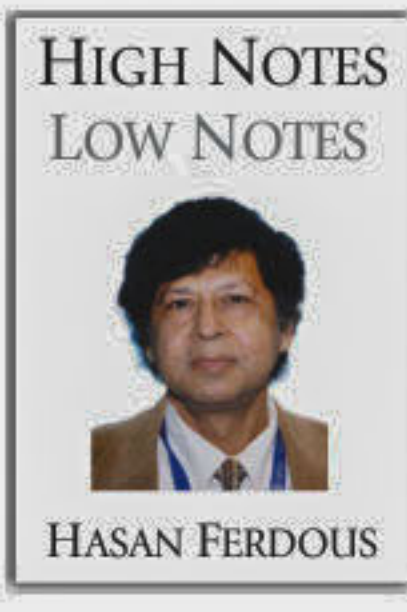


A requiem for the Sundarbans



HIGH NOTES
LOW NOTES
HASAN FERDOUS

