

WORLD OCEANS DAY

Our oceans: The ultimate sump



TODAY is "World Oceans Day," a day observed worldwide to raise our awareness of the crucial role the oceans play in sustaining life on Earth.

to decompose fully, some of them break down much quicker into tiny, easy-to-swallow particles that can easily be ingested by marine species causing choking, starvation and other impairments.

Pollution of the oceans by oil spills has been one of the major concerns for a long time. The primary source of spill is offshore drilling. The process is inherently dangerous and thus, is prone to accidents.

If the layer of the oil is thick enough, it smothers creatures unable to move out from under it. Besides, swimming and diving birds become covered with oil, which mats their feathers, reducing their buoyancy and preventing flight.

The world's largest oil spill was not an accident; it was the result of the Persian Gulf War in 1991. The second worst disaster was the spill by BP's Deepwater Horizon offshore rig in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010.

Land and oceans together absorb slightly more than half of all the carbon dioxide emissions, with the oceans taking a greater share. When carbon dioxide dissolves in water, it forms carbonic acid.

Because oceans absorb more than 90 percent of the heat that is added to the climate system, sea level is changing, albeit unevenly.



The oceans are among our biggest resource and also our biggest dumping grounds.

It is changing unevenly as oceans do not warm uniformly across the planet, with the southern oceans warming at a faster rate.

The single most significant contribution to rising sea level is from the thermal expansion of water. Melting ice makes the second most important contribution, but only melting of land-based ice—glaciers, ice caps and ice sheets—is significant.

According to some studies, global sea level rose by about 18 cms during the last century. In the worst-case scenario, sea level

could rise by two metres by the end of the year 2100. Arguably, rising sea level is among the potentially most catastrophic effects of human-caused climate change.

The oceans are no longer "The Silent World" of the famous oceanic explorer Jacques Cousteau. Today, they are being acoustically bleached by noise from seismic blasts used for offshore oil and gas exploration, marine traffic and military sonar.

Unlike plastic pollution, noise pollution does not have the visual impact that is needed to spark an outcry and force action. It is an invisible menace that is drowning out the sounds of many marine animals, including fish, use for navigation, communicating with each other, finding food, choosing mates and warning others of potential dangers.

Whales and dolphins are particularly vulnerable to noise pollution. The deafening seismic blasts and the ping of sonar are responsible for the loss of their hearing and habitat, and disruption in their mating and other vital behaviours. The disappearance of

beaked whales in the Bahamas in recent years have been attributed to testing of US Navy sonar systems in the region.

From 1946 through 1993, nuclear countries used the oceans to dispose of radioactive wastes. The United States alone dumped more than 110,000 containers of nuclear material off its coasts.

It is highly likely that radioactive wastes would eventually leak out of the containers because of poor insulation, volcanic activity, tectonic plate movement and several other geological factors.

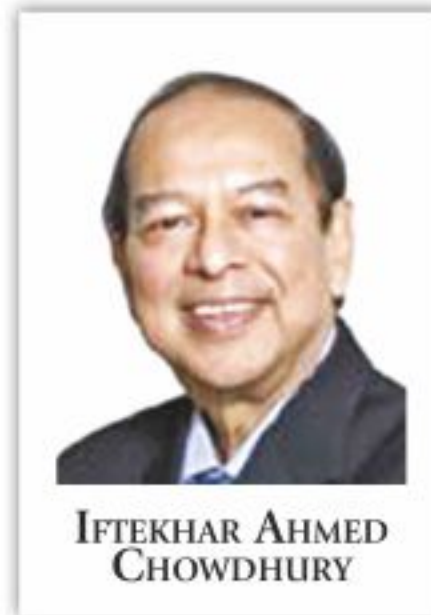
Furthermore, six nuclear submarines—4 Russian and 2 American—lost as a result of accidents are lying at the bottom of the oceans. They represent serious threat of radioactive contamination of the oceans, too.

One of the biggest contaminations due to radiation was caused by a series of nuclear tests conducted by the USA on the sea, in the air and underwater at Bikini Atoll in the North Pacific between 1946 and 1958.

Clearly, we are using the oceans as the ultimate sump, partly because their very immensity seems to preclude any long-term effect, and partly because they belong to no one. This cannot continue indefinitely because in order for us to survive, we have to protect the oceans. Lest we forget, life emerged from the oceans and the source of most of the oxygen we breathe are the oceans.

Quamrul Haider is a Professor of Physics at Fordham University, New York.

Duel at the Shangri-La dialogue: Implications for us all



THE Annual Jamboree of global defence leaders at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore is much more than just a talkathon.



