

ABHIROOP CHOWDHURY AND
ARMIN ROSENCRANZ

Nicobar development at the cost of ecology?

With climate change crisis looming large and ever-increasing anthropogenic footprint pushing unique biodiversity to the brink of extinction, developmental projects need to be evaluated for their environmental impacts before execution.

The Andaman and Nicobar islands are an archipelago on the Bay of Bengal, bordering the Indonesian island of Sumatra in the south and Cocos island of Myanmar in the North.

Strategically these islands also hold a phenomenal importance in regional geopolitics. Even during the British colonial period, Andaman and Nicobar Islands were the checkpoints to minimize the Dutch, French and Japanese imperialistic influences in South-East Asia. With the passage of time, the situation has not changed, only the political players are different. Still these islands hold the key to check the increasing Chinese influence in this region particularly in the neighboring country of Myanmar.

Against this backdrop, comes the news of building the New Transshipment Terminal in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a part of the grand plan to develop these islands. The terminal is supposed to be built in the island of 'Great Nicobar' and entails an overall investment of 100 billion Indian Rupees. This project will be built in Campbell Bay, at Great Nicobar near the national naval station of 'Baaz'.

Nestled in the warm waters of the tropics, this island has a plethora of endemic biodiversity. These 572 forested islands host 9,130 animal species of which 1,032 species can be found only in this ecoregion. It is a part of the 'Sundaland' biodiversity hotspot. Hotspots are areas in the world with exceptional richness of biodiversity. This is the habitat of diverse terrestrial and marine species - whales, dolphins, dugong, hornbills, marine turtles, saltwater crocodile, *Trochus*, sea cucumbers, sea-shells, sharks, marine turtles and saltwater crocodiles, to mention a few.

Apart from the unique biodiversity, these islands are the abode of four 'Negrito' tribes - the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa, Sentinelese and two of Nicobar island's 'mongoloid' tribes- the Shompen and Nicobarese.

Ships burn modified sulfur rich crude oil for their movements. Ship-



source pollutants, namely Carbon dioxide (CO2), Sulfur dioxide (SO2) and Nitrogen dioxide (NO2) all are global warming gasses as well as leaving enormous toxic footprints on the environment. Research indicates that SO2 emission from per liter heavy ship-grade crude oil is 2700 times higher than petrol or diesel used in road transportation sector. Harbours and port terminals also use diesel intensive machineries emitting pollutants in the environment. Some of the bulk materials handled by port authorities such as fertilizers, coal, petroleum products, sulfur, and asbestos can result in increase of dust load in the nearby atmosphere.

A 2010 study by Civic Exchange at Hong Kong, reported 519 deaths per year in the Pearl River delta due to SO2 exposure. But experts claim that total

premature deaths from all shipping-derived air pollution can be even twice this number and by 2030 this figure could rise to 1,100 premature deaths per year due to shipping impacts. Oil and petrochemical pollutants have polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAH), which can impact the digestive, respiratory and circulation systems.

Any oil seepage or spills in the marine system can reduce oxygen level in waters, impact the phytoplankton community and can destabilize the whole marine ecosystem. Oil pollution also impacts bird species and researches indicates it can have toxic impacts by reducing egg-shell thickness and their breeding success. The near threatened Nicobar pigeon (*Caloenias nicobarica*) has its breeding ground in the small Nicobar island near the 'would be' shipping lanes

after the start of the Nicobar Transshipment Terminal.

Physical impacts of anchoring of vessels are known to cause threat to assemblages of infralittoral algae and sensitive benthic flora and fauna. Anti-fouling paints used in ships have toxic tributyltin (TBT) in them and a 1998 study suggests that north-western Mediterranean waters have around 0.04 nanogram per litre of this toxic contaminant destabilizing the marine ecosystem.

The Chamoli disaster on 7 February has shocked the nation and showed the impact of unplanned developmental projects in the environmentally unique ecoregion of the Western Himalayas. On a similar note, Nicobar Islands should not be viewed as a pawn in a regional geopolitical chess game or a cash cow for finan-

cial coffers. It needs to be recognized for its unique biodiversity and environmental wealth. Developmental activities must be scientifically evaluated by unbiased competent agencies before execution of any project.

The best-case scenario would be to keep these untouched, pristine, forested islands free from the burden of unsustainable, non-green developmental models. Climate change and global warming are rapidly changing the weather pattern of this region as well as increasing disaster events in the tropics. In view of this, environmental conservation must definitely be prioritized over short term financial or geopolitical gains.

The writers are, respectively, Assistant Professor and Dean at Jindal School of Environment & Sustainability, O.P. Jindal Global University, Haryana, India.

