

CLIMATE-INDUCED DISASTERS

Meeting the challenges

BITTER TRUTH



ASADULLAH KHAN

GLOBAL warming is now a grim reality. There is hot air aplenty, mostly because of global warming, caused by the galloping increase in carbon emissions by uncaring nations, that has severely disrupted weather patterns across the world. As the World Environment Day gets under way on June 5, the world appears no better a place than it was at Rio in 1992.

A study report revealed by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the top UN scientific authority on Climate Change asserts that by 2050 as many as 150 million "environmental refugees" may have fled coastlines vulnerable to rising sea levels, storms and floods. In our region, a sixth of Bangladesh could be permanently lost by sea level rise and land subsidence.

Global warming will add to earth's worrisome water problems. Already around 1.4 billion people live in water stressed areas, a term defined as having less than 1000 cubic metres (35000 cubic feet) of water per person per year. The world's supply of clean water already threatened by growing levels of pollution is growing so scarce that in some areas accentuated by climate change in consequence of global warming, two-thirds of humanity will suffer severe water stress within 30 years, says a UN report. The growing scarcity of water as we have witnessed in recent time in different parts of Bangladesh is also hampering the expansion of agricultural production at a time when demand for food is rising with a steady population growth.

The south-western part of Bangladesh now bears the brunt of the ravages of climate change in almost unimaginable proportions. Cyclone Aila hit the south western part of the country on May 25, 2009 just one and a half



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year after cyclone Sidr hit Bangladesh. And now in May 2013, Cyclone Mohasen hit the coastal belts around greater Barisal again damaging standing crops, uprooting trees, vegetation and households, of course, this time with minimum loss of human lives because of massive evacuation effort undertaken. The inundation caused by the tidal surge put vast areas of Bhola, Patuakhali, Borguna and Mongla under saline water, forcing people to live under oppressive situation without food, shelter and drinkable water. The frequency of disasters in the coastal belts of Bangladesh suggests that mere adaptation or mitigation is not the solution, rather prevention of the

damage through reconstruction of the breached embankments and building levees and dikes along the coastal belts that can withstand the fury of nature such as storm surge is the answer. Even after 3 years of the Aila and Sidr disaster, water in the ponds of the coastal villages of Satkhira, Bagerhat and Khulna is highly saline and not drinkable as the ponds that got submerged in saline water during the onrush of storm surge could not be flushed back with sweet water till now.

How would our people respond if the oceans were to rise 6 to 9 ft that coastal people are experiencing these days? One option would be to construct levees and dikes along

the coastal belt and industrialised countries must come up with fund, expertise and equipment to alleviate the distress of the suffering people here, because poor Bangladeshis are paying a heavy price for their actions. The Netherlands, after all, has flourished more than 12 ft below sea level for hundreds of years. Its newest bulwark is a 5.6 mile dam made up of 131 ft. steel locks that remain open during normal conditions to preserve the tidal flow that feeds the rich local sea life, but can be closed when rough weather threatens. Since 1200 people have built dikes there to reclaim land from the sea. More than 2500 sq miles of The Netherlands is reclaimed land. The ancient Egyptians built levees for more than 600 miles along the Nile river. One of the largest modern systems of levees runs along the Mississippi river in the US. These levees extend from southern Missouri to the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of about 1000 miles. The proposed W.B. assistance of \$1.2b as reported in *The Daily Star* on May 28 for three projects with allocation of \$400m for coastal embankments, if implemented this time properly, might go a long way in alleviating the profound distress of the coastal populations battered by cyclones and storm surge.

There are things that people and governments in different countries can do if the well runs dry or the water turns saline. The most formidable problem that Sidr, Aila and Mohasen affected people in the coastal region of Bangladesh are facing after the disaster is the scarcity of drinkable water. The Climate Trustee Board could have invested a part of this fund towards redressing the drinking water problem in the coastal belt. People are not inclined to believe that any part of this fund is being utilised otherwise as reported in a section of the press. Several states in India such as Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan located near the sea have built desalinisation plants. Tamil Nadu, at the moment has 45 such plants. Shockingly, we couldn't have one such plant in these vulnerable zone till now, even though the region continues to be battered by the fury of nature with such alarming frequency!

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Boycott is not a solution

RIPAN KUMAR BISWAS

100-percent-cotton summer shorts. Made in Bangladesh. During the last Memorial Day weekend at JCPenney Departmental store of Manhattan mall, Six Avenue, Manhattan, New York, me and my colleague Anthony Giangos noticed that around ten people had bought those shorts within half an hour. "Bangladeshi garments are nothing short of sumptuous but have unique luster and captivating look," Anthony said delightfully. He further added "how come this big giants like Disney forget their corporate social responsibilities!"

The Walt Disney Company is the first brand, which has declared to stop production of its branded merchandise in Bangladesh, in response to the devastating collapse of a factory building in last April that left more than 1130 people dead and thousands critically injured. Disney added that the decision was made before last April's collapse of the factory building and was based on a report from the World Bank that assesses how countries are governed, using metrics like accountability, and corruption and violence etc. The company also halted production in four other countries: Ecuador, Venezuela, Belarus and Pakistan, by April 2014.

While Disney has reassured that the company will consider permitting production in Bangladesh in the future if factories agree to partner with the Better Work program, but Disney isn't the only company snapping into action after the latest tragedy. The European Union, which gives preferential access to Bangladeshi garments, had threatened punitive measures if the country would fail to improve its worker safety standards.

We become speechless when we witness the stench of frequent unexpected death in many garments factories in Bangladesh. True, when we see the pictures of the Rana Plaza wreckage, it's very easy to imagine a backdrop of stagnation, complacency and despair in which nothing ever changes, no matter how awful the tragedy is or was. Understandable when buyer companies face harshest words from critics, international bodies, human rights groups, or even from their customers, but is it a solution to stop sourcing apparels from the country altogether?

Among \$578 billion value of apparel and garments business worldwide, Bangladesh is the third largest exporter of garments in the world to the US, following China and Vietnam, and a large exporter to Europe. There are 5,000 factories in the country and 4 million garment workers. On an average, Bangladesh exports \$20 billion of garments each year. Eighty percent of Bangladeshi exports are ready made garments. Total exports in the first three quarters of Bangladesh's July-June financial year were \$19.70 billion, compared with \$17.89 billion over the same period the previous year. Garment exports totaled \$17.31 billion for the 10 months that ended in April, 11.5 percent more than a

year earlier. In 2012 the textile industry accounted for 45% of all industrial employment in the country.

Bangladesh is heavily reliant on garment exports and 90 percent of all export earnings are coming from this one sector. For women, it often represents the best opportunity to work outside the home. According to a World Bank study released in 2008, women in Bangladesh are more employed

life expectancy are improving. The present mortality rate of 4.6 percent was used to be far worse in 20 years ago, which was 12 percent.

If the goal is to help Bangladeshi workers, then not buying from Bangladesh would be a terrible strategy. Of course, one then has to think carefully about what (alternative) strategies would enable workers to gain better protection.



Although a combined strategy and initiative should be taken by importers, factory owners, the Bangladeshi government, and the garments manufacturing association, but does the Bangladeshi government feel its legal obligations and responsibilities towards its people?

in the garment industries compare to any other countries. Companies have benefited from the cheap labor offered by women -- who tend to work for less than men.

Relying on this garment sectors, Bangladesh has been a development success story. High poverty rate is falling fast. Country is making rapid improvements in nutrition, health, education and women's employment. Literacy and

Nobel laureate and pioneer of micro credit Dr. Muhammad Yunus says "there is no sense" in foreign firms "leaving a country which has benefited a great deal from their business."

Boycotts do nothing to challenge the implied market-consumer relationship. By not considering capitalism as a system it fails to understand why factories are built cheaply

and why workers are paid the lowest wages in the world. It is not simply because they are evil. It is because the system requires as much in order for companies to operate especially as markets become saturated and profit begins to fall.

Like Professor Yunus, Pope Francis of Vatican City added to pressure for change in his toughest remarks on workers' rights, an indication he planned to make social justice a plank of his pontificate. "Living on 38 Euros (\$50) a month - that was the pay of these people who died. That is called slave labor," Francis said.

As of May 17, 2013 in response to the Rana Plaza tragedy, more than 30 of the world's leading apparel companies -- including Benetton, PVH, Abercrombie & Fitch, H&M, Inditex (Zara), Marks & Spencer and Tesco, signed an agreement to protect the safety and lives of that Bangladeshi workers, who make the companies' products. The signatory firms have made a legally binding five-year commitment to establish a monitoring regime in which workers and their unions will participate, and to pay enough money into the system to fix the problems it uncovers. While Gap -- the world's third-largest apparel company -- has refused to join, citing concerns about liability related to the agreement's provision for legal enforcement through arbitration, Wal-Mart announced that they would conduct its own initiative.

In addition, the British retailer Primark said it would compensate victims who worked for its supplier, by providing long-term aid for children who lost parents, financial aid for those injured and payments to families of the deceased. Companies like J.C. Penney, Benetton, and Sears -- all of which source clothes from Bangladesh -- have reaffirmed their support for worker safety and monitoring conditions in the country.

Although a combined strategy and initiative should be taken by importers, factory owners, the Bangladeshi government, and the garments manufacturing association, but does the Bangladeshi government feel its legal obligations and responsibilities towards its people? While improvements in wages, working conditions and building standards -- all of which Bangladesh can afford and can change the life of millions of people, but working conditions in the \$20 billion industry are grim, a result of government corruption, desperation for jobs, industry indifference, and not taking legal actions against those who are responsible for wrongdoings. According to research by the advocacy group International Labor Rights Forum, at least 1,800 garment workers have been killed in factory fires and building collapses in Bangladesh since 2005.

Millions of workers in Bangladesh put their lives and limbs on the line every day on the factory floors to serve the world community. Something tangible should be done so that we don't need to count any more loss of life.

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ACROSS

1 Zinger

5 Nuisance

9 Oprah's network

12 Chills and fever

13 Viscous

14 Dove's calf

15 Short musical works

17 "Hail, Caesar!"

18 Yule quaff

19 Fairy tale villain

21 Chic

22 Island perch

24 Formerly

27 Ever-green type

28 Break suddenly

31 Tasseled topper

32 Lobe locale

33 Gonia

34 Dread

36 Attempt

37 Car sticker no.

38 Batman's pal

40 Proceed

41 Dishes

43 Commercial song

47 Scoot

48 Varieties of wheat

51 Carte lead-in

52 Handle

53 Point

54 Clear the tables

55 Stitches

56 Wan

DOWN

1 Foundation

2 Enthusiastic

3 Ladder step

4 Cap with a propeller

5 Bluetooth

6 A billion years

7 Hot tub

8 Mike of the ring

9 Simple wind instrument

10 Used a loom

11 Vetero's votes

16 Heavy weight

20 Petrol

22 Mernaize

23 Distorted

24 Vacationing

25 Born

26 Ivan's and Peter's wives

27 Bigfoot's cousin

29 Spring mo.

30 Vigor

35 Director Howard

37 "Friends" role

38 Soaks up some rays

40 Hodges of baseball lore

41 Seafood

42 Streamline

43 Apple co. founder

44 Witbees

45 Whip

46 Catch sight of

49 Away from WSW

50 Do some lawn work

Solution time: 25 mins.

Yesterday's answer 4-25

CRYPTOQUIP

Z KZLMZAT PQZL IMTSA

NSGP BE PQT QBLNZPSM

IDP ZP OZMM LBEEZUT, EBG

MSUA BE S ITPPTGOSGX.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I'M NOT EXACTLY A DEPENDABLE BOXER. EACH TIME I START A FIGHT, I USUALLY END UP FEINTING.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: P equals T

BEETLE BAILY

by Mort Walker

HENRY

by Don Trachte

QUOTABLE Quotes

"A fool's heart is on the tip of his tongue and a wise man's tongue is in his heart."

Ali (ra)