

CLIMATE CHANGE

Turning Bangladesh into the learning capital of the world



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
THE adverse impacts of human induced climate change are already occurring around the world, including in Bangladesh. It is incumbent on all countries to gear up their ability to be better prepared for the

impacts before they occur through enhancing adaptive capacity, and to also be prepared to deal with the loss and damage after the impacts occur.

There are certain aspects of enhancing adaptive capacity that are most relevant for vulnerable developing countries such as Bangladesh, where finances and technology are major constraints.

The first thing to focus on is the social assets that exist in each country and the development of a National Adaptation Plan (NAP), which the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has mandated all countries to do.

In the case of Bangladesh, we have already taken our own national efforts to prepare the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) over a decade ago, followed by setting up a Climate Change Trust Fund to support hundreds of activities by government ministries and agencies over the last ten years. We have thus gone up a very steep learning curve, as adaptation to climate change is a learning-by-doing process. This learning is now being distilled into the revised BCCSAP, which will take us to 2030. The government is also embarking on its official UNFCCC and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported NAP, so there will be ample opportunity for Bangladesh to build on its prior experience and prepare a path breaking NAP that other

vulnerable developing countries can learn from.

One of the key lessons that we have learned over the last decade is that we need to make an initial investment in enhancing the understanding of climate change impacts in all sectors of society. After that, we need to ramp up investment in enhancing the capacity of each group of stakeholders on what their specific roles and actions need to be, as there is no one size fits all approach for everyone.

In Bangladesh, we have made significant progress in enhancing the understanding of the entire population on the impacts of climate change, and we are rapidly making progress on learning what needs to be done by different institutions and groups. In this scenario, there are a few key institutions and groups that have evolved and become better equipped to tackle climate change impacts going forward.

The first sector is obviously the government, which includes the main ministries such as Environment, Agriculture, Water, Disaster Management, Education, as well as Planning and Finance. It also includes local governments in both rural and urban sectors, as well as the legislature. The important transition that all these ministries and stakeholders have been able to make is to understand how they need to tackle climate change and incorporate it into their usual practices. This is illustrated by the fact that the Ministry of Finance has for the last three years prepared a climate change budget in each national budget. This year, it allocated nearly eight percent of the national budget to tackling climate change in 25 ministries.

Another example is the way that climate change will now be integrated or mainstreamed into all the ministries in the Eighth Five Year Plan now under preparation. Similarly, the National Parliament has adopted a resolution to declare a planetary

emergency, which is the first parliament in the world to do so.

These are good illustrations of how the different branches of national and local government have learned, and then put into practice their learnings, on how to tackle climate change.

A similar learning-by-doing curve has also been achieved in the non-governmental sector, with many NGOs, big and small, having received funds from the Climate



PHOTO: STAR

Change Trust Fund as well as other sources. They have gained a great deal of experience in supporting local communities in different climate vulnerable zones around the country. As a result, Bangladesh has become a globally recognised leader on community based adaptation.

A major aspect of building national capacity to tackle climate change is to ensure that there is the ability to capture the experiential learning and use it to revise and

improve actions through a national network or platform of researchers and universities in each country, rather than depending on fly-in and fly-out international consultants to do workshops. In Bangladesh, the Gobeshona initiative has brought together over 50 universities and research institutions, who have their own monthly meetings to share knowledge and a major annual national conference every January, where we take stock of where we are and make decisions

television, radio and newspapers, in Bangla as well as English, are all able to understand the issues and communicate them in an effective manner. The media in Bangladesh has indeed risen to this challenge in a very significant way.

A good example of this is the fact that Bangladesh has perhaps the most effective cyclone warning and evacuation system in the world, where nearly three million people living in the coastal zones in Bangladesh know how to track the cyclone and take shelter when needed.

Going forward on this excellent foundation of awareness of the climate change problem and knowledge of solutions, we need to focus next on two aspects. The first is to invest heavily in the understanding of climate change and what to do about it in all our educational institutions, starting with universities and then into colleges, high schools and even primary schools. This does not require a major new financial investment, but rather an investment in enhancing the teaching abilities of our teachers. This investment will give us major dividends and make the country more resilient by turning the next generation into climate change leaders.

