

Living within planetary boundaries



THIS year, New York City had the coldest winter in decades. The US National Weather Service informed that in February 2015 the average temperature was 24.1 degrees Fahrenheit, which is the highest in 80 years. In February 1934, NYC felt a temperature of 19.9 degrees. After the arctic weather, as the thermometer rises the city has already started to feel the flavour of the spring. So much so that some have even brought out their summer clothes enthusiastically though the possibility of fresh snow in March is not ruled out yet. But summer has its own pitfalls. True, people cannot wait for the blooming trees and sunny beaches. However, scorching and prolonged heat in recent years has also dried the soil, brought drought and killed corn and soybean crops in some parts of the country. Outbreaks of several tornados and disasters such as Superstorm Sandy are manifestations of the oppressiveness of extreme weather events that pose long-term risks to the country.

or the other. Drought in Brazil, flooding in China, heat waves in Australia and cyclones in Bangladesh—are all human caused natural disasters that threaten the development efforts of these countries. Some are paying for their own misdeeds of reckless growth while others are simply the victims of that process. But humanity does not know how and where to stop. The invention of the steam engine in the seventeenth century propelled the transportation system. This was a moment of transformation in human history. Technology played an important role during the industrial revolution, which is considered to be an unprecedented juncture of humanity. Looking at present day transportation and industrialisation patterns one wonders how technological and economic progress has also created some of the worst encumbrances in human civilisation. Within less than three centuries, global carbon dioxide concentration has increased so

development path. Growth which is based on fossil fuel and natural resources is not sustainable. Therefore, international agreements must be reached for reducing emissions by 25% to 40% by 2020 to have a chance to avoid catastrophic climate change. These pledges have to be compounded with strong legal framework and public finance.

In November last year, the biggest emitter China pledged to cap its carbon emission by 2030 or even earlier while the second largest emitter the USA has committed to bring its emission by 26%-28% below 2005 level by 2025. Both of these commitments are huge in terms of breadth and difficult in terms of implementation. China will have to do massive investment on clean energies including nuclear, wind, solar and other zero-emission generating capacity. For the USA, it will require the country to double its effort towards reducing carbon emission during 2020 - 2025 from that of 2005 to 2020. India is yet to make any commitments, but emphasised on the adoption of energy efficient measures and investment in renewable energy. The EU has pledged an emission reduction of 40% by 2030.

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rapidly that by the middle of this century it will be doubled compared to the pre-industrial period.

Undeniably, there has been diffusion of economic growth. So has been carbon emission. Even if emission of greenhouse gases is totally stopped at this very moment the average temperature will continue to rise because of the past emission pattern. Most of this emission is done by developed and developing countries. Only three countries, such as China, the USA and India, are responsible for an astonishing 44% of all greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, a least developed country but one of the worst impacted countries, Bangladesh emits only 0.14% of total global emission.

Scientists say that humanity is leaving the safe operating conditions of the planet. If the planetary boundaries are exceeded the existence of humanity will be in real danger. Economists have suggested a sustainable

But global negotiations aimed at slowing the emission level have yielded little progress so far. Climate negotiations have always been chaotic and fraught with disagreements. The adoption of a climate agreement has proved to be elusive since 1992 when the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was established. Major milestones of climate negotiations were closed without any outcome. Kyoto Protocol was stillborn and the Copenhagen climate convention was a debacle. Now if the Paris climate conference in December fails to adopt an agreement no one will believe this process anymore.

As I sign off this column an encouraging news item in the New York Times struck my attention. According to the International Energy Agency, carbon dioxide emissions from global energy producers have not increased during 2013-2014 even though there was economic growth. Critics have noted that this does not tell much since one has to look at the long-term trend of emissions rather than just one year. To me it carries a lot of significance and proves that appropriate technology based on renewable energy is the solution to the problem of climate change. This of course, will gain a moral boost if an agreement is reached in Paris towards low carbon emissions.

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Salahuddin untraceable!!

Shouldn't the government account for it?

FIVE separate reports, as a response to the High Court's directive, were submitted to the attorney general's office yesterday by the law enforcing agencies stating that none of them has arrested the BNP leader Salahuddin Ahmed.

The disappearance of a well known political figure is deeply disturbing. According to his family, some plainclothes men showing Detective Branch ID cards picked up Salahuddin from a house in Uttara on the night of March 10. If the police had not picked him up, then are we to believe that there is a well organised group in the city posing as DB men capable of carrying out such an operation with impunity? In that case it is a serious breach of our internal security, something that should have triggered an immediate and massive response of the police, which we did not see happen. Not only that, the local police even refused to register a missing person's case which Salahuddin's wife wanted to register. This has raised a question mark on the veracity of the police statements.

Feigning ignorance by the government of such a big matter will not wash with the public. Similar denial was made in the case of Manna who was eventually found in Rab custody after 17 hours. This is not the way that the legal system should work under law. A prominent political figure has gone missing and the responsibility of the police cannot end with their denial of having to do anything with his arrest. A vigorous operation must be launched immediately to trace out Salahuddin.

Antenna high on swine flu

Raise preparedness level

WITHOUT being alarmist, one can quite see a risk perception growing in Bangladesh about swine flu. Naturally, because the deadly H1N1 virus afflicted 27,234 people in neighbouring India, of whom 1,537 died as of March 10. Furthermore, in the adjoining West Bengal state, the number of infected was 274 whilst death toll stood at 18. Although the big gap between the number of people infected and those dying is indicative of a certain containment strategy at work; still the spread of virus in our immediate neighbourhood is concerning for us.

Accordingly, the Directorate General of Health Services here is bracing up for the task. Some 3,000 frontline health workers are going to be vaccinated. So will be the physicians, nurses or health assistants posted at the 27 international ports (air, land and sea), isolation wards of district hospitals and the Institute of Epidemiology labs. Immunity of those handling potential, suspected or afflicted patients will have to be ensured in the first place. However, in the process, other preventative, and particularly the curative measures to tackle the malady should not be relegated. These include strengthening health screening of passengers from India and keeping essential drugs and vaccines at the ready.

Basically, a massive awareness-building campaign has to be launched to sensitise the people about the do's and don'ts to steer clear of the deadly affliction.

There may be an issue of mutations of the virus, an eventuality scientists must be prepared to face with the discovery of new antidotes.

This also reminds us of the consequence of climate change, a situation which occurs through human activities such as burning of fossil fuels and destruction of forests. We burn primary energy such as coal, oil and natural gas for driving our cars, heating or cooling our buildings, generating electricity, manufacturing products and so on. This produces carbon dioxide, a major component of the greenhouse gas. We have been cautioned by scientists time and again about the increased global average surface temperature due to human induced carbon emissions into the atmosphere.

Future risks of climate change over the next few decades and in the second half of the 21st century and beyond, outlined by the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, look daunting and depressing. Some of these impacts would include risk of death, injury, ill-health, disrupted livelihoods, coastal flooding and sea level rise. This will also result in breakdown of infrastructure networks and critical services such as electricity, water supply, health and emergency services. We will face the risk of mortality and morbidity, risk of food insecurity and the breakdown of food systems, drought, flooding and precipitation. Countries spread over Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, Australia and Antarctica will feel the steam of extreme climate situation in one way

When will it all end?



ANY direction you cast your gaze you encounter violence in myriad forms; situated in racial, religious, ethnic, or class conflict zones. Intolerance is perhaps the underlying motivation of our times. Indeed, to

moment's blur. A hand shapes an arc in the air, a projectile neatly lands with practiced motions, blast, smoke fire, and then annihilation. Finally, the number is erased from memory; it will balance out in the number of births and deaths in the next census. Next please.

And then, one Avijit Roy is murdered, hacked to death in full public view, the circle of violence complete. Perhaps this marked the finale of this season. And some perhaps thought that the good people of Bangladesh would rise against this very obvious attack on intellectual freedom, this attack on free speech, and free thought. But, no, someone came, read the script, and underlined the word violence, and wrote 'stet.' Let it stand. Let it continue. That was expecting too much, perhaps.

Being away from Bangladesh has its advantages. One can be nostalgically delusional. At least for a short period of time. One can pretend that the country they left retained the innocence that it had when they had left for foreign shores. Maybe that's what Avijit Roy thought, too? But Bangladesh is no longer a new nation. The freshly minted hope of post '71 euphoria has died, not a quiet death, but a violent one. We have again and again hacked, just like Avijit was, at the idea of the nation we had birthed. Now, the nation lies sprawled, bleeding, whimpering, in full public view. We are all watching, we are bystanders. No one is moving. No one is stepping forward to take the broken nation—its harsh, shallow breath grating against their ears—to lift it up, cure, tend, and resurrect it back to its full glory. Our narrow agendas are too narrow for empathy. All we have are fierce words, hate speeches, threats, and violence, violence, violence.

The wrong kinds of powers are in the wrong hands. Opposing voices are being silenced, not engaged with. No one cares for a debate or a discussion (unless it's on TV). So we have found a better way to deal with it. Silencing the voice. Take the head out and the headache will disappear kind of remedy.

What is most disturbing is that people have been taught to stop thinking, and in doing so they have relinquished their power of thought to others, who now think for them. I don't know if this is inevitable. I don't know if people are meant to regress into sheep led by a pack of wolves. Evolutionarily that seems improbable. Humans are supposed to be able to fight for survival. Then why are we only at the receiving end of violence?



Because we are constantly at war. "There is a war between the rich and poor/a war between the man and the woman/There is a war between the left and right/a war between the black and white/a war between the odd and the even/Why don't you come on back to the war, pick up your tiny burden/why don't you come on back to the war, let's all get even/why don't you come on back to the war, can't you hear me speaking?" - Leonard Cohen.

These wars must come to an end. But when? That's anyone's guess.

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echo Achebe's novel, things are falling apart. Even though we have all kinds of experts, these days. Just turn on the TV. There's your terrorism expert. And violence expert. And gender expert. Perhaps we need to get rid of that word from the dictionary. What is an expert, who is an expert, anyway? One who knows everything about something, anything? And when does that happen? At what point in their lives do they achieve that god-like power? There is no end to learning. Not even after a zillion degrees and whatever-have-you. We have to be learners for life. You are nothing if you're not curious. You're dead when you stop thinking. Not when you physically die.

A while back I wrote about the bomb hurler, when the first bus was blown up this season. Unfortunately I (and probably many others in Bangladesh) was right: many, many more buses were burnt in the months following that article. Many, many people died in explosions around the country. A huge amount of public and private property was destroyed. All in the name of protests. Using violence to protest defeats the idea of protest; it degenerates into anarchy. We hear that all these protests are in the interest of the people, by representatives of the people. Only that all of this is happening at the expense of the people. Most affected are the ones who have become a number in the census of this country, a nameless, faceless 'jonota' who have nowhere to run, and nowhere to hide. It is them whose families are destroyed in a

COMMENTS

"DB arrests key man behind 'Basherkella'" (March 14, 2015)



TruthnLie

I am an admirer of free speech and media but what I hate is when I see people use this as a medium of spreading propaganda. The war criminals are murderers and deserve capital punishment. I personally think these Shibir-people are mentally handicapped.

"Tigers go down fighting" (March 14, 2015)

Mohammed Y Ahmed

Keep it up, Tigers; you are doing fine, Mahmudullah is in great form and Bangladesh has the potential of upsetting any team in the current World Cup series.

Patrick

Well done and best of luck for the rest of the tournament.

"Cops want legal bar removed" (March 9, 2015)

Akm Fazlul Bari

It is a dangerous proposal by the police. Torture is universally condemned. It is an old colonial practice which causes innocent people to suffer in the hands of police. If the government allows police to torture anyone in their custody, then our country will be nothing but a police state.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Best wishes, Tigers

The Bangladesh cricket team is now playing better than any other time. They have already qualified for the quarter final by defeating three other teams. I hope Bangladesh will qualify for the semi final by defeating India and create another occasion to celebrate that we did when the tigers defeated the English.

Md. Khurshid Alam Palash
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Mob killing and subsequent attacks

I read a recent news report that a mob dragged a rape suspect out of jail, killing him and stringing him up from a clock tower in the north-eastern state of Nagaland, India. Another man was killed in the subsequent police firing. The report has added that Nagaland Chief Minister TR Zeliang said the suspect was a Bangladeshi immigrant. I was shocked to know that the mob killing had been followed by attacks on Bangladeshi-owned businesses. For an individual's crime, one should not attack the others of the same community. People should learn to be more tolerant.
 Tauhid Milton
 Dhaka

West's partial view about Muslims

It always surprises me that nothing good is ever said by the West about Muslims; I never heard anything good in school about the Muslims. I think the only good thing I ever heard about the Muslims was, "Well, we did get our numerical system from them."
 Muslims are often portrayed in western news media as violent, backward, extremists and as a threat to western civilisation. Western news coverage rarely highlights Islam except to show its possible relation to some atrocity, and Muslims are rarely mentioned in the context of news that is positive or benign.
 Other studies show inconsistent coverage of violent global and regional conflicts. When Christians, Jews and other non-Muslims are killed by Muslims, Islam is identified as playing a direct role. When Muslims are killed by Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims, however, the religious identity of the violent perpetrators is downplayed or ignored. How ironic!
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