

# Climate change: Bangladesh's case

There are reasons to believe that the low-lying deltaic country will face major changes in her hydro-geophysical aspects, which will increase the extent as well as frequency of floods, droughts, cyclones and wave interactions, salinity ingress, water logging, etc. This will adversely affect crop production, infrastructure, people's health and livelihoods, and inflict poverty on many households.

AHSAN UDDIN AHMED and SHARMIND NEELORMI

AT the advent of the new concept called "anthropogenic accelerated climate change," there have been numerous discussions across the globe regarding highly vulnerable countries and communities, their urgent and immediate needs for response measures (partly adaptation) and institutional as well as financial mechanisms to do so.

There have been many attempts by international media as well as global scientific community to portray Bangladesh as one of the most vulnerable countries. It is claimed that climate change will exacerbate the current contexts of vulnerability that are prevailing in the country and the resulting adverse

to climate related hazards and their consequences. There are clear scientific evidences that the current climate is no longer the same as it was some three to five decades earlier. In Bangladesh, even though there are limited data sets to deal with, it can be proved beyond doubt that a number of climate parameters have been consistently showing trends of change as a response to global warming.

However, when it is argued whether the additional effect in any observed extreme weather event can be explained scientifically as a logical consequence of change in climate system, it becomes extremely difficult to find such evidences. Since one cannot take out the "signal generated by climate change" from the background trend, the "additionality" factor appears to be an unsolved mystery towards establishing cause-effect relation-

ship. Those countries which have been included in Annex-1 of UNFCCC and have accepted the responsibility to promote and facilitate response measures, including adaptation in LDC and most vulnerable countries (MVC), often used this uncertainty issue to waste time.

Apparent, unless a victim country can explain (beyond doubt) how much of a given flood (for example) is caused by "additional rainfall" induced by climate change, it may not plead for its due share of international support to reduce vulnerability. Adaptation support has been pledged and mobilised, but not as "duty bound" as dictated by the UNFCCC. A logical Convention-bound action has now become an arbitrary gesture of pure humanitarianism!

This has placed Bangladesh in a difficult situation. Cyclones are known along the coastal zone. How many people died during Sidr (November 15, 2007) due to climate variability (i.e., usual cyclonic event) and how many due to climate induced component of the cyclone? Apparently, if we cannot find an answer to this vital question, the word com-

occurrence of about 5 to 6 low pressure systems, a few turning into depression/deep depressions and even cyclones in the Northern Indian Ocean (Bay of Bengal).

That has been the usual case. From satellite data, it is found that sea surface temperature (SST) in the Bay of Bengal (BoB) has been showing a persisting rising trend for both monsoon and post-monsoon seasons over the past four decades. Certainly, it has led to further accumulation of heat energy in the ocean system in the Bay.

Since the SST is now higher than usual (about 0.5°C higher than the average observed five decades ago), enhanced by climate change induced warming, a few days of sunshine now generates enough energy to cross the threshold for producing low pressure systems.

The trend for the decade of 2000 clearly highlights that, instead of 5 to 6 lows, the occurrence of lows has doubled. Since the said period of 2007, there have been at least 14 events in each successive year. This year alone, 15 such events have disturbed coastal people's lives, and yet another is brewing in the Bay.

Coastal fishing is no longer the same for the fishermen. Their sense of security has been shattered, their lives are at risk. They can no longer exercise the right to life and right to safe livelihood. The widows are living in unacceptable conditions, and their children can no longer exercise their right to education or a healthy family life.

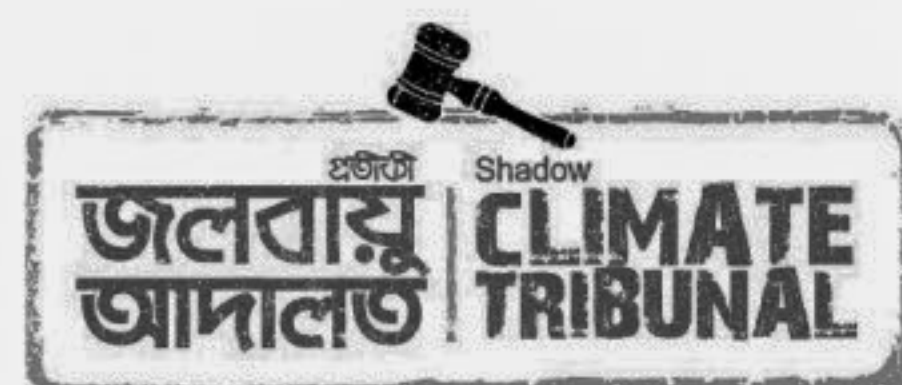
Those who survived such rough sea events are heavily in debt and living like fugitives. The rights of all these people have been violated already, which has triggered migration from the coastal areas.