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The most recent report that has been issued by the Industrial Fatigue Research Board illustrates the attention which is now being given at Home to the improvement of the conditions of labour, with the object of promoting at the same time industrial efficiency and the health and contentment of the workers. This report deals specially with the iron and steel industry, and is based on the investigation of the sickness records of about 20,000 steel-workers during six years. Fatigue, it is pointed out, may be muscular or mental. An example of the man who suffers from mental fatigue is the crane-man, who is seated all day at his work but who has to be ever on the alert to manipulate his levers correctly. Fatigue, again, may be due to the trying effects of exposure to hot and moist air, and labour of an intermittent type, where spells of idleness alternate with spells of excessively strenuous work - as in the case of open-hearth steel-melters, - is also very prone to cause fatigue. In some occupations, again, the inhalation of dust and chemical poisons has to be taken into account. The first indication of fatigue is diminished capacity for work with a diminution of output, and the more remote effects are manifest in the sickness and mortality records. The report estimates that output might be increased by 50 to 100 per cent by the general adoption of the most improved plant.

NEWS ITEMS

LAWLESSNESS AT NAGPUR

Nagpur, Feb 24
In connection with the serious situation created at Nagpur the following facts have been ascertained: A large demonstration occurred at the District Court, Nagpur, yesterday, where excise sales were being held. An attempt was made to interrupt the auction, but this was frustrated. In the afternoon a large mob collected near the court and a liquor contractor was assaulted. The mob then stoned the police and the Magistrate in charge, and two European officers and a few policemen received some injuries. The conduct of the police, under most difficult circumstances, was exceptionally good. In the evening some liquor shops were looted in the city. The latest report is that the city is now quiet. Additional military and police forces have been summoned.

TRIBUTE TO INDIAN POLICE

Presiding at a lecture at the East India Association by Sir John Cumming on, "Crime and Police in India," Sir Edward Henry said that steps to increase the status and efficiency of village chowkidars would do more than anything to prevent ordinary crime. Lord Carmichael said that there had been a great improvement in the police in Bengal during recent years, but it was essential to any advancement that the pay and prospects of the force should be far better. Once when visiting a mofussil hospital he remarked on the large number of police patients, and the doctor told him that the reason was that many of the police were inadequately fed owing to insufficient wages. For this, the British officers and their Indian colleagues and subordinates are alike to be congratulated.

ANGLO-PERSIAN OIL COMPANY

Shareholders at a meeting of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, unanimously authorised the creation of ten million sterling second preference shares, ranking both as regards dividend and capital after existing preferences, also five millions first preference shares ranking pari passu with those at present issued. The Chairman, Sir Charles Greenway, submitting resolutions said that the expenditure was necessary to attain completely independent status in all branches. Their business was so large that they were unable entirely to meet it from the profits without unduly delaying expansion. The first preferences would benefit from the issue by the improvement of their dividend to a fixed eight per cent. There was reason to anticipate an increase in the profits in consequence of the output of oil rapidly increasing as various extensions came into operation.

BLIZZARD SWEEPS AMERICA

The most severe snowstorm for years has been experienced here. Snow is lying in drifts six to ten feet deep. Trains have been delayed for hours and half a dozen deaths have occurred. Sixteen thousand men are employed in shovelling away the snow. New caterpillar tractors have been used for the first time to push snow-ploughs, and they have cleared the principal thoroughfares in a most efficient manner. A message from St. Johns, Newfoundland, states that the blizzard sweeping the Atlantic seaboard is the worst snowstorm Newfoundland has had this winter. Train and steamer services are suspended and business is practically at a standstill. The storm has destroyed the residence of the Roman Catholic Archbishop, who, with nine priests and the domestic staff, had a narrow escape.

A more appropriate epitaph



MAHIR ALI

The headstone above a final resting place dug in Rome's non-Catholic cemetery 200 years ago today bears the indelible inscription: "This grave contains all that was mortal of a young English poet who, on his death bed, in the bitterness of his heart at the malicious power of his enemies, desired these words to be engraven on his tomb stone: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'."

There is a harp above the inscription, but no name. As some readers might have guessed, the mortal

remains are those of John Keats, the bicentenary of whose distressingly premature demise was commemorated this week with readings, lectures, virtual tours and the like. His immortal remains can be found in bookshelves all around the world.

Contrary to what the gravestone suggests, it wasn't bad reviews that killed the poet. The villain was tuberculosis, commonly known back then as consumption. After a night out in London in February 1820, Keats coughed up blood and recognised its colour. "That drop of blood is my death warrant," he told his house-

mate. "I must die."

A couple of years earlier, he had watched his younger brother, Tom, succumb to the ailment. As a teenager, he had seen his mother die of the same disease. Besides, he was a qualified apothecary and an apprentice surgeon who eventually chose poetry over medicine, but not before working at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals in London.

Orphaned at a tender age, Keats was a belligerent schoolboy, more interested in brawls than in scholastic pursuits. But he became a voracious reader in his later teens and soon began spouting verse. Hardly any of

his juvenile poetry has stood the test of time, although the emotions expressed therein ought to be familiar to men — yes, it's the male gaze, although Keats was later to be commended (or criticised) for his feminine sensibility, too.

