

Port city's gas crunch

Residents get no remedy

FOR the past week, Chittagong city residents have been forced to choose alternative, albeit more expensive, fuel sources to cook. Apparently the Karnaphuli Gas Distribution Company Ltd. (KGDCL) has tried and failed to supply requisite gas to residential areas. The shortfall of 50 million standard cubic feet per day has not been found despite rationing of power plants and fertiliser factory, and going by what has been carried in this paper, authorities are at a loss as to what to do. This is hardly a satisfactory state of affairs for the millions who call Chittagong their home.

With more gas being diverted to feed Meghna Power Station, there is less of the precious fuel to fire up stoves for residents. Although we understand that industry must get priority, the fact that Chittagong has been suffering from a chronic shortfall of gas supply is nothing new. For years, policymakers have failed to address the issue of energy inefficient power plants which have become gas guzzlers, wasting more of this precious fuel than necessary. Expert advice has been willfully ignored and now we are witnessing the result of short sightedness.

With little in way of finding new and promising sources of gas, either on the mainland or offshore, the situation will only get worse. With a finite supply of gas now an established fact, is it not high time to make power plants more efficient in gas consumption? That would make life easier for both Chittagong residents and industry at large.

Action against District Judge

Shouldn't lower court come under the HC?

IT is not very common to see a judge subjected to disciplinary action. Yet in what is a rare case, the law ministry has initiated disciplinary action against a district and sessions judge after finding allegation of his misconduct to be true. The accusation against the judge is that he had exempted two accused from a murder case, based not on judicial but, allegedly, other considerations. The law ministry and the Supreme Court deserve compliment for the promptness in taking cognizance of the complaint and initiating proceedings against the said Judge.

That and the action of the government against a lower court judge brings up the question of oversight, of the performance and control, of the lower judiciary, which happens to be in the hands of the government and not the apex court of the country. And in this regard the comments of the Chief Justice in May this year – that if rules of discipline of lower court judges and right to take disciplinary measures against them remain in government hands, then HC will have no controlling power over the lower court – deserve serious consideration of the government. Because without that, the much needed supervision and control will continue to be absent.

Judiciary is the last resort of the aggrieved. And there is nothing worse than questionable actions and behaviours of those associated with it that causes public confidence in it to sap. And there is nothing better than to see the system punish those that defame it, as we see in this case.

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

THE number one and number two global economic powers, USA and China respectively, appear to be venting their frustrations with each other not only in the economic and political front, but also in recent days in the geo-political or more specifically geographical arena. A few days ago, a US guided missile destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of Subi Reef in the disputed Spratly Archipelago in South China Sea. China has previously laid claim to this area, and has been building up this and neighbouring reefs in an attempt to push its territorial reach south both for economic and strategic reasons. The upshot of these recent events is that both USA and China have warned each other to stay out of trouble and the world is now waiting with bated breath in the hope that tensions between these superpowers will not escalate even as they vie for economic and political influence in the Pacific Rim and beyond.

As is well-known, the USA pushed for a rapid conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) treaty to contain China's economic influence in the Pacific littoral countries. The TPP member countries are the US, Japan, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, Chile and Peru. President Obama was very open about US intentions when he declared, "When more than 95 percent of our potential customers live outside our borders, we can't let countries like China write the rules of the global economy." But, it is now becoming clear that USA is also seeking to rein in China's geographical ambitions and economic clout by creating an alignment with its other TPP partners that might reach beyond trade relations. For many years, China has been building up the coral reefs and creating islands with air-strips in the South China Sea. USA does not recognise the push by China to expand its territorial waters, even if USA concedes that the latter has vital commercial interests in the sea lanes located in South China Sea or that run through the Strait of Malacca to the Indian Ocean. To reinforce the point, last week, USS Lassen, a guided missile destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of these disputed "islands". It is

not a coincidence that the area in contention also overlaps territorial claims long-held by Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Taiwan, all of which except Taiwan are now in the TPP fold, i.e., allies of the USA. Thus, it is evident that the recent skirmish represents but the opening salvo in the effort by both countries to maintain or extend their respective global influence.

One can speculate whether USA decided to send in the warship at this point emboldened by the conclusion of the TPP deal. Undoubtedly, USA has legitimate economic interests in this region, and will use its muscle to keep these busiest sea lanes clear of

"economic" encirclement if all-out trade wars break out. It has already built a three-kilometre air strip on Fiery Cross Reef. Incidentally, the disputed Spratly Islands is only 700 km from Vietnam and 1027 km from the Philippines, but 1187 km from China's most southern island, Hainan.