Had it not been due to climate change, had it not been due to reckless emissions from the "self identified" culprits in Annex-1 of the UNFCCC, the frequency of such lows and depressions would not have been so great.

The plight of all these people should not be seen as a mere accident. It is not business as usual. The cause effect relationship is known. The responsible parties must keep their promise and assist these people. Those who have lost their lives cannot be contacted any more. However, many more will simply perish in the near future if corrective measures are not considered now. The government of Bangladesh must raise this issues in international forums and demand justice.

Dr. Ahsan Uddin Ahmed is a Panel Member of IPCC and Convener of the Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSR). Sharmind Neelormi teaches Economics at Jahangir Nagar University, she also is a Steering Committee Member of the CSR.

Dr. Ahsan Uddin Ahmed is a Panel Member of IPCC and Convener of the Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSR). Sharmind Neelormi teaches Economics at Jahangir Nagar University, she also is a Steering Committee Member of the CSR.



Increasing numbers of low pressure systems means that for an increasing number of days per annum the sea will be rough along with high tides -- which will not allow fishermen to go for fishing. In simple terms, poor fishermen will have fewer active days, less catch per annum, and perhaps less income.

In the coastal zone of Bangladesh, the estimated number of households depending on fisheries-based livelihoods ranges between 140,000 and 160,000. A fishing trip generally takes about 12-14 days (sometimes less for those who catch estuarine fish), particularly for the fishermen living in the Southeastern parts of the country.

Each fishing group generally borrows cash from money-lenders (locally known as mahajans) at very high interest rates and purchases fuel and other commodities to cover the entire fishing trip. The preparation prior to a trip takes a few days and requires healthy investments (food for the group, fuel for the return trip, nets and other equipments).

Disasters prevailing in Bangladesh, people must come to shore and take shelter if signal number three (3) or above is issued following occurrence of a low-pressure system. Following the issuance of such warnings/signals, fishermen along the coastal region are required to come back to the shore. If such events/episodes occur once in a while, which was the general case, fishermen could stop fishing and safeguard their lives and assets.

With the increased frequency of such episodes, the time between two successive events has lessened so much that fishermen cannot complete a trip, and their investment is wasted. Instead of making a profit, they incur loss and remain indebted, which creates a sense of desperation amongst them.

Repeated and frequent episodes of rough sea events have devastated the lives of coastal fishermen. Many boats have capsized, many fishermen have drowned and lost their lives. There have been newspaper reports that thousands of Bangladeshi fishermen were saved by the coast guards of neighbouring countries and put in jail because they did not have proper documentation.

Coastal fishing is no longer the same for the fishermen. Their sense of security has been shattered, their lives are at risk. They can no longer exercise the right to life and right to safe livelihood. The widows are living in unacceptable conditions, and their children can no longer exercise their right to education or a healthy family life.

Those who survived such rough sea events are heavily in debt and living like fugitives. The rights of all these people have been violated already, which has triggered migration from the coastal areas.

Had it not been due to climate change, had it not been due to reckless emissions from the "self identified" culprits in Annex-1 of the UNFCCC, the frequency of such lows and depressions would not have been so great.

The plight of all these people should not be seen as a mere accident. It is not business as usual. The cause effect relationship is known. The responsible parties must keep their promise and assist these people. Those who have lost their lives cannot be contacted any more. However, many more will simply perish in the near future if corrective measures are not considered now. The government of Bangladesh must raise this issues in international forums and demand justice.

Dr. Ahsan Uddin Ahmed is a Panel Member of IPCC and Convener of the Campaign for Sustainable Rural Livelihoods (CSR). Sharmind Neelormi teaches Economics at Jahangir Nagar University, she also is a Steering Committee Member of the CSR.

# Think hard and think seriously

It is time that we too start taking "active" interest in the affairs of the government and the state. We should put our acts together, rising above all partisan interests. We should make our voices of concern and dissent heard by appropriate authorities.

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

WOULD you prefer to have three square meals a day now or wait for a sumptuous meal not knowing when?

