



Te Urewera National Park.

PHOTO: NEWZEALAND.COM

# Mother Nature's right to live

MOYUKH MAHTAB

IN 2008, Ecuador codified the principle of Rights of Nature in its Constitution, recognising that ecosystems have an inalienable right to exist and flourish. "Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes," reads Article 71 of the Constitution. Not only does the Constitution set out in detail the rights of nature, it states that "persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature." Article 72 on the other hand states that "In those cases of severe or permanent environmental impact, including those caused by the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources, the State shall establish the most effective mechanisms to achieve the restoration and shall adopt adequate measures to eliminate or mitigate

harmful environmental consequences." Going a step further, New Zealand has now granted legal personhood to its Te Urewera National Park. In effect, what this means is that now the national park, a verdant forested landscape, possesses the same rights and powers as that of a citizen. Like the Constitution of Ecuador, this legislation gives stronger rights to nature: to protect its rights, cases can be filed on its behalf. The same is true for the Whanganui River. And, as should be, nobody, not even the government can 'own' them. As Pita Sharples, former minister of Maori Affairs put it: "This is a profound alternative to the human presumption of sovereignty over the natural world." As environmental concerns over the world grow, the examples of Ecuador and New Zealand come as a sweet surprise. The balance between consumption and exploitation of nature and its preservation have been strongly on the side of the former, and with passing time the threat of harming biodiversity and disrupting the

ecosystem continues to grow to epic proportions. A recent study by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which involved 1,203 scientists, hundreds of scientific institutions and more than 160 governments, unequivocally stated that already the degradation of natural resources worldwide is outpacing the nature's ability to absorb that damage (Humans damaging the environment faster than it can recover, UN find, *The Guardian*). It goes without saying that the need to act to protect them is crucial, now more than ever. Going back to the case of New Zealand, the legal status was a result of agreements between the government, and the Maori groups over guardianship of the land. The *New York Times* quoted Chris Finlayson, New Zealand's attorney general, as saying: "In their worldview, 'I am the river and the river is me'. Their geographic region is part and parcel of who they are." From years of debate, came the agreement to grant the natural land a legal status.

Now, the concept of legal personhood granted to a national park may seem absurd to many – how could nature assume the rights of a person? But, if corporations, which are profit driven, can be given legal personhood and rights, the question is why should nature and the ecosystem not be given the same rights. They are surely more important for the survival of the species. It's unfortunate that where a few countries are willing to go to such extremes over concerns for their natural environment, Bangladesh today stands on the eve of what might possibly be irreversible damage to the Sundarbans. Surely, no one expects the home of the Bengal Tiger to be granted a legal personhood with rights and dignity any time soon, but can we in good conscience get behind this project, no matter how bountiful be its return in developmental terms?

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

## Can we ever feel safe again?

MEHNAZ ALI

THESE days it does not take much to get panicky. Any loud noise sounds like a bomb blast – it could be a blown out transformer from a crow's misstep, a tire bursting in the middle of the road or just some wedding revellers using firecrackers to celebrate the idea of marital bliss. Similarly, any young man with a backpack makes one nervous, reminding us of that dark, dark July 1 night of horror that haunts us all too often. Which is why when a worried relative calls in the morning to say a building in Gulshan 1 has been surrounded by police as a response to a possible terrorist attack, it is normal to feel jittery. In a matter of a few hours, it is clear that this is not a militant hostage takeover or even a bank robbery, as rumours have it, but an attempt to steal from a showroom. The grand response to the 'incident' includes armoured cars and fire service vehicles being drafted into the cordon and members of police's SWAT team and RAB rushing to the venue. But after three hours of searching, all the security forces find are two backpacks with a large number of mobile phones in them. While some people will snigger at the overzealous response of the police and other security agents, personally I think it's good that they acted fairly fast – even if they couldn't catch anyone. It is better to be over cautious than complacent and clueless. Had we been this vigilant and prompt, perhaps those precious lives lost on July 1 and later on July 6 could have been saved. Other measures taken to apparently make us feel more secure are not completely foolproof. Gulshan at present, resembles a war zone with police check points at several entrances to the area and many of the alleys completely cordoned off. At night, getting out of Gulshan is like being in a crazy maze – every road apart from the main road is closed off with barricades, so the only way to go is to take the main roads, exacerbating an already aggravating gridlock. Many Gulshan dwellers and surrounding areas suffer what they consider daily harassment in terms of the way they are treated by some law enforcers every time they enter their own neighbourhood. But they still put up with the inconveniences in the hope of more security.

The truth is, it is impossible for security personnel to check every single vehicle or person carrying a backpack. While the main entry points have check points, there are side roads that can circumvent them. There are metal detectors at malls but security personnel are not really trained to react when they go off while many women customers get away without even their bags getting checked. Reinforcing the earlier ban on commercial establishments that include restaurants, cafes and shops because of 'security reasons' is also not the answer. Eating out and shopping are the two main entertainment options for most people in this city, and depriving them of this will only add to the misery and unease. It will definitely not bring back our foreign friends. So what is the answer, how can we make ourselves more secure? Certainly a counter terrorism team capable of quick, definite, efficient responses to such situations is certainly a step up in security measures. Those in charge of checking vehicles and people must take their job seriously without resorting to highhandedness. Instead of cordoning off one side of the road, there can be more security personnel to check vehicles on both sides. The 100 CC cameras installed in Gulshan, Baridhara and Niketon areas should be properly maintained. But nothing is as important as developing the intelligence needed to prevent further acts of terror. This includes getting information from ordinary citizens. A large part of the investigation of the Holy Artisan Bakery attack was based on what an amateurish video by a Korean national revealed. It will be a while before we can feel completely safe again. While vigilance is crucial on the part of law enforcers and ordinary citizens alike, going into a panic mode will not help.

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## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# Killing non-communicable diseases

STEVE DAVIS

OVER the last 25 years, thanks partly to a coordinated global effort to fight infectious diseases, including malaria, tuberculosis (TB), HIV/AIDS, and polio, childhood mortality rates have been reduced by 50 percent, and average life expectancy has increased by more than six years. Moreover, the share of the world's population living in extreme poverty has been halved. These are major achievements, but they have brought a new set of challenges that must urgently be addressed. As lives have gotten longer and lifestyles have changed, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and respiratory ailments have taken hold, becoming far and away the world's leading causes of death. While about 3.2 million people died from malaria, TB, or HIV/AIDS in 2014, more than 38 million died from NCDs. And the death toll continues to rise. Consider diabetes, one of the fastest-growing NCDs. According to a recent World Health Organization report, diabetes killed 1.5 million people in 2012, about the same number as TB. But while TB deaths have declined by half since 1990, the impact of diabetes is rising fast. In 1980, 108 million people were living with diabetes, a rate of about one person in 20; today, more than 400 million, or one in 12, have the disease. Contrary to popular perception of NCDs as diseases of the affluent, they disproportionately affect the poor in countries at all stages of economic development, but especially low- and middle-income countries. Indeed, according to the WHO report, more than 80 percent of diabetes-related deaths occur outside the high-income countries. One reason for this is that type 2 diabetes, the more common variant, is associated with lifestyle factors, such as inactivity,



obesity, poor diet, and smoking, that are often more common among the less affluent. Making matters worse, in poorer communities, tools and medicines to diagnose and treat diabetes are scarce and often priced beyond people's means. A recent study authored by PATH, with support from Novo Nordisk, showed that, in some cases, just one-third of public health facilities had insulin in stock, and only one in four had testing strips available to monitor diabetes. In Ghana, 15 days' wages pays for a 30-day supply of just two of the drugs needed to prevent complications. These failings mean that almost half of diabetes cases outside wealthy countries are undiagnosed or inadequately managed. This has significant human and economic consequences. Diabetes requires lifelong treatment, and the earlier it is detected and care begins, the better the outcome.

Untreated, diabetes causes conditions that make it impossible to work and often lead to early death. What will it take to ensure that people have the tools and medicines to diagnose, treat, and monitor diabetes? For starters, policymakers and donors must acknowledge the disproportionate impact of diabetes on poor communities and focus greater attention and funding on prevention and treatment. Prevention programmes that promote healthier diets and exercise can lower the prevalence of type 2 diabetes and reduce complications for those who have the disease. And investment in health-care systems in low- and middle-income countries can help them to adapt to the increasing burden of lifelong diseases such as diabetes. The cost issue, too, must urgently be addressed. We must tackle deficiencies in

distribution systems that limit access to drugs and diagnostics, driving up costs. This will require better forecasting, planning, and distribution; more effective negotiation of prices; and limits on markups. Moreover, we must invest in research and development of low-cost diabetes treatments and diagnostic tools that are suited for low-resource environments. Smart collaborative projects that bring innovative thinkers from nonprofits, academia, and the private sector together to create effective, affordable, and appropriate solutions are desperately needed. Diabetes is not unique among NCDs. Essential medicines and technologies for diagnosing and treating heart disease, cancer, and respiratory ailments are also significantly less available and proportionally more expensive for people in low- and middle-income countries than they are for those in the rich world. This disparity prompted the medical journal *The Lancet* to call the NCD crisis the "social justice issue of our time." Unless we take action, the crisis will only become more serious. The WHO expects that, from 2010 to 2020, deaths from NCDs will grow by 15 percent, with the majority occurring in low- and middle-income countries. Today, just 1 percent of global health financing goes to NCD-related programmes. This must change – and fast. Otherwise, the remarkable gains made in improving global health in the last 25 years will be overwhelmed by a rising tide of people who suffer and die from chronic diseases that we know how to prevent and treat.

The writer is President and Chief Executive Officer of the Seattle-based international nonprofit organisation PATH. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**LEO TOLSTOY**  
*Boredom: the desire for desires.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Crib occupant
- Jellied dishes
- Lotion additive
- Of the backbone
- Astonish
- Stylish
- Greedy one
- "Exodus" author
- Ibis' cousin
- Relaxing spot
- Relay stick
- Stable worker
- Clickable picture
- Continental coin
- Confidence
- Calls to the phone
- Clique
- Fashion's Lauren
- Lord's wife
- Soaking spot
- Minute part
- U2 singer
- Without delay
- Roadster
- Peril
- Physics bit

**DOWN**

- Big party
- Choir voice
- Got financial control of
- Hankering
- Texas player
- Winter follower
- Bakery buys
- Travel stop
- Heel
- Crafty
- Ornate planter
- Ages and ages
- Looked for
- Skin feature
- Singer Tori
- Comic's stock
- Farm unit
- Harvest
- Somnolent state
- Tissue layer
- European viper
- Protracted
- Golden Rule word
- Cannon sound
- Blue
- Greek vowel
- Take in
- Meadow cry

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | A | H | S | B | U | S | T | A |   |   |
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| B | A | N | N | E | D | B | O | O | K | S |
| A | C | E | V | E | E | W | E | E |   |   |
| R | U | S | T | I | C | P | E | T | S |   |
| S | T | E | E | R | A | D | O | S |   |   |
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| L | E | G | S | S | O | O | N | E | R |   |
| A | G | E | H | E | N | G | E | E |   |   |
| C | A | N | N | E | D | G | O | O | D | S |
| E | L | D | E | R | S | P | R | E | E |   |
| S | E | A | T | S | T | A | R | T |   |   |

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott