

Another coal-carrying vessel sinks in Sundarbans

Heed the wakeup call!

HOW many more wake-up calls do authorities need to realise that carrying coal, or other ecologically harmful substances, particularly on faulty vessels, through the Sundarbans, is a recipe for disaster? A lighterage ship carrying over 1,000 tonnes of coal to Noapara in Jessore sank in the Pasur River, and given the choppy water conditions it is near impossible to locate the sunken vessel in time for salvaging it. This is the fourth accident in two years and we have written about these accidents umpteen number of times but to no avail. We wonder at the likely eventualities when the Rampal power plant becomes operational and the traffic of coal-carrying vessels increase exponentially. Given the dismal performance of authorities to check unfit vessels plying our waters, we wonder what precisely might be the accident rate when thousands of tonnes of coal will have to be transported using these rivers?

The idea of a coal-based power plant so close to the Sundarbans is fraught with danger, and our stand on the issue is not in consonance with the government's. We have to remember that while the Rampal plant may use higher grade coal, the project will require 10,000 tonnes of coal on a daily basis. This quantity will require a lot of vessels to operate along the Pasur, through the forest every day. These are ground realities and it is high time the authorities woke up to the possibilities, among other things, of accidents, and accidents can happen, and their effects on the Sundarbans. After all, we have only one of its kind.

Unsafe three-wheelers on city streets

Address the underlying problem

A photo published in this newspaper yesterday showed an improvised motorised three-wheeler, known as Nasimon, in a major thoroughfare of the capital. Despite a ban on these road-unsafe vehicles, they continue to ply the roads. These vehicles, scrapped together unprofessionally, were banned for safety reasons. On top of that, these vehicles are without registration, operated by untrained drivers. Yet, they continue to be a preference for low-income groups.

In the busy traffic of the city as well as on the highway, these slap-dash vehicles pose a significant safety hazard. It is the failure of the authorities to enforce the ban, which ultimately puts not only the Nasimon passengers, but other vehicles on the road in danger.

But the issue is more than one of enforcing the ban on such improvised local vehicles. The fact that people continue to use them despite knowing the risks shows that there exists a lack of affordable public transport. Especially in the rural areas, where there is almost no lateral connectivity with the highways, people are forced to use these vehicles.

However, the photo in question was taken inside the city. This highlights how little the rules count and can be easily flouted. We urge the authorities, in light of the risks, to enforce the ban on these deadly vehicles. On top of that, the transport authorities should also realise that a ban can only go so far. These vehicles are filling a need that has not been addressed. Therefore, affordable and available public transport is the need of the hour.

INDIA'S ANTI-DUMPING DUTY

Finding the best outcome

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

FOLLOWING an investigation launched in October 2015 by the Directorate General of Anti-Dumping and Allied Duties (DGAD) under the Ministry of Commerce and

Industry of India, on January 5, 2017, India imposed substantial 'anti-dumping duty' on imports of jute and jute goods from Bangladesh. The investigation was to see whether export prices of jute from Bangladesh were set 'below fair market prices', after the Indian Jute Mills Association accused Bangladeshi exporters, for the first time in 40 years, of selling jute products at prices lower than that in India's domestic market.

In response, the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), based on an investigation outcome, said that "there is no clear finding of injury caused by Bangladesh's export price and volume to Indian local finished products" (DCCI protests proposed anti-dumping duty on jute, *The Daily Star*, January 8). While the Indian market accounts for 20 percent of all Bangladeshi exports of jute and jute-made products, Bangladesh's jute exports to India is equivalent to only 8 percent of the entire Indian market share.

The argument, therefore, presented by the DCCI that the share of Bangladeshi jute products in the Indian market is too insignificant to manipulate prices there, is clearly a valid one. Meanwhile, the DCCI also said that "the proposed anti-dumping duty could result in adverse multiplier impacts on our local growers, producers, exporters and spur further trade imbalance with India", which is already massive and of significant concern.

Then why did the Indian authorities decide to levy such hefty duties on Bangladeshi jute, even when Indian importers and manufacturers of jute products themselves said in the past that the quality of jute from Bangladesh is the best that they get to work with? Clearly, the justification that it was done to protect domestic producers in India is shaky at best. And it gets even more tenuous when you take into consideration the fact that Indian businesses, as recently as 2015, urged the authorities of both countries to allow Bangladeshi jute to enter the Indian market as it "would help stabilise prices".