Would you rather see the raping of, and suicides by, young girls to continue or let your children go out of the house to schools and colleges or elsewhere?

Would you rather see our RMG industries get destroyed, or put an end to blaming some imaginary external forces for the growing unrest and violent protest marches by workers and resolve the debacle once for all?

Would you like to raise a storm of hopes and aspirations of cooperative efforts and promises to do anything and everything under the sun for the people of the region instead of making a beginning by opening up of free flow of citizens between the Saarc countries through easing of visa regulations etc?

Would you like to see the government continue nurturing its volatile student wing's mayhem of vandalising the sacred premises of our educational institutions, snatching of tender boxes, raping of women or rather dismantle the outfit outright?

Would you rather lose Tk.7,000 crore due to contracting of some power agencies without going through the regular process of tendering or take the time needed and follow the due process of tendering?

Would you like to see the continuing onslaught on the media on the slightest pretences to grow or put an end to it before the expanse becomes too wide?

Would you rather see your children be with you in the country and not "escape" to some other promised land instead of putting an end to this devastated state of our law and order situation?

What would you prefer -- the country to be full of honest matriculates and graduates rather than a bunch of morally bankrupt so-called intellectuals?

These and many more are taking a toll of our already overburdened minds. Difficult questions to answer but not so difficult that we should simply keep silent and do nothing about them. It is time that we too start taking "active" interest in the affairs of the government and the state. We should put our acts together, rising above all partisan interests. We should make our voices of concern and dissent heard by appropriate authorities.

We simply cannot continue to bask in our past glories and



legacies. We must act as patriots more than just playing politics. We must come out of this mad consumerist culture of the West. We must come out of this senseless race for acquisition of money and riches. We must inculcate the spirit of living frugally through honest earnings.

We must not hold briefs for individuals who are dishonest and whose activities may put the country's good name at stake. We should resist in no uncertain terms the acts of rapists and violators of women's honour and dignity, no matter what.

We must prevail upon the judiciary and the judges to refrain from indulging in selective justice. Justice must be even-handed, as much for a beggar on the street up to a billionaire or the mighty and the powerful.

Let us not be fooled by our rulers' high propaganda exercises. Let us be truthful and honest and demand the same from others.

As I said before also, I have never been in politics, neither do I intend to be. Yet, the fact remains that no state, democratic or otherwise, can be governed without involving politics and politicians. The truth, however, remains that we do have a hand in their making for good or for worse.

We the people, therefore, must rise to the occasion and choose our leaders after due process of enquiry into their antecedents -- including track record of their moral and ethical calling and professional acumen. Let us face it; we have been deceived too many times and too often. Let us remember that we the people are the owners of the state and not any of the political parties. They are mere custodians on our behalf for limited durations.

Resorting to lies has reached an unprecedented level, starting from the state level to the ordinary man on the street. This is indeed eating through the vitals of the nation's moral content. We the people must put all our efforts in bringing about a reversal of the debilitating culture.

Our salvation lies in sticking to our individual vocations and professions. A cobbler must not try to be a plumber, a historian should restrict himself to learning history and not surgery, a student should engage himself full time in studies, and a rickshawpuller must not be entrusted to drive a limousine.

The question that has been vexing my mind for years, most of all at this point of time, is this; have we played our due role in nation building activities?

Shamsher Chowdhury is a columnist for The Daily Star.



effects will challenge the development thrust.

There are reasons to believe that the low-lying deltaic country will face major changes in her hydro-geophysical aspects, which will increase the extent as well as frequency of floods, droughts, cyclones and wave interactions, salinity ingress, water logging, etc. This will adversely affect crop production, infrastructure, people's health and livelihoods, and inflict poverty on many households.

People's basic human rights, especially that of the poor people, will be violated despite the fact that their contribution to the overall sin of emitting greenhouse gases (GHG) is amongst the least in the world.

Bangladesh has been vocal internationally against such inequitable consequences of climate change. We would like to see that the cause of the "wicked problem" -- GHG emissions, primarily in advanced economies -- is addressed quickly so that our poor people do not have to deal with such consequences. We would also like to see that international assistance for their immediate as well as future adaptation requirements is committed and mobilised soon.

People are, arguably, already suffering due

ship.

Those countries which have been included in Annex-1 of UNFCCC and have accepted the responsibility to promote and facilitate response measures, including adaptation in LDC and most vulnerable countries (MVC), often used this uncertainty issue to waste time.

Apparent, unless a victim country can explain (beyond doubt) how much of a given flood (for example) is caused by "additional rainfall" induced by climate change, it may not plead for its due share of international support to reduce vulnerability. Adaptation support has been pledged and mobilised, but not as "duty bound" as dictated by the UNFCCC. A logical Convention-bound action has now become an arbitrary gesture of pure humanitarianism!

This has placed Bangladesh in a difficult situation. Cyclones are known along the coastal zone. How many people died during Sidr (November 15, 2007) due to climate variability (i.e., usual cyclonic event) and how many due to climate induced component of the cyclone? Apparently, if we cannot find an answer to this vital question, the word com-

occurrence of about 5 to 6 low pressure systems, a few turning into depression/deep depressions and even cyclones in the Northern Indian Ocean (Bay of Bengal).

That has been the usual case. From satellite data, it is found that sea surface temperature (SST) in the Bay of Bengal (BoB) has been showing a persisting rising trend for both monsoon and post-monsoon seasons over the past four decades. Certainly, it has led to further accumulation of heat energy in the ocean system in the Bay.

Since the SST is now higher than usual (about 0.5°C higher than the average observed five decades ago), enhanced by climate change induced warming, a few days of sunshine now generates enough energy to cross the threshold for producing low pressure systems.

The trend for the decade of 2000 clearly highlights that, instead of 5 to 6 lows, the occurrence of lows has doubled. Since the said period of 2007, there have been at least 14 events in each successive year. This year alone, 15 such events have disturbed coastal people's lives, and yet another is brewing in the Bay.

# Lock-picker's change of heart



master housebreaker who served four years in jail now goes round to victims' homes to install high-tech door locks.

Yang Guihua, 29, of China, invented a fingerprint recognition lock. "It makes me feel a bit better to help these people make their homes more secure," he told the *Chongqing Evening Post*, in a story posted on the internet.

I love heartwarming stories of people who turn their lives around, so mentioned this in the noodle shop at lunchtime. "Yeah, and

every single lock is pre-programmed to open with his fingerprints too," said a guy slurping *laksa*. The other diners laughed and nodded.

Aiyeeaa. Honestly, the level of cynicism in modern society is shocking. Mr. Yang's change of heart should be celebrated, not greeted with suspicion.

Mind you, on the way home I was thinking about this, and I admit that lock-pickers are a tricky bunch.

I once reported on a guy nicknamed Mr. Walk-Through-Walls because no barrier could stop him. Police in Tokyo eventually caught him. They locked him into a cell and went off for tea. Within 15 minutes he had opened the jail doors and strolled off.

I wonder what the Tokyo police would do if they caught a master counterfeiter of bank notes? Hit him with a large fine, which he could then pay in cash with notes still warm from the printer?

Mr. Yang's fingerprint lock may be needed in Australia. An airline union spokesman in that country said last week that terrorists

could get through locked cockpit doors on some aircraft using only the tiny wooden sticks from the middle of ice-llollies.

Uh-oh. You know what this means, don't you? New questions will have to be added to the list they ask you at airports.

- Do you have an ice-olly stick inserted anywhere upon your person?
- Could anyone have inserted an ice-olly stick into your luggage or your person without your knowledge?

The right answer, of course, is to say: "If someone inserted something into my luggage or my person without my knowledge, how would I know?"

Incidentally, my son's fingerprint-based identity card never works. It rejects him because his finger is fractionally bigger every time. Clearly, programmers didn't realise children have a strange and bizarre habit called "growing."

Anyway, with lock-pickers in the news, I rechecked the thief-turned-lock-installer story

on the internet. Lo and behold, a furious comment had appeared under the report in angry capital letters. A former jailbird named Gray again wrote: "This guy has nicked my idea. I invented this whilst doing HM time. All I have to do now is just walk into my victims' homes. They don't even know that I have visited them. I only take small items now. Things like jewelry and money."

So much for honor among thieves. Regular readers may recall the UK gang I wrote about last year. They stole vast amounts of goods from Mayfair, the posh bit of London. But before they could sell it, another gang of thieves stole it from them. You can't trust anyone these days.

PS: Am writing this from Europe. Have arrived in Germany. Went to bed at 5am (body clock time). Woke up at 2.30 am on the same night (their time). I hate jetlag.

Anyway, how cynical are you? Do you think Yang is a reformed man or a sneaky one?

For more visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com