. Or even better, the phone may make its way across the border (BSF, where are you now?).

Solve this crime? Stand in line. This is just a petty theft. There are murders, disappearances and much larger thefts all providing fodder for CBS's *Unsolved Mysteries – Bangladesh*.

Here's my public service announcement. Do take the warning signs at mosques seriously. There ARE those preying on the praying. Oh, and record the IMEI number of your phone once you buy it. Trust me, it is only a question of time that you will need it when you scream, "My phone! My phone!!" For it is not just during somber occasions such as being at the mosque, church, temple, funeral or *milad*, but also at weddings and large events that the smooth operators operate.

Oh well, I have paid for my sins. At least I made someone happy. Meanwhile, I need to get a smart-er phone, or really a cheap, dumb one.

The writer is an engineer & CEO turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club.  
 E-mail: [naveed@naveedmahbub.com](mailto:naveed@naveedmahbub.com)

## The European Union and the Twin Civil Wars in Syria/Iraq

DR. PETER CUSTERS

IS this one of those rare occasions where policymakers self-critically correct a gigantic blunder? Or is it a cold turn-about guided by pure self-interest? On August the 15th, the Foreign Ministers of EU-countries gathered in Brussels and decided that each would henceforth be free to supply arms to Kurdish rebels fighting Sunni extremists of ISIS in the North of Iraq. Even Germany which in the past had been unwilling to furnish military supplies to warring parties in 'conflict zones', is now ready to provide armoured vehicles and other hardware to the Kurds opposing ISIS' advance. The decision of Europe's Foreign Ministers may surprise some, for barely a year and four months ago, in April of 2013, the European Union had lifted a previously instituted ban on all imports of Syrian oil (1). Moreover, the lifting of this boycott was quite explicitly intended to facilitate the flow of oil from areas in the North-East of Syria, where Sunni extremist rebel organisations had established a strong foothold, if not overall predominance over the region's oil fields (2). ISIS was not the only Sunni extremist organisation disputing control over Syrian oil fields. Yet there is little doubt but that the fateful decision the EU took last year has helped ISIS consolidate its hold over Syrian oil resources and prepare for a sweeping advance into areas with oil wells in the North of Iraq (3).

The outcome of the recent Brussels' meeting thus appears to over-turn a disastrous previous decision. To underline the point it is useful to briefly describe the extent to which Sunni extremist rebels have meanwhile established control over oil extraction and production in both Syria

and Iraq. The Syrian oil fields are basically concentrated in Deir-ez-Zor, a province bordering on Iraq. Whereas oil extraction in Syria has always been very limited in size if measured as a percentage of world supplies, - control over the Syrian oil wells plus its refinery has become crucial towards the financing of ISIS' war efforts. In neighbouring Iraq, oil reserves are not concentrated in one single geographic region as they are in Syria. The bulk of the oil wells are to be found in the country's South, at great distance from ISIS's war theatre in the North. Only a seventh of Iraq's oil resources are said to be located in areas controlled by ISIS on the one hand, and Kurdish fighters on the other. Nevertheless, recent reports indicate that ISIS controls at least 7 major oil wells in Iraq alone. Using expertise gathered after it established control over wells in Syria, the Sunni extremist organisation is able to draw huge profits from the smuggling and sale of oil. It is ISIS's oil-backed armed strength amassed in two adjacent civil wars that has now sent shivers throughout the Western world.

If the EU's April 2013 decision appears to have helped trigger ISIS's current success, the situation created is historically novel. To my knowledge, never before has a rebel force fighting a civil war in the Global South been able to base its war aspirations on control over oil. True, in most of the civil wars that have rocked Africa over the last thirty years, access to raw materials has been key. Witness the cases of Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo (DRC) and Sudan. It is also true that oil exports have been a specific mode of war financing, for instance in Angola and the Sudan. Yet in those cases the state remained in command of the oil wealth. In Angola, the rightwing rebel movement

UNITA heavily relied on smuggling rough diamonds towards financing its war, while the country's oil fields were located at great distance from UNITA's war theatre. In Sudan, oil fields are concentrated in the country's South, i.e. close to and in the region which was disputed by the South's rebel movement. But the regime of Al-Bashir pursued an inhuman policy of depopulation through aerial bombardments, massacring hapless villagers and forcing survivors to flee. In the selfsame process the rebels were deprived of access to people and oil. Hence, strictly speaking there is no precedent for the oil-fuelled civil wars waged by Sunni rebels in Syria and Iraq.