The second opportunity is for Bangladesh to reach out to other vulnerable developing countries, such as the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), as well as to countries in the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), in order to share our experiences in a South-South modality. Indeed, we can also share our experiences in a South-North modality with developed countries as well.

Over the next decade, through our coordinated efforts, Bangladesh can emerge as the learning capital of the world on how to tackle climate change and make the country more resilient.

Saleemul Huq is the Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University Bangladesh.

Can tourism in Cox's Bazar survive the Covid-19 effect?



COX'S Bazar, the longest sea beach in the world, lies terribly still and vacant. At Laboni Beach, the most popular tourist attraction, in the absence of the crowds, you can hear the wild waves crashing against the shore for a change,

and the magnificent sunsets are perfectly visible to the eye. But the seaside restaurants are no longer serving and hotels guests are no longer building sandcastles, paragliding, surfing or playing volleyball. Local fishermen who go out to sea with their wooden fishing boats are nowhere to be seen.

With the onslaught of Covid-19 weighing on its economy, tourism in Cox's Bazar has witnessed a headlong decline in both domestic and foreign tourist visits after being categorised as a red zone by the government.

According to Pacific Asia Travel Association's (PATA) Bangladesh chapter, till June 2020, the world will face a loss of USD 97.05 billion in the tourism sector alone. The Tour Operator Association of Bangladesh (TOAB), a platform of 678 tour operators, analysed their losses from January to March and estimated that the tourism industry alone may lose up to Tk 6,000 crore this year—from January to December—if the situation does not improve. And this is a relatively optimistic scenario—PATA Bangladesh has predicted that overall, the Bangladesh tourism sector will incur a loss of approximately Tk 9,705 crore till June 2020 due to the pandemic. So what does this mean for all the entities connected to the tourism industry—the transportation systems, airlines, hospitality workers, bus companies, cruise ships and accommodation facilities like hotels, motels and home stays, as well as other tourism service providers like travel agencies or tour operators?

With Cox's Bazar's number of domestic

tourists steadily increasing, newer tourist spots being discovered and overseas tourists trickling in to go to our largely overlooked country, the tourism and hotel industry has thrived for more than half a century. For example, according to Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC) data, Bangladesh's tourism revenue reached USD 357 million in December 2018, compared with USD 348 million in the previous year. According to news reports, with the

by 70 percent. On March 13, the World Travel and Tourism Council said that up to 50 million jobs in the travel and tourism sector are at risk due to the global health crisis. Cox's Bazar was probably the first case that demonstrated the impact of the disease on tourism, as this district's economy is largely dependant on its tourism sector. Against this backdrop, tour operators have invariably come to the conclusion that the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 has plunged

spend in the host community and of course, the money made in tourism is injected into the host community's economy. However, as this contribution is not yet perceived by Bangladeshi policymakers, the budgetary allocation is not being made in the manner expected.

"We have requested the government and the Bangladesh Bank to support us while we attempt to contain the coronavirus impact, especially during peak season, but so far, no concrete actions have been taken. Without government support, it is impossible to survive," said NM Karim, chairman of Ocean Paradise Hotel and Resort in Cox's Bazar, when asked about the government's recovery incentive package. In addition to this, hotel staff from the Sayeman Hotel in Cox's Bazar have mentioned that their (hotels) only source of income at the moment is from development and aid workers who are working with Rohingya refugees and staying at their hotel, but even the number of the development workers from abroad have reduced due to the rapid transmission of Covid-19 in the region.

Those within the industry are therefore profoundly skeptical about how much money will trickle down for the survival of the tourism industry, despite the government's declaration of a bailout programme of about Tk 73,000 crore in five separate loan-scheme incentive packages to various sectors.

Given such uncertainty, it seems that any type of policy development and execution is highly unpredictable. Futile attempts at reopening the tourism industry are already taking place. For instance, the Bangladesh Tourism Corporation (BPC) has decided to offer non-seasonal discounts in hotels and motels located in Cox's Bazar and Kuakata that are under its control. What seems to be lost in Bangladesh's business-as-usual approach to the pandemic is that our best chance to fight the virus is still a properly enforced lockdown, zonal or national. Domestic tourists in Cox's Bazar amount

to 70 to 80 percent of its overall tourism and considering the rapid increase in local Covid-19 cases, they are still not going to be lured there by the 50 percent discounts (well, at least I hope not). Hence, proper planning and policy guidelines are needed from the government.

