

How half a degree will impact the future?

SHAILA MAHMUD

THE Paris Climate Conference last December, set the highly ambitious and universal long-term global goal to keep warming not just “well below 2 degree Celsius” but also “to pursue efforts” to limit the average world temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial (late 19th century) levels. This raises the critical question: How dramatic will the impacts be for an additional half degree rise? And, who will face the consequences?

As we are already one degree above the pre-industrial levels, we can see the significant climate impacts all over the globe: sea-level rise, salinity of river water, intense heat waves and unpredictable weather fluctuations and higher precipitation rate. It is foreseeable that limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius will be twice as hard as keeping it below 2 degree Celsius if not more. The Paris Agreement (PA) is often considered as the hard earned “ray of hope” for The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the Small Island Development States (SIDS) as they are most vulnerable to climate change. Therefore, Bangladesh, a member of the LDCs has welcomed the historical PA as a climate action for a better future. So how essential is it for a country like Bangladesh? Is it worth pushing for?

In Paris, delegates called on the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to report on the implications of a 1.5 degree Celsius target by the year 2018. The report will demonstrate improved policies on more strict emission pathway to achieve the target. So what it would be like in both 2 degree Celsius and 1.5 degree Celsius?

The comprehensive assessment of the differences in impacts between 1.5 degree Celsius and 2 degree Celsius, undertaken as part of the review of the long-term global goal of the UNFCCC concludes that a 2 degree Celsius cannot be a safer limit for warming. It is only now that the scientists have started to describe how a world with 1.5 degree Celsius warming would look like. Research published this April in Earth System Dynamics analysed the climate models used in IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report, where they considered 11 different indicators including extreme weather events, water



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availability, crop yields, coral reef degradation and sea-level rise to project impacts at 1.5 degree Celsius and 2 degree Celsius warming at the regional level. According to the study's lead author Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, they found “significant differences” in all the impacts including inundation (due to sea-level rise and glacier melting), unavailability of fresh water, issue of food security, unbearable heat waves in summer and unpredictable precipitation rate. The impacts are projected to be more severe and pervasive for the countries already spotted as most vulnerable to climate change.

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sea-levels. It is predicted that even a meter increase in sea-level may cause a loss of 16 percent of the country's low-lying areas under water, making around 30 million people homeless. Earth System Dynamics assessed that by 2100 sea-levels will rise about 50cm in a 2 degree Celsius warmer state, which is 10cm more than what it would be if global average temperature rises by 1.5 degree Celsius. Schleussner also stated that the “sea level rise will slow down” during the 21st century only in the 1.5 degree Celsius scenario.

The consequences of global warming are evident in Bangladesh. Last summer, the country recorded its highest temperature of 42.4 degree Celsius in 54 years. If earth's average temperature upsurge is at 2 degree Celsius rise, the summer seasons will prolong from 1.5 to 3 months globally. Also increase in heavy precipitation intensity is anticipated due to warming; it will affect the high latitude (>45°N) and monsoon regions (Bangladesh is a tropical monsoon region) most; i.e. wet countries will become wetter and dry countries drier. Schleussner and others showed in the research how South Asia (in which Bangladesh belongs) alone will face 10 percent increase in heavy precipitation intensity in a 2 degree Celsius warmer world and a much less severe increase of 7 percent in a 1.5 degree Celsius setting.

William Hare, a senior scientist and CEO at Climate Analytics who also took part in the Earth System Dynamics research stated that highly vulnerable countries to climate change would face the most severe of impacts for temperature rises between 1.5 degree Celsius and 2 degree Celsius. The Paris Agreement goes into effect only when 55 nations (the rich and developed ones), accounting for at least 55 percent of total global greenhouse-gas emissions, ratify it. With the announcement of ratification of the Paris Agreement by the United States and China, the world's two biggest economies and biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, it opens a new window of “opportunities” to the pathway of achieving the global long-term temperature rise goal of 1.5 degree Celsius.

