

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER EARTH DAY

No turning back in the global fight against climate change

MARCIA BERNICAT

As people around the globe observe Earth Day today, world leaders are making history at the United Nations in New York. Over 100 countries will sign the Paris Agreement on climate change, representing their commitment to join it formally. This marks a turning point in the story of our planet and may set a record for the largest number of signers to an international agreement in a single day. Moreover, last month, President Obama announced with President Xi Jinping that our two countries will sign the Paris Agreement today and formally join this year. We are confident other countries will do so too, with the intention of bringing this historic and ambitious agreement into force as quickly as possible.

A greener future is already in sight. Leaders of countries and cities are adapting and innovating away from fossil fuels and business owners are investing in a clean energy economy. The United States is moving forward in its commitment to cut greenhouse gas emissions 26-28 percent from 2005 levels by 2025. We are doing this through the strongest fuel economy standards in our history, through our twenty-fold increase in solar generation since 2009, and through proposed rules on everything from energy conservation standards for appliances to reduction in emissions of methane-rich gas from municipal solid waste landfills.

My home state, New Jersey, has undertaken ambitious programmes tackling climate change and promoting renewable energy. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has introduced the Sustainable Jersey programme to aid cities and towns in going green, saving money, and taking the steps necessary to ensure long-term quality of life. Sustainable Jersey provides guidance and financial incentives in support of the programme. The New Jersey Board of Public



PHOTO: AMBRELEND

Utilities' Clean Energy Programme encourages homeowners, businesses, and municipalities to incorporate clean energy into their lives. The Clean Energy Programme has received the 2016 Sustained Excellence Award from the United States Environmental Protection Agency for 15 years of success in promoting clean energy use.

While we are taking significant climate action domestically, the United States is also focused on international cooperation to address this global challenge. Our \$500 million contribution last month to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) – the first tranche of the \$3 billion U.S. pledge to the GCF – will help developing countries reduce

carbon emissions and prepare for climate impacts, while also advancing our commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals – another major landmark agreement the world came together around last year.

One of the most successful environmental agreements of all time is the Montreal Protocol, which is phasing out ozone depleting substances globally. It set the ozone layer on a path to recovery and prevented tens of millions of cases of skin cancer among other health, environmental, and economic benefits. Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) – which replace many of the ozone-depleting substances – do not harm the ozone

layer, but they are greenhouse gases that in some cases can be thousands of times more potent than carbon dioxide. The United States is working with partners to adopt an HFC phase-down amendment to the Montreal Protocol this year that could avoid half a degree Celsius of warming by the end of the century.

We also need international cooperation to change how we transport ourselves and goods. The aviation sector represents two percent of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions. The International Civil Aviation Organisation is aiming to achieve carbon neutral growth for international aviation by 2020. The United States is committed to reaching an agreement on a global market-based measure that will help move the airline sector toward this ambitious goal.

Bangladesh, located at the confluence of the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna rivers, is uniquely vulnerable to climate change. The 600 kilometre coastal zone faces considerable challenges: flooding, erosion, rising sea levels, and cyclonic storm surges. Bangladesh has risen to this challenge. From the establishment of the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan of 2009 and Climate Change Trust Fund to the continued dedication of over six percent of the annual budget to climate change adaptation, Bangladesh has been on the leading edge of environmental policy. For all of these reasons, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was awarded the United Nations' Champion of the Earth award for Policy Leadership last September.

This Earth Day – with the signing of the Paris Agreement – is truly a cause for hope. It is also a reminder of our shared commitment to combat climate change. We must all seize upon the momentum from Paris to build a clean energy future for ourselves and our children and grandchildren.

The writer is the U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh.

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Tree at my window



AMITAVA KAR

KARTIK Pramanik had an irresistible desire to plant trees since he was ten—enough to turn the char areas of Chapainawabganj, once desolate and barren, into a lush green land. Like Elzeard Bouffier in *The Man Who Planted Trees* by Jean Giono, he was not interested in

whose land it was. All he cared about was that it was dying for want of trees. Water was scarce; he carried pitches of water for miles. This he did with the money he made as a barber. "Trees are life," he says, now 76.

When we consider that all this had sprung from the hands and the soul of just one man, armed only with his physical and moral resources, it reaffirms our faith that men could be as capable in the realm of creation as that of destruction. When I reflect on him, I am taken with an immense respect for humanity that is worthy of God.

I don't know if there has been any study on the impact of Pramanik's effort on the local climate. But this we know: Trees help combat climate change. A large tree can provide a day's supply of oxygen for four people. An acre of trees absorbs enough CO2 in a year to equal the amount produced by a car driven for 26,000 miles. They are natural air conditioners. The evaporation from a single tree can produce the cooling effect of 10 room size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day. There are good reasons why fairs and bazaars in the rural areas are organised under large trees.

Fallen tree leaves can reduce soil temperature and loss of soil moisture. They decrease soil erosion. Decaying leaves enrich the soil. Sound waves are absorbed by leaves and branches. A belt of trees 100 feet wide and 45 feet high can cut down traffic noise by half.

Studies show that patients recover quickly when their hospital room offers a view of trees. Urban vegetation can result in slower heartbeats, lower blood pressure and more relaxed brain wave patterns. Trees create an ecosystem for birds and animals.

Trees can also be assets to count on. I know a poor man in Faridpur—a proud, successful father



PHOTO: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

now—who sent one of his sons to Malaysia, another to Italy and married off his only daughter to a respectable young man. How did he manage to do all this? "By selling the Mahogany trees I grew. The seedlings were a gift from a kind-hearted man," he says with a sense of gratitude.