China's Defence Minister Wei Fenghe (left) and acting US Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan (front second right) attend the opening of the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue summit in Singapore on May 31, 2019.

PHOTO: AFP

time round Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong himself took care to lay down the ground-rules of the discussions in a masterful analysis of the regional and global situation at a post-dinner tour d'horizon on the opening night.

He did not fight shy of the problems that dot the world in our times, offered some pragmatic solutions while circumspectly avoiding taking sides. He concluded by urging: "we must work together to maximise the chances that countries will have the wisdom and courage to work together... will have the wisdom and courage to make the right choices, opt for openness and integration, and so preserve and expand the progress we have made together."

It was not that Singapore was simply punching above its weight. His rational words

calmed nerves. They helped to round off the sharp edges of the inevitable US-China debate that was at the core of this year's programme.

Nonetheless, some sparks did fly. A restrained Shanahan, without mentioning China, iterated that States that "eroded rules-based order", were a "threat to the region". Despite the perplexity of some in the audience, who could have thought the remarks could have applied equally to Shanahan's own country, the US, Wei Fenghe accepted the fact that China was the target.

To many analysts though, it could have

seemed like the pot calling the kettle black. For didn't it resemble the pattern of behaviour of the US itself, not so long ago? So, is the US now looking to inherit the pristine purity of behaviour of the proverbial Caesar's wife?

He reiterated that China was ready to fight the US to the end, but confined the rhetoric, for now at least, to the sphere of trade! He might as well have quoted the old limerick: "We don't want to fight, but by jingo if we do, we've got the men, we've got the ships, we've got the money too!"

Happily the prospects of a war are far beyond the rim of the saucer. The US and China, much unlike the US and the Soviet Union of the yesteryears are much too interdependent. They are the largest trade partners, and China owns an estimated USD 1.18 trillion US debt (as of April last year, though the figures pared down somewhat since).

Despite the oft-cited mention of the Thucydides syndrome, named after the Greek historian who said when Athens grew strong there was great fear in Sparta, serious current

thinkers have pretty much ruled out an all-out war. In a recent tome entitled "Destined for War; Can America and China escape the Thucydides Trap?" the strategic writer Graham Wallace argued that, yes, they can.

But this does not mean we are not headed for a long-term Sino-US rivalry, within the model of a rising power challenging a sated one. The trade gap with China has, for the US, grown to a record USD 419.2 billion. Competition for influence in the Asia-Pacific region, where the powers collide directly is fierce.

In a situation where each State is more or less on its own, the need for each to focus on its own security and development increases manifold. For a country like Bangladesh it would entail expanding product and services markets through innovative initiatives like bilateral and pluri-lateral Free Trade Agreements, rather than say, being dependent on global bodies like the World Trade Organization.

Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury is Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, and a former Foreign Advisor in a Caretaker Government in Bangladesh.

QUOTABLE Quote ANAIS NIN (February 21, 1903 – January 14, 1977) FRENCH-CUBAN AMERICAN DIARIST, ESSAYIST AND NOVELIST Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH ACROSS 30 Song sung singly 9 Botch 31 Court 11 Half of a sextet 32 Pigs Noses 15 Vegan Sandwich filler 34 External 37 Santa's crew 19 Grating sound 38 Mall business 20 Lowdigit 39 Tie the knot 22 Musical finish 23 "My word!" 24 Cries 25 Nucleus part 26 Home of the "Mona Lisa" 27 Changes 28 Popular cow name 29 "Terrible" age 30 Sun-powered 33 Nautilus captain 35 Period of history planning 36 GOP member DOWN 1 On the FBI's list 2 Chant 3 Wise teachers 4 Location 5 Way off 6 Lupino of film 7 Do some city planning 8 Teapot parts

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER CART BASES AMEND ARISE BITTE BETTE ON LOY CAD TURNUP LOTS STAGENAME VENOM TRADENAME FEEL RARELY RAT TAG TEE AMIGO OLIVA TUNIS NIMES SPANS TENT

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker THERE'S SOME PUDDING LEFT NO, THANKS, I'VE HAD ENOUGH I'M CURIOUS, WHAT DO YOU CALL "ENOUGH"? "ENOUGH" IS WHEN HE CAN SEE HIS BELT BUCKLE WITHOUT BENDING HIS HEAD!

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott SHE'S ADORABLE! HOW OLD IS SHE? NINETEEN MONTHS AND THE BOY? FOUR HUNDRED AND THIRTY-TWO MONTHS. BETHHHHHH

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