On the current issue, when talks of



Jute growers and traders sit idle at a weekly market in Tangail's Korotia.

investigations started, the Jute Products Importers Association (JPIA) of India had even sent a letter to the commerce minister of Bangladesh on January 28, 2016, asking him to intervene and prevent the imposition of duties that may restrict the import of jute products from Bangladesh. The letter read: "The JPIA strongly feels that there is no case of imposing any duty on import of jute goods from Bangladesh into India" (Export to India at high risk, *The Daily Star*, February 7, 2016). And according to a joint secretary of JPIA at the time, "The demand for jute goods in India is higher than the supply" and the gap is in fact "met by the imports from Bangladesh." Finally, he said that the real intention behind the move was to give "a few Indian millers" the opportunity to create "a monopoly market".

As harmful as that would be for the overall Indian economy, the imposition of the export duty is surely going to hurt Bangladesh as jute is already our third largest export behind garment and leather and, India, the biggest market for jute export. Meanwhile, the setback also comes at a time when some believed that the Bangladeshi jute industry was on the cusp of making significant strides forward with the help of China, which had offered technology and finance to

Bangladesh for building a plant to make viscose fibre from jute (Indian jute sector jittery as China offers Bangladesh help, *Business Standard*, December 13, 2016). Currently, Bangladesh imports around 33,737 tonnes of viscose fibre - a lot of it from India - and once established, the plant could help Bangladesh save somewhere between Tk. 700 and 800 crore annually from not having to import it.

Another justification given by India for the tax imposition is that the Bangladesh government is subsidising its jute sector. Again, Bangladeshi government officials have already argued that the subsidies are not very high, planned to be lowered and eventually phased out. So why slap the tax? Why not negotiate with the Bangladesh government and work out a deal if that was India's main concern?

In the past, when it came to working out sensitive issues, the Bangladesh government has shown time and again that it is willing to discuss the matter over with its Indian counterpart and make concessions, sometimes, more than what its citizens and critics felt was justified. Take the matter of allowing India to transport its goods through Bangladesh's territory for example, charging amounts way lower than what

it would cost Bangladesh to allow India to do so, as experts had estimated.

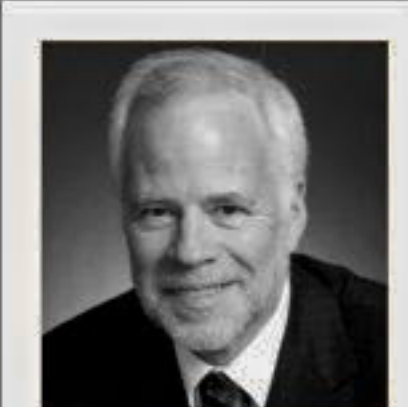
There are plenty more examples of when the Bangladesh government has been very magnanimous in terms of what it has been willing to give to India, in its various dealings. And obviously so, given the history of its friendship with India. The current governments of Prime Minister Modi and the Awami League had also shown a willingness to rapidly strengthen that tie in the past, and yet, the Indian side simply went ahead with something that would badly hurt its next door neighbour.

It is all the more surprising given that the tax would not really help the Indian economy from a holistic perspective. Thus, the Bangladesh government should immediately look to initiate talks with the Indian government and try to resolve the matter quickly. The tax does seriously damage Bangladesh's vision for its own future, but it also hurts India. At a time when we rapidly see the emergence of a potential Eurasian century, of which, Asia is central, we cannot be making such poor decisions. Sometimes, dialogue is the best answer, and working together, the key to finding a better outcome. I believe that this is, quite obviously, one of those times.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Trump before Trump



BARRY EICHENGREEN

UNDERSTANDING the political success of US President-elect Donald Trump is not easy. There have been many glib comparisons with populist politicians of the past, from Huey Long to George Wallace. But the most revealing comparison may be with an historical figure from another country: the British nativist

firebrand Enoch Powell in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

At first glance, the comparison might seem peculiar. Powell came from a lower-middle-class family. He was a classical scholar of true erudition and a man of

invoked Virgil: "Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood.'"

Powell's equivalent of Trump's Mexican bogeyman was Indian and Pakistani immigration, which he portrayed as threatening the British way of life. "Ordinary people," he asserted, knew that the true number of immigrants was larger than official government figures showed. Powell went on to advocate large-scale repatriation of immigrants to their country of origin.