Most tourism industry insiders in Cox's Bazar, including NM Karim, expressed the need for tax waivers for at least two to three years for the industry to bounce back. This includes tax rebates for resort owners and hoteliers; exemptions of double taxation on food and beverage industries and exemptions of ferry and bridge tolls for tourist-carrying vehicles. Interest free deferred bank loans for investment in tourism parks, resorts, picnic spots, etc may also be offered. In the longer term, more focus should be given to domestic tourism as part of the development phase. NM Karim further added, "considering the longevity of this health crisis, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in line with the Ministry of Health guidelines, such as the one published by Ocean Paradise, can be useful for the hospitality sector. Once local tourists see that safety precautions are being maintained, they may be encouraged to visit Cox's Bazar again."

It is indeed unfortunate that such an unforeseen adversity has befallen the tourism sector of Bangladesh, especially since in recent years, it has come to be regarded as a, although marginal, driver for national economic development. However, all hope should not be lost, since the industry itself is a resilient one. However, the Cox's Bazar tourism sector needs an extra dose of resilience through effective budgetary allocations. As expected, almost all business sectors are facing an array of complexities created by the coronavirus crisis. To overcome this situation, the entire tourism industry and the policymakers should go through a proper planning process to restart their activities.

Zaha Chowdhury is a graduate of the University of Manchester, UK.



STAR FILE PHOTO

government's announcement of Cox's Bazar as a Covid-19 red zone, daily transactions of Tk 25 to 30 crore are no longer taking place. But the hotels still have to pay staff salaries and maintenance costs.

The cancellation of domestic and foreign flights has contributed to this crisis. At the same time, travel visas for tourists from all countries have been suspended for the time being. According to a report in this daily, Mohibul Haque, senior secretary of the civil aviation and tourism ministry, said the number of domestic tourists have fallen

the tourism sector of Bangladesh into its worst-ever evolving challenge, and the sector requires an immediate recovery incentive package.

Tourism has a multiplier effect on society, even though the result isn't necessarily measurable. Its extensive contributions must be justified by successful developments in communities. This includes increased skilled and unskilled employment in the community, such as food vendors, souvenir sellers and retailers. Tourism also leads to an increased standard of living because tourists

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 15, 1965

Close-up pictures of Mars provided by Mariner 4

Mariner 4, an uncrewed space probe launched by NASA in 1964, flew by Mars and returned close-up pictures of its surface on this day in 1965, the pictures proving that the planet's rumoured canals were actually illusions.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Mexican region
- 5 Meadow group
- 9 Sapphire Kin
- 11 Milky gems
- 13 Identified
- 14 Scuffle
- 15 Mont Blanc, for one
- 16 In ruins
- 18 More suspicious
- 20 Juan Peron's wife
- 21 Hersey's "A Bell for—"
- 22 Perfect place
- 23 Third word of "America"
- 24 Diamond club
- 25 Paul's collaborator

DOWN

- 1 Hackneyed
- 2 Flowery shrub
- 3 Didn't wait one's turn
- 4 Live and breathe
- 27 Light circlers
- 29 Mimic
- 30 Serving collections
- 32 Softens
- 34 Auction buy
- 35 Wilson of the Beach Boys
- 36 Baling need
- 38 Yellow-gray
- 39 Muscular power
- 40 Spots
- 41 Hardy heroine
- 5 Person with promise
- 6 Oil org.
- 7 Behaved
- 8 Jacket part
- 10 Hubble and Moses
- 12 Car type
- 17 Old auto
- 19 April forecast
- 22 Puts away
- 24 Isn't modest
- 25 Door parts
- 26 Verdi works
- 27 Kitten cry
- 28 Go pieces
- 30 Theater awards
- 31 Frets
- 33 Store in the hold
- 37 Humorist

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott