

The implications of Paris agreement for Bangladesh

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A lot has already been written and stated about the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, but little about how an LDC such as Bangladesh may benefit from it. The general problems of investment under climate change more particularly the country's development prospects and choices have received only limited attention at best. This is important given the apparent limited effectiveness of the Paris Agreement for climate change and the aspiration of the country to be a low middle income country in a few years and a fully developed one by a quarter of century from now. What this aspiration means is that the process of growth needs to be as fast as possible which would have been difficult under climate change anyway but now has become probably more uncertain than before for the limitations of the Paris Agreement.

At present the rate of growth of the economy is more or less 6.5%. This has to be higher in the near future say to around 8% or so for the economy to

not and what still remains to be done. There are short and long run views on these issues and there are also different perspectives from the LDCs, the big developing countries and the developed world. All such views and perspectives differ from one another between groups and more importantly between countries due to national circumstances (read politics) as well as readiness and capacity to take difficult decisions and implement them. Let us make it a bit clearer.

First the views from the side of the detractors of the Agreement. And this has to do with the "failure" to take the bull by the horn, so to speak, of the fundamental task of very substantial and time-bound global reduction in emission of green house gases (GHGs) that is called for to limit the rise in temperature by 2100 well below 2 degrees celsius, not to speak of the "shadowy" target of 1.5 degrees. Despite 20 previous annual meetings of the Conference of Parties (COP) preceding the Paris Climate talks, this eluded the global community because

efforts mentioned in the Paris Agreement is not enough to stem the tide of the continued rise in global temperature. This has been clearly stated in the COP decisions taken along with the Paris Agreement which itself was a part of the COP decision. As pointed out by COP, all the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) which are but no more than promises of countries to cut down the level GHG emission over time, would leave a gap of some 40 gigatons of carbon emission to be reduced over and above the sum of the promises if the desired targets of limiting temperature rise as stated earlier are to materialise.

Worse than this shortfall is the almost open secret that all Parties are complicit in it. Those among the developing countries, particularly the big emitters among them (China, India, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico) who till recently had been frothing in the mouth about "historical responsibility" of developed country parties had dropped the idea which had generally

The last point that should be mentioned is that the Agreement has little by way of any compliance mechanism. Will countries be rapped in the knuckle if they do not keep their own promises? Hardly likely. In any case if one does not have a promise which is mandatory to keep, why bother with a compliance mechanism?

Silver lining in the cloud?
Given the above, the question now is: is everything lost? Will collective human "self delusion" lead Nature to unleash all its fury threatening human civilisation that we know of or are there enough safeguards against such prospects. While some people argue that the Agreement is a shining example of global cooperation, unfortunately this is as good as useless in its present form for averting the dangerous rise in temperature.

Yet, is there no silver lining in the cloud? I believe that there is but this is true only in the short run, at most. In its present form, the Paris Agreement does not guarantee the long run future of the globe. And obviously some

future. But for that to happen, very hard work and consensus building has to start right from Marrakech and not waiting for the review to take place 5 years from now. But of course it is easier said than done particularly for an LDC.

The second plus point is that the part on adaptation seems to be more or less workable. And this is what matters for countries like us at least for the next one decade or so. The minimum floor of financial support has been earmarked at USD 100 billion per year from 2020 onwards.

Areas of intervention and action
First and foremost, there are several immediate things to do, one being the signing of the Agreement if possible next April with Secretary General of UN overlooking the process. Being among the first nations to sign may generate enough of good will for the country. Then possibly the Agreement has to be ratified in the Parliament. All these are matters of form, rather than substance.

The more substantive issue is how may Bangladesh benefit from the Agreement before its LDC status changes which may not allow it to enjoy certain privileges or exemptions under the Convention or the Paris Agreement several years from now. Very crudely speaking, this means that Bangladesh must try all means to get as much funds as possible for adaptation technology development and transfer and capacity-building. It must be noted that every dollar received will be watched for its best utilisation ensuring which means that our accounting and auditing system would have to be of the order of best international practices. Furthermore, the financing will be result-based calling for prompt, transparent actions with social and environmental safeguards in designing and implementing programmes and projects. We have only a few years to put our house in order. Now we move to the most difficult issue.