The timing of the US military action on October 27 appears to have been well-planned. It followed hard on the heels of the visit by Indonesia's President Joko Widodo who has openly declared his country's intent to join TPP. USA also did not want to jeopardise its ongoing dialogue with China on multilateral issues and wisely decided to hold back these naval

TPP provides USA and its allies a less overt mechanism to keep China's influence in check. USA has already indicated its displeasure with China's espionage and hacking activities, some of which are carried out under the very nose, if not patronage, of Chinese government officials.

As the TPP moves forward and the signatories proceed to ratify the deal, the next moves by China will be important. China might witness a substantial reduction in its exports to the TPP countries due to trade diversion brought about by the "rules of origin" protocol adopted by TPP. According to Jose Manuel Quijano, the former head of Mercosur, the South American trade alliance, "The main victim is China... because in order to sell to other TPP members, the country needs to have created goods with its raw material or input." One possible strategy for China to counter TPP is by boosting its BRICS participation. The BRICS countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, "comprise about 30 percent of world's GDP at the moment in PPP terms and are projected to increase to as much as 45 percent by 2030. BRICS already accounts for 17 percent of world trade." Another political analyst, Valery Mironov of Russia, speculates that Russian and China might work on a joint strategy and team up with BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

From the US perspective, TPP has already started to pay dividends in its long-standing territorial dispute with China. After the recent incident in South China Sea, Australian Defence Minister, Marise Payne, declared, "It is important to recognise that all states have a right under international law to freedom of navigation and freedom of overflight, including in the South China Sea. Australia strongly supports these rights." It was announced at the end of the recently concluded ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting that US Secretary of Defence Ash Carter will be joined by his Malaysian counterpart on board the USS Theodore Roosevelt as they cruise the South China Sea. Another show of solidarity between USA and a TPP nation! What are trade agreements for after all if not to gain support for our geo-political goals?

The writer is an economist who writes on public policy issues.



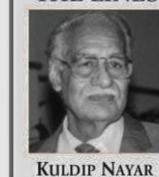
any interference. According to some estimates over \$5 trillion or almost 30 percent of the world's export and import trade navigates through this area. China, on the other hand, claims a 12 nautical mile territorial limit around the artificial islands. To counter China's moves, USA and its allies hold the position that UN Convention on the Law of the Sea does not recognise these limits around man-made islands "built on previously submerged reefs" which the Subi and the Fiery Cross Reefs are. China is undoubtedly positioning itself to exert more influence should tensions mount, but also to break out of any

maneuvers until the conclusion of Chinese President Xi Jinping's trip to Washington in September. Undoubtedly, it is premature to draw any firm conclusions about the new economic and geo-political map that might emerge even before the ink dries on the paper TPP treaty is written on. If we look back, at the end of WWII, following the emergence of two communist powers in Europe and Asia, USA created SEATO and CENTO to contain China and the Soviet Union, respectively. Nowadays, the new emerging countries in the Pacific region do not see the value of a military alliance against China. Hence the creation of

Remembering 1984

MASSACRE AT DELHI

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

I WAS on my way to Peshawar from Lahore to meet Khan Abdul Wali Khan, son of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Frontier Gandhi. My friend and I stopped at Abbottabad, halfway, to have a cup of tea. The radio continuously blared that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had been assassinated by her Sikh security guards.

It was a BBC broadcast. The All India Radio announcement came four hours later. There was no question of our proceeding further. But it was too late to catch the flight back to Delhi from Lahore. I had no permission to cross the border on foot.

It was late in the afternoon the following day that I landed at Palam. The airport wore a forlorn look. The two Sikh officers at the immigration counter stood aloof. I could not make out what had happened. A Hindu immigration officer explained that many Sikhs had been killed in the city. (The official figure of casualties was put at 3,000 in Delhi alone.) Hordes of fanatics had been hurled upon the Sikhs to kill them.

I could not imagine how it was possible when the Hindus and Sikhs were so close to each other socially and religion-wise for ages and when the government was in good control. But it had turned out that the government itself was a party to the killings.

The then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, had reportedly said that his mother had been murdered and nothing had happened. And after the massacre of Sikhs, he had lamented that when a big tree is felled, the earth is bound to shake. He had no qualms of sorrow.

Rajiv Gandhi intentionally delayed the deployment of the army. I discovered subsequently to my horror that he had stopped even the flag march by the army because he wanted to "punish" the Sikhs. But the police had also been told to overlook the incidents.

After the Nanavati Commission had reconstructed the events in a White Paper, I asked him why he had not named the people responsible for killing the Sikhs, he said it was "so obvious." He did not want to elaborate further.

Indeed, it was not a secret and Justice Nanavati was quite right in not spelling it out. His reticence was in order. Even though he had come to the conclusion that Rajiv Gandhi was behind it, he, as a judge, could not hold the then Prime Minister guilty without a proper inquiry.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi should have publicly apologised for what had happened to the Sikhs at the hands of her family, headed by Rajiv Gandhi. But Sonia preferred to go to President Pranab Mukherjee to complain about the rise of intolerance. There was nothing wrong in doing so because it is for anybody to see intolerance has increased in the last one and a half years.

There is no doubt that the level of tolerance has come down after the advent of the Narendra Modi government. But it is also true that the liberal elements do not speak out. Their silence is ominous and it is inexplicable why the media should be a mute spectator. The early November is one occasion when the atrocities against the Sikh community should have been recalled and condemned at the joint meeting of the two communities. But even the liberal Hindus did not take the initiative.

The contamination of bureaucracy is obvious. There is tolerance towards minorities but not acceptance. When I was India's High Commissioner at London, I found out how the officials behaved. At the High Commission, I saw the mission's main gate was kept closed. The security men told me that this was being done to keep the Sikh terrorists away.

The security opened the aperture in the door to see if the visitor was Sikh or non-Sikh. If he was a Sikh, he was told to come through the back door and was thoroughly frisked. I was horrified because the assumption was that the Sikhs were

terrorists. I immediately ordered throwing open the gate and the Sikhs were allowed through the main door.

I also found that there was a list of 100 odd Sikhs who were declared by the Home Ministry as "undesirable." A Sikh rang me up from Lancashire to request me to issue a visa to his son, who was just 12 years old. I asked him why he did not follow routine procedure. He said that Sikhs were not being issued visas. I took up the case of this boy and found that his father was listed as an undesirable.

Going deep into the case, I found that the father had raised a slogan "Khalistanzindabad" outside the India House, the mission's office. I found it strange that the sins of the father should visit upon the son and also felt amused that the father had been black-listed because he had raised the slogan.

I told the visa officials that if we were to deny visa to the boy, he would definitely become a Khalistani. If he were to go to India, he would see that there were no discriminations against the Sikhs. After visiting India, the boy and his family began to vocalise the message that he was proud to be an Indian. He had gone all over and found that there was no discrimination against the Sikhs. A fringe element was against the minorities but it had no supporters.

One argument of mine was that the country should be differentiated from the government. The government belongs to a political party or a combination of parties which could be thrown out in elections. But the country belongs to all the people and any harm done to it would affect all the communities, whether they are in the government or in the opposition.

India, as a country, has survived for ages because it has the spirit of accommodation and sense of tolerance. Those who are trying to defeat this idea are really harming the country. Fortunately, the people have awakened to the intolerance which some elements are spreading. This is a positive sign.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

COMMENTS

"Trial? I don't want it either"
(November 2, 2015)

Saleh Chowdry

Seeking justice from the incumbent government will fall on deaf ears.

"Judiciary separated, not effectively yet" (November 1, 2015)

Muslim Ahmed

Without political stability, judiciary cannot be effective.

"Tk 3-5 lakh charged for leaked questions: DB"
(November 1, 2015)

Hanif Repon

Stern action against both the syndicate and the admission seekers who pay for the questions can prevent such things in the future.

"Now criminals safe, people unsafe: Ershad"
(November 1, 2015)

Murtaza Sohag

You said the right thing, Mr. Ershad. But don't you have anything to do regarding this? Shouldn't you protest it rather than brief the journalists?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Ministry is not a stadium

Arif Khan Joy, the deputy minister at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, recently ransacked the office of a joint secretary of the ministry because his name was left out of a banner at a national youth day programme. It seems that the ex-footballer-turned politician is unable to distinguish between a football field and the ministry. Since he took office, he has been misbehaving with his staff. We wonder how people like him get a cabinet position. Indeed, Bangladesh is a country where everything is possible!
Nawfal Talukdhar
USA

Aircraft safety

This refers to the report, "Sinai plane crash: Russian airliner 'broke up in mid-air'" (Nov 2). Lately, we have seen many such fatal crashes in several countries. I think the passengers have a right to know the condition of the aircraft they fly in. Such details can be printed on the back of the air ticket. Thus passengers can make informed decisions about which airline to choose.
Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail



PHOTO: REUTERS