Trees can do more that cannot be measured. Last year on a summer day, I was in a rickshaw on the Satmasjid Road. The puller looked exhausted as the mercury rose. As usual, the traffic came to a standstill after a while. Lucky for both of us, the rickshaw stopped under a banyan tree. Everything magically changed. Instead of the harsh dry winds that attacked us minutes ago, a gentle breeze was blowing. In the shade, we were not being baked anymore. In an expression of relief, he went, "Ahh..."

It won't be long before we won't have any trees left in this city. We are cutting them down for all kinds of reasons—for building apartments that

resemble cages and shopping complexes that look like prisons. We have created a new urban reality. Sometime trees are felled for "protesting" in the name of political programmes. What does it take to move our conscience?

Tens of thousands of Bhutanese came together last month to welcome their newborn prince not by throwing a big party but by planting 108,000 trees. Have governments in this country been concerned at all by the diminishing forest areas? "We talk about sustainable development. Sustainable for whom? Certainly not for nature. I think it a great paradox of our time. I do not have the answer as to how to break the cycle of production, consumption and pollution," says Dwijen Sharma, environmentalist and writer.

Trees are our friends. Once I learned a good deal about moving through grief from some of them. They were not mine. I lived in an apartment

surrounded by them. I had just lost someone. At times, I experienced numbing grief or 'painful unpleasure' as Freud would call it. At night, I would be tempted to take out the photo album, just to look at a picture, just for a minute, like an addict on the verge of relapsing.

I resisted. During a fierce thunderstorm, I had seen the branches thrashing back and forth, slamming against my window with a thud, and then sliding down slowly before being lifted aloft again. A week later, birds came.

Eventually I found a bigger, cheaper place and decided to move out. I was going to miss the place. I couldn't sleep. The next morning, I found the trees not moving at all; as if they knew I was leaving. I pushed the thought away. I wanted to be as still as them and stayed there until I was.

Surely, one can find peace in being with trees.

The writer is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

I know a poor man in Faridpur—a proud, successful father now—who sent one of his sons to Malaysia, another to Italy and married off his only daughter to a respectable young man. How did he manage to do all this?

QUOTABLEQuote



KAMLA BHASIN

There's no denying patriarchy really harms women, and it provides material benefits to men. But just see the dehumanisation of men in patriarchy. They have no relationship with their emotions; they're not allowed to cry, not allowed to remain gentle. We're born as human beings—we turn them into nasty, masculine, aggressive, dominating men.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

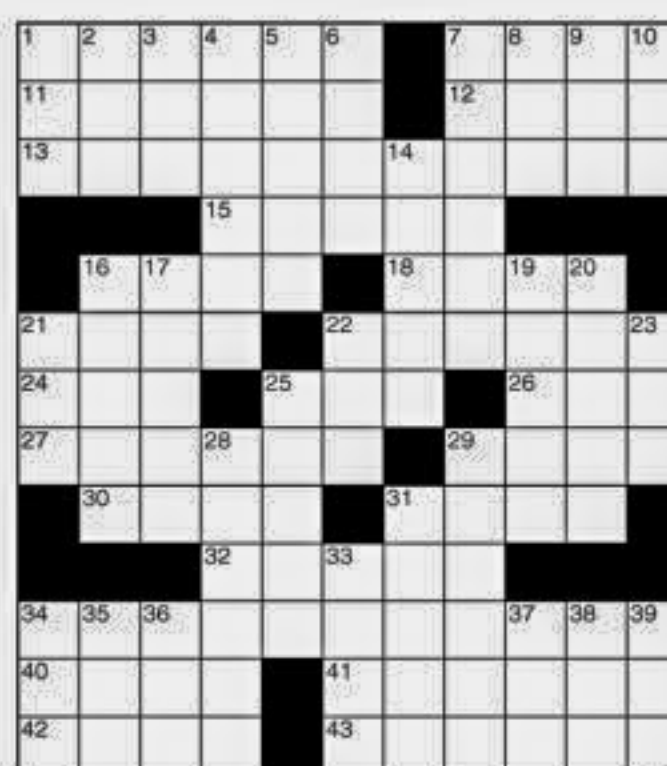
- 1 Tourist stops
- 7 Hay unit
- 11 Zoo resident
- 12 Grace finish
- 13 Red fruits
- 15 Enticed
- 16 Composed
- 18 Tuna sandwich
- 21 Quite a few
- 22 Marshy inlets
- 24 Compass trace
- 25 Cargo unit
- 26 -- tizzy
- 27 Sensitive
- 29 Rowing team
- 30 Coneril's father
- 31 Storage site
- 32 Puccini opera
- 34 Red fruits
- 40 Indonesian island
- 41 Aerie youngster
- 42 Dance move
- 43 Rank

DOWN

- 1 Spoil

2 Stop-- dime

- 3 Frank McCourt book
- 4 Take on
- 5 Record company
- 6 Downhill coaster
- 7 Bush White House dog
- 8 French friend
- 9 Golfer Trevino
- 10 Print measures
- 14 Forum figure
- 16 Yule song
- 17 When expected
- 19 River of France
- 20 Fixed the piano
- 21 Porch sight
- 22 Young fellow
- 23 Carpentry tool
- 25 Pulsate
- 28 Treat for Tabby
- 29 Accusation
- 31 "Beat it!"
- 33 Takes in
- 34 "Survivor" network
- 35 Scoundrel
- 36 Pub order
- 37 Poorly
- 38 Snaky swimmer
- 39 Hog home



BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