True, climate change will pose a very big problem some of which is already evident on the ground, particularly for agricultural production and health and hygiene. However, for growth and development one needs a healthy, educated nation with adequate and efficient infrastructure and for better livelihood of people the industrial manufacturing and services must flourish. And unless we invest resources for these objectives, the spurt to growth and ultimately development will remain weak at best. This will mean limited capacity to withstand the adverse impacts of climate change. So shall we, say if we have USD 500 million, invest that in school for children or for redesign a dyke as adaptation to storm surges in the coastal belt? The choice is not easy and the future prospects of Bangladesh lies in what choices it makes. Unfortunately, so far there seems to be little empirical analyses of trades-off in such choice of investment in a developing country context. And here comes the opportunity for Bangladesh as an LDC.

LDCs are expected to have preferential access to finance for adaptation as well as mitigation, capacity-building and technology generation and transfer. If Bangladesh can take the advantage for the next 5-10 years that it may remain an LDC and access funds for much of climate related actions, it may release its domestic resources more for the directly growth-friendly policies or investment. But for this to happen, again I may repeat we have quite a long way to go. I will end this paper with a few words related to mitigation.

There are many in this country who always say that mitigation is not our problem. There are two arguments against it. Despite being a very minor player, any mitigation activity helps as it is the absolute emission which matters to the natural process. Secondly, as Bangladesh develops and becomes a middle income country, it will have to shoulder greater burden of mitigation and may have to invest more for this. It would be only wise to learn to do that, especially while lucrative deals can be till the country remains an LDC.

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PARIS CLIMATE TALKS WORTHWHILE RESULTS OR EXERCISE IN HYPOCRISY?

INFOGRAPHIC: SHAER REAZ

1.5 DEGREES CELSIUS

ALL PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES IN THE PARIS CLIMATE TALKS 2015 PLEDGED TO CAP GLOBAL TEMPERATURE RISE AT 1.5 DEGREES CELSIUS

SINCE 1880, GLOBAL TEMPERATURES HAVE RISEN BY 0.85 DEGREES CELSIUS AND UNCHECKED, GLOBAL TEMPERATURES MAY RISE BY UP TO 4.6 DEGREES CELSIUS, WHICH WOULD BE DISASTROUS.

IN THE 19TH CENTURY, THE CONCENTRATION OF CO2 IN PARTS PER MILLION (PPM) WAS 270. AT PRESENT, IT IS 400.

THE SEA LEVEL WOULD RISE BY 1 METRE IF NOTHING CHANGES, PRESENTING CONSIDERABLE THREAT TO LOW LYING COUNTRIES.

DEVELOPED COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD HAVE PROMISED 100 BILLION DOLLARS IN AID TO THE DEVELOPING WORLD TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE.

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN; OECD; LES AMIS DE L'EUROPE.

THE DOOMSDAY CLOCK, WHICH REPRESENTS HOW CLOSE HUMANITY IS TO EXTINCTION, IS CURRENTLY AT 3 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT DUE TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

196 PARTIES (195 STATES + EU) ATTENDED #COP21

THE PARIS CLIMATE PACT WOULD ONLY HAVE GONE INTO EFFECT IF ALL PARTIES VOTED FOR IT UNANIMOUSLY. THEY DID.

IMPOSSIBLE TARGET OR A SIGN OF DESPERATION?

EMINENT ENVIRONMENTALISTS DO NOT CONSIDER THE PARIS TALKS TO BE MUCH OF A SUCCESS, CALLING THE 1.5 DEGREES CELSIUS CAP "OVER-AMBITIOUS". OTHERS SAY ITS A GOOD SIGN THAT THE TARGET IS NEAR IMPOSSIBLE. BECAUSE IT HIGHLIGHTS HOW IMPOSSIBLE THE SITUATION IS. AN OVERAMBITIOUS TARGET THUS FORCES PARTIES TO ADOPT DRASTIC TACTICS TO MEET IT.