The "Rivers of Blood" speech was denounced as evil by no less than *The Times*. But it won Powell a dedicated following among working-class voters experiencing hard economic times, discomfited by the "invasion" of their neighbourhoods by Asian and Caribbean immigrants, and prone to conflate the two

appreciated the Soviet Union for its World War II sacrifices, its prideful nationalism, and as a counterbalance to other self-interested foreign powers (read: the US).

The apex of Powell's influence was bracketed by the "Rivers of Blood," which made him a national figure, and his defection from the Tories. Quitting the party left him a political outcast. Although Powell left the House of Commons once and for all only in 1987, his political influence was increasingly marginal.

Why, then, did Powell - unlike Trump - fail to scale the higher reaches of power? And what does his failure tell us about the Trump phenomenon and the prospects for its repetition in other countries?

First, there were limits on Powell's ability to mobilise public opinion. He was able to attract attention mainly by delivering speeches and encouraging his followers to circulate the text. With the exception of two tabloids, coverage by the establishment press of his "Rivers of Blood" speech ranged from sceptical to outright hostile. And the establishment press was all there was. The 1960s and 1970s, recall, were when the BBC ruled the airwaves. Powell had no equivalent of Twitter to spread the word, and there was no Fox News or Breitbart to create an ideological echo chamber.

Second, Powell fundamentally believed in the British parliamentary system, having grown up in it. He was reluctant to harness his followers' nativism and economic insecurity to build an anti-system movement that might weaken the foundations of the country's parliamentary democracy.

Third, public dissatisfaction with British politics in Powell's heyday was more limited than Americans' political dissatisfaction in the age of Trump. Even in the economically disastrous 1970s, British voters were not prepared to reject the political status quo. Discontent and disillusion were not "accompanied by a basic questioning of British political institutions," in the words of Powell's biographer, Douglas Schoen.

Finally, the structure of the political system worked against a maverick like Powell. In Britain, MPs, not the electorate, choose the prime minister. Only in a full-blown crisis can popular opinion effectively determine who becomes leader. This institutional arrangement creates a high barrier to populist outsiders.

Maybe, then, the ultimate lesson of the Powell-Trump comparison is that a presidential system of government, like that in the US, is not superior in terms of the checks it imposes on political extremists. On the contrary, the opposite may be true.

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PHOTO: AFP

principle. He was also a political insider, having served as Member of Parliament since 1950 and as the junior minister for housing in Prime Minister Anthony Eden's government in 1955.

Still, the parallels with Trump are undeniable. In his notorious 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech, Powell, a skilled orator, broke decisively with the political mainstream. He decried immigration and denounced the Race Relations Act of 1968, which prohibited discrimination in housing, employment, and lending. The passage giving his controversial speech its name alluded to inner city riots in the United States and

phenomena.

Moreover, the parallels with Trump extend beyond hostility to immigration. Powell was fervently pro-business. He was a committed nationalist who rejected any and all foreign alliances that threatened Britain's policy independence. He implacably opposed joining the European Union (then the European Economic Community) on the grounds that doing so would compromise British identity and sovereignty. He left the Conservative Party over the issue in 1974.

Curiously, Powell, like Trump, was also pro-Russian. Notwithstanding his free-market principles, he

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Perennial traffic gridlock of Dhaka

Dhaka city has become synonymous with traffic jam. Perennial traffic jam has gripped the entire city. It is quite unpredictable how long it will take to reach from one place to another. People used to be able to reach their destination within a reasonable time but now it takes hours to reach the same destination. The situation has worsened recently as digging for utility lines has been taking place in the roads in various parts of Dhaka city. The unplanned way in which roads are being dug shows that there is little coordination among the many departments responsible for the management and maintenance of Dhaka's roads. Does anyone care about the suffering of the people? For instance construction work is going on in various parts of the city such as gulshan-1, Malibagh-Moghbarz flyover, Asadghat, Shymoli and many other places at a snail's pace. In order to give city dwellers some relief from excruciating traffic jam, the ongoing road construction projects should be immediately completed by the concerned authority. We appeal to the city corporations to take the matter seriously and complete the ongoing roads construction projects timely so that commuters can travel freely within the city without being stuck in gridlock for hours. That will most certainly increase the productivity of the residents of the city.

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