Now, in turning from de facto supporters to opponents of ISIS, - Europe's Foreign Ministers have followed the US's lead, for the US had just initiated bombardments of ISIS position in Iraq's North. Though loudly defended on grounds of ISIS's relentless persecution of minorities, the US's renewed military intervention is not devoid of self-interest. Uppermost in the minds of Pentagon officials is the nexus between oil and arms. Shortly after Obama announced the withdrawal of US occupation forces from Iraq in October 2011, - the US clinched a huge deal for the sale of F-16 fighter planes and other armaments to Iraq's military, valued at 12 Billion US Dollars. At least 4 in 5 top US military corporations are beneficiaries of Iraqi purchases. Coincidentally, around the time when the US-Iraq agreement on arms' sales was sealed, the extraction of Iraqi crude was back to old level, crossing the threshold of 3 million barrels per day in 2012. As the Iraqi government's income from oil extraction and exports rose exponentially, American and competing Russian arms' manufacturers both lined up

to bag the orders. And there is robust confidence that the oil-and-arms nexus can be sustained. For according to euphoric projections of the I.E.A., the body of Western oil consumer nations, Iraq holds the key to future increases in world production of crude!

Western policymakers are feverishly espousing the cause of Muslim Shias, Christians and Yezidis, who are persecuted in areas of Iraq controlled by ISIS, and yes, there is no doubt that the Sunni extremist force is guided by a Salafi ideology that severely discriminates against religious minorities, - whether Muslim or non-Muslim. But tell us: at what point in the past have Western states consistently defended religious minority rights in the Middle East? The idea seems to have emerged as an afterthought of the illegal US invasion of Iraq. But are Muslim and Christian Arabs in Israel, Muslim Shias in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain - to name just some of the groups mistreated by the West's close allies - likely to be charmed by the West's resolve to save the Yezidis of Iraq? In any case, it is high time the policy reversals in Brussels be questioned. To recall: a turn-about in relation to the twin civil wars in Syria/Iraq was staged twice. First, in September 2011, a general prohibition on investments in and exports of oil from Syria was imposed, affecting both Assad's government and Syria's opposition. Then, in 2013 the European Union shifted de facto towards a position favourable to Syria's Sunni extremist rebels. And although the EU's Foreign Ministers now appear to have realized their sin, - the damage can no longer be repaired without a complete overhaul of EU-policymaking towards the Middle East.

The writer is the Author of *Questioning Globalized Militarism* (Tulika, New Delhi/Merlin Press, London, 2007)

### CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

#### ACROSS

#### DOWN

- 1 Remains
- 6 Mona Lisa feature
- 11 Add
- 12 Walks nervously
- 13 De Niro/Crystal film
- 15 Lass
- 16 Took the title
- 17 Cool - cucumber
- 18 Swanky
- 20 Purchase
- 21 Anger
- 22 Extra amount
- 23 Frighten
- 26 Was partisan
- 27 Like most NBA players
- 28 Tour carrier
- 29 Longoria of TV
- 30 Frank topper
- 34 Spider's home
- 35 Artist Jean
- 36 Mermaid's home
- 37 Eddie Murphy film
- 40 Christened
- 41 Brother's daughter
- 42 Pesky swarm
- 43 Cars scars
- 1 Play place
- 2 Sound-related
- 3 " - of two Cities"
- 4 Brynner of "The King and"
- 5 Dangerous PC apps
- 6 Wasn't thrifty
- 7 Yoga need
- 8 Sleepy Hollow name
- 9 Free time
- 10 Tried
- 14 Map region
- 19 Young woman
- 22 Very light rain
- 23 Worrying
- 24 Early hunter
- 25 Georgia neighbor
- 26 Discontinue for now
- 28 Overcook
- 30 Hotel workers
- 31 Pasty
- 32 Respond to stimuli
- 33 Sees socially
- 38 Obtain
- 39 Even score

### CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

#### DOWN

- 1 BLAST
- 2 SCAR
- 3 LABOR
- 4 COMET
- 5 IN USE
- 6 A BASE
- 7 NAT
- 8 MEL
- 9 DUN
- 10 DISCOVERERS
- 11 ORE
- 12 HUGE
- 13 MAINS
- 14 POSES
- 15 ANTI
- 16 COD
- 17 DISCOURAGES
- 18 AMT
- 19 LET
- 20 ERA
- 21 MARIS
- 22 METAL
- 23 ELUDE
- 24 ALIST
- 25 SEAN
- 26 NINES

### Yesterday's answer

- 1 XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW
- 2 One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc.
- 3 Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

### BEETLE BAILEY



### by Mort Walker



### HENRY



### by Don Trachte



**QUOTEABLE**  
**Quote**  
**Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge even where there is no river.**  
**Nikita Khrushchev**