The sonnet On First Looking into Chapman's Homer is generally seen as his first significant poem, signalling a lifelong fascination with Greek mythology, which didn't always serve him well. It was followed not long afterwards by a far lesser known sonnet, Written in Disgust at Vulgar Superstition, an exhortation of organised religion. Some of the early poems also hint at political engagement, but it never came anywhere close to that of his contemporary (and admirer) Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Keats' first volume of verse, published in 1817, may not have been particularly impressive, but it did not deserve the derision it received from a Tory literary establishment almost genetically inclined to be dismissive of "Cockney poets". The criticism became even more vicious when Keats published his first long poem, Endymion; he himself was far from satisfied with this extended excursion into Greek mythology but had decided that he couldn't countenance any further revisions.

What's particularly extraordinary, though, is that his genius wasn't widely recognised even after he published Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems in 1820. The "other poems" included, mind you, some of the most exquisite verses committed to paper in the English language — the odes "To a Nightingale", "On a Grecian Urn" and "To Autumn", alongside the odes "To Psyche" and "On Melancholy". The only notable poem that

followed was the sonnet Bright Star.

Yet by the mid-19th century Keats was yet to be recognised as a gift to posterity, unlike older contemporaries such as Wordsworth and Coleridge (both of whom he had met). Perhaps it was only in the 20th century that Keats' stature (he stood 5ft 1in) was deservedly elevated to that of a literary giant, but his star was already shining bright in the late 19th century.

On a visit in 1877 to the cemetery where the poet's remains are interred, Oscar Wilde prostrated himself upon the grave and declared it to be "the holiest place in Rome". He marked the occasion with a sonnet that includes the lines: "Thy name was writ in water — it shall stand/ And tears like mine will keep thy memory green."

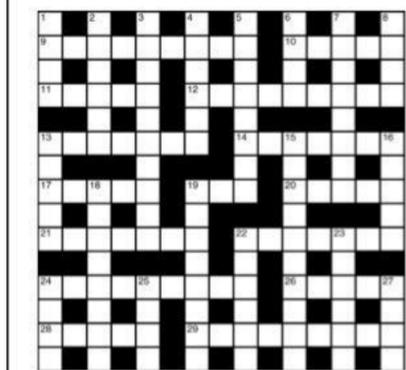
The original manuscript can be found in the Keats-Shelley House adjacent to the Spanish Steps in Rome, where Keats grew pallid and spectre-thin and died just months after he arrived in Italy, having survived a tumultuous sea voyage that included quarantine off the coast of Naples because of a cholera outbreak in London.

Keats stepped ashore on his 25th birthday, fully aware that his fears that "I may cease to be/ before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain" were about to come true. His possible future shall eternally remain a mystery and matter of conjecture. But given his core body of work, it's hard not to conclude that the opening lines of Endymion would have served as a far more appropriate epitaph than a name "writ in water": "A thing of beauty is a joy forever:/ Its loveliness increases; it will never/ Fade into nothingness..."

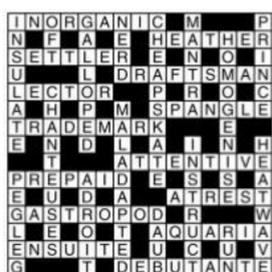
Dawn/ANN.

CROSSWORD

NO 28836



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- 9 Butcher's wrapping duck — huge duck! (9)
- 10 Flyer that talks about advanced inner personality (5)
- 11 Somewhat eccentric, or mad, losing power to Democrat? (5)
- 12 Greek leader soon brought about plucky Priam's end (9)
- 13 50s rocker pinching golden chain is fired (7) See 6 Down
- 14 Two characters abroad initially pursuing model (3-2)
- 15 His poetry no-go? Or

- 20 prose uneven? (3)
- 21/2 Peacock in mating frenzy on the way (5)
- 22 Stanhope for one in time becomes mediocre (7,6)
- 24 Carol eating cold and out-of-date bread (9)
- 26 Retreat from Moscow? (5)
- 28/4 Another 6 to trouble Longshanks? (5,6)
- 29 Ray — powerful — toyed with male bears (5,4)

DOWN

- 1 Like good brandy found in drainage ditch? (4)
- 2 See 21 Across

- 3 Note stain left surrounding crack in cathedral area (4,6)
- 4 See 28 Across
- 5 Chest-beater having breakfast in Chardonnay? (5,3)
- 6/14 Novel bleak: an end should incorporate article in work of 23 (4,3,4)
- 7 Mineral from old Roman watering-hole (8)
- 8 This will break with martial artist coming round (4)
- 13 Theme work penned by Mark that remains unfinished (5)
- 15 Mostly useless about

- 16 missing staff turning up in city (10)
- 17 One used to spin has some control at Headingley (5)
- 18 One tends crows and three bats (8)
- 19 Sweet bad stuck in gum (8)
- 22 Respected heads of army units and air force (6)
- 23 Person walking miles leaves old soldier (6)
- 24 Very hard getting round London district (4)
- 25 Much drama having no quiet songs (4)
- 27 Culminating point of month in service (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