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Gross procurement anomalies

ACC should show no leniency

VIOLATION of procurement rules relating to the purchase of medical equipment for Chittagong General Hospital to the tune of Tk7.18 crore has been detected by a probe committee. For instance an MRI machine was bought for Tk9.95crore whereas the manufacturer of the machine in China stated that the cost was Tk2.8crore! It is astonishing to find that the same person, who happens to be the Superintendent of the hospital, was both the head of the procurement committee as well as the chairman of the evaluation committee. Clearly a violation of Public Procurement Rule (PPR)-2008, we are at a loss how this was allowed in the first place. Not only do we have a case of graft here, many of the other equipment bought did not meet the specifications of the tender.

It is good that the probe committee has forwarded the matter to the ACC. The question here is how is it that the same person managed to head both procurement and evaluation committees? There was clearly a conflict of interest, and the breach should have been reported to the higher authorities by any one of those involved in the procurement system before any procurement went ahead. We believe that there is a coterie involved in the corruption.

This is tax payers' money that is being literally stolen by a bunch of thoroughly moral decrepit masquerading as doctors. As the ACC no longer requires prior permission to prosecute government employees, we hope that the Commission will get to the bottom of the racket and prosecute those responsible for the marked up purchase to the full extent of the law.

Shabby treatment of U-16 football team

This was not their due

THE success that the girls of the Bangladesh under-16 women's football team have earned through their performance in the AFC Women's U-16 Championship was marred by the reception that awaited them back home. The U-16 team, with their impressive wins against Iran and UAE, showed talent, especially considering the sports infrastructure.

After the tournament however, 9 girls of the squad were sent back to their village, alone on a local bus. Their journey home, which should have been one of triumph, involved harassment on the bus. To add to that, we hear of alleged assaults on their parents and threats to the girls with transfer certificates because they had refused to play in a local competition as they opted to join the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) training camp.

Firstly, it is utter negligence on part of the Bangladesh Football Federation to send these girls alone considering safety concerns. Their response that the girls had chosen to go in the local bus is not convincing, when the responsibility was theirs to ensure that the girls reached home safely. On the other hand, it is heartening to see that the principal of the school has formed a three-member probe body to look into the incident of assault and threats. We only hope justice will be done.

These girls, who won the hearts of the country with their talent, deserve better. They are breaking barriers of the stereotyped notions of women in sports in the country. While we congratulate them, we insist that these girls are given their due: from the BFF and from their school.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Air pollution kills

Air pollution is a matter of serious concern in Bangladesh. As per a World Bank study, 15000 deaths (5000 in Dhaka) and a million cases of illness requiring medical treatment can be avoided annually if the air pollution level can be reduced. The same report estimates that Bangladesh could save between USD 200 to 800 million per year if air pollution in the country's four major cities was reduced.

Faulty vehicles, brick kilns and power plants are the main sources of smoke which causes pollution. Besides, smoking and using vinyl floor tiles or vinyl building siding, trim and windows put workers' health at risk during and after production. Alternatives must be used to avoid danger from these materials.

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The letters column

The letters column in a newspaper is an active media for citizen journalism. A lot of useful information including opinion is being sent by the letter writers for publication in the letters column. Many people get benefited by these information while the policy-makers, public and private authorities use information/suggestions ventilated through the letters column for improving services and in establishing accountability. Often the letters column provides entertainments to the readers.

Meanwhile, we have noticed that some newspapers particularly the English ones have reduced spaces of the letters column. I think, sufficient spaces should be given to the letters column and it should be made a daily treat.

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SEAWOMIR SIERAKOWSKI

Now, Orbán and Jaroslaw Kaczyński, the leader of Poland's ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, and puppet-master of the country's government (though he holds no office), have proclaimed a counter-revolution aimed at turning the European Union into an illiberal project.

After a day of grinning, backslapping bonhomie at this year's Krynica conference, which styles itself a regional Davos, and which named Orbán its Man of the Year, Kaczyński and Orbán announced that they would lead 100 million Europeans in a bid to remake the EU along nationalist/religious lines. One might imagine Václav Havel, a previous honoree, rolling over in his grave at the pronouncement. And former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko, another previous winner, must be aghast: her country is being ravaged by Russia under President Vladimir Putin, the pope of illiberalism and role model for Kaczyński and Orbán.

The two men intend to seize the opportunity presented by the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum, which demonstrated that, in today's EU, illiberal democrats' preferred mode of discourse – lies and smears – can be politically and professionally rewarding (just ask the UK's new foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, a leading Brexiteer). The fusion of the two men's skills could make them a more potent threat than many Europeans would like to believe.

What Orbán brings to the partnership is clear: a strain of “pragmatic” populism. He has aligned his Fidesz party with the European People's Party, which keeps him formally within the political mainstream and makes German Chancellor Angela Merkel an ally who provides political protection, despite his illiberal governance. Kaczyński, however, chose to ally the PiS with the marginal Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists, and quarrels almost ceaselessly with Germany and the EU Commission.

Moreover, Orbán has more of the common touch than his Polish partner. Like Donald Tusk, the former Polish prime minister who is now President of the European Council, he plays soccer with other politicians. Kaczyński, by contrast, is something of a hermit, who lives alone and spends his evenings watching Spanish rodeo on TV. He seems to live outside of society, whereas his supporters seem to place him above it – the ascetic messiah of a Poland reborn.

It is this mystical fervour that Kaczyński brings to his partnership with the opportunistic Orbán. It is a messianism forged from Polish history – a sense that the nation has a special mission for which God has chosen it,

with the proof to be found in Poland's especially tragic history. Uprisings, war, partitions: these are the things a Pole should think about every day.

A messianic identity favours a certain type of leader – one who, like Putin, appears to be animated by a sense of mission (in Putin's case, it is the same mission proclaimed by the czars: Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality). So, whereas Orbán is a cynic, Kaczyński is a fanatic, for whom pragmatism is a sign of weakness. Orbán would never act against his own interests; Kaczyński has done so many times. By attacking members of his own coalition government, for example, Kaczyński lost power in 2007, only two years after he had won it. He seems to have no plans. Instead, he has visions – not of fiscal reform or economic restructuring, but of a new type of Poland.

Orbán seeks nothing of the kind. He doesn't want to

terms, it means building a new national culture. State-funded media are no longer public, but rather “national.” By eliminating civil-service exams, offices can be filled with loyalists and party hacks. The education system is being turned into a vehicle for fostering identification with a glorious and tragic past. Only cultural enterprises that praise the nation should receive public funding.

For Kaczyński, foreign policy is a function of historical policy. Here, the two men do differ: whereas Orbán's pragmatism keeps him from antagonising his European and US partners excessively, Kaczyński is uninterested in geopolitical calculation. After all, a messiah does not trim his beliefs or kowtow; he lives to proclaim the truth.

So, for the most part, Kaczyński's foreign policy is a tendentious history seminar. Poland was betrayed by the West. Its strength – today and always – comes from pride,



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán

PHOTO: AFP

create a new-model Hungary; his only aim is to remain, like Putin, in power for the rest of his life. Having governed as a liberal in the 1990s (paving the way for Hungary to join both NATO and the EU) and lost, Orbán regards illiberalism as the means to win until he takes his last breath.

Kaczyński's illiberalism is of the soul. He calls those outside his camp “the worst sort of Poles.” Homo Kaczyńskius is a Pole preoccupied with his country's fate, and who bares his teeth at critics and dissenters, particularly foreign ones. All non-Polish elements within Poland are viewed as a threat. The PiS government has not accepted a single refugee of the tiny number – just 7,500 – that Poland, a country of nearly 40 million, agreed with the EU to take in.

Despite their different motivations for embracing illiberalism, Kaczyński and Orbán agree that, in practical

dignity, courage, and absolute self-reliance. Its defeats are moral victories that prove the nation's strength and courage, enabling it, like Christ, to return from the dead after 123 years of absence from the map of Europe.

The question for Europe now is whether the marriage of messianic and opportunistic populism will go mainstream and spread across the Union, or remain confined to Central Europe. Already, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, eyeing a return to power in 2017, is adopting some of the language and postures of the Kaczyński/Orbán axis. Johnson, for his part, has shown an affinity for their methods. Will others follow?

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