HOW DOES CHINA, ONE OF THE LARGEST CONTRIBUTORS TO WORLDWIDE EMISSIONS, PLAN ON LIVING UP TO THEIR PLEDGE OF REDUCING EMISSIONS BY 65% BY 2030?

- EMISSIONS TRADING
- ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS
- TARGET AND SUBSIDIES FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY
- INVESTMENTS IN NUCLEAR POWER, NATURAL GAS AND CARBON CAPTURE
- LOW CARBON DEVELOPMENT IN INDUSTRY, URBAN SETTLEMENTS AND AGRICULTURE

29.1% SHARE IN GLOBAL CO2 EMISSIONS

SEEMS A BIT VAGUE? IT IS. IN MOST OF THE CASES, THE COUNTRIES' PLEDGES DID NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT AVAILABLE AND FEASIBLE TECHNOLOGIES, SAY EXPERTS.

pick up sufficiently for poverty eradication, generate surplus for investment in agriculture, industry, infrastructure and services as well as for supporting health and education for human skills to be developed as drivers of growth and better quality of life, an increased sense of well-being and desirable development outcomes. To understand what choices Bangladesh may have in near and longer term future, it is necessary to understand what the Paris Agreement is and what it implies for future action.

The French Revolution that was not
The reaction to Paris Agreement has been basically two extremes of euphoria and desperation because of the compromises that has been done. When there is no clear winner or loser, any agreement among nations has to be a compromise. So has been the case with the Paris Agreement. Question is were the compromises those of principles or sheer short-sightedness and cold feet on the part of the Parties as well as what it has really achieved and what

of some time irreconcilable and/or acrimonious differences among nations and groups of nations regarding the responsibility of each and the "fair" share of burden that they should bear. For that matter there was no unanimous view of what constitutes "fare" share.

Yet, many may have hoped that this time there would perhaps be a second "French Revolution". The first French Revolution was a beacon for political freedom from tyranny of a select few while the second one, it was hoped, will become an example of global cooperation freeing the humanity from the life-threatening curse of climate change. Unfortunately, a predominant view is that the "second revolution" did not materialise, at least not for now. And this was because the major players in the game, the developed countries and the big emitters among the developing countries acted as what in Bengali we call gyan papi (committing a sin knowing fully well that they are doing). All Parties knew that the mitigation

been accepted by the developed ones. The developed ones in turn had dropped their demand of reduction of current rate of emission from the large developing country emitters. The marriage of convenience between the two groups may allow both to happily live thereafter, if not forever, at least for the time being. The complicity had gone so far as to even at the last minute under pressure from the USA, a critical sentence in the Paris Agreement had been changed. All throughout the negotiation process, it had been an article of faith that the developed country Parties shall take the lead in absolute reduction of emission. This was retained in the initial final text of the Paris Agreement. However, at the insistence of USA, the word "shall" was replaced with "should" under the fig-leaf explanation by the COP President (i.e. French Foreign Minister) that it was a typing error thus at one stroke making it voluntary rather than mandatory. Only then the USA agreed to support it.

would lose more than others while for some such as the Small Island Developing States it would be a question of physical existence. Only if the review process that has been called for in the Paris Agreement takes place sooner (say by 2018/19) rather than later (2023) and the emission targets are very substantially ratcheted upwards can there be some hope of bringing the process on track.

On the plus side, therefore it must be said that that an agreement has been reached despite question marks over the effectiveness of the promised actions and its legal status (as COP decisions has no legal validity in international law and Paris Agreement has been adopted under a COP decision), is a landmark event. Possibly the spectre of failure as in Copenhagen prompted the French not to leave any stone unturned to make a deal whatever be its form or level of perfection. In any case, while the aim should have been higher which is not so now does not mean that it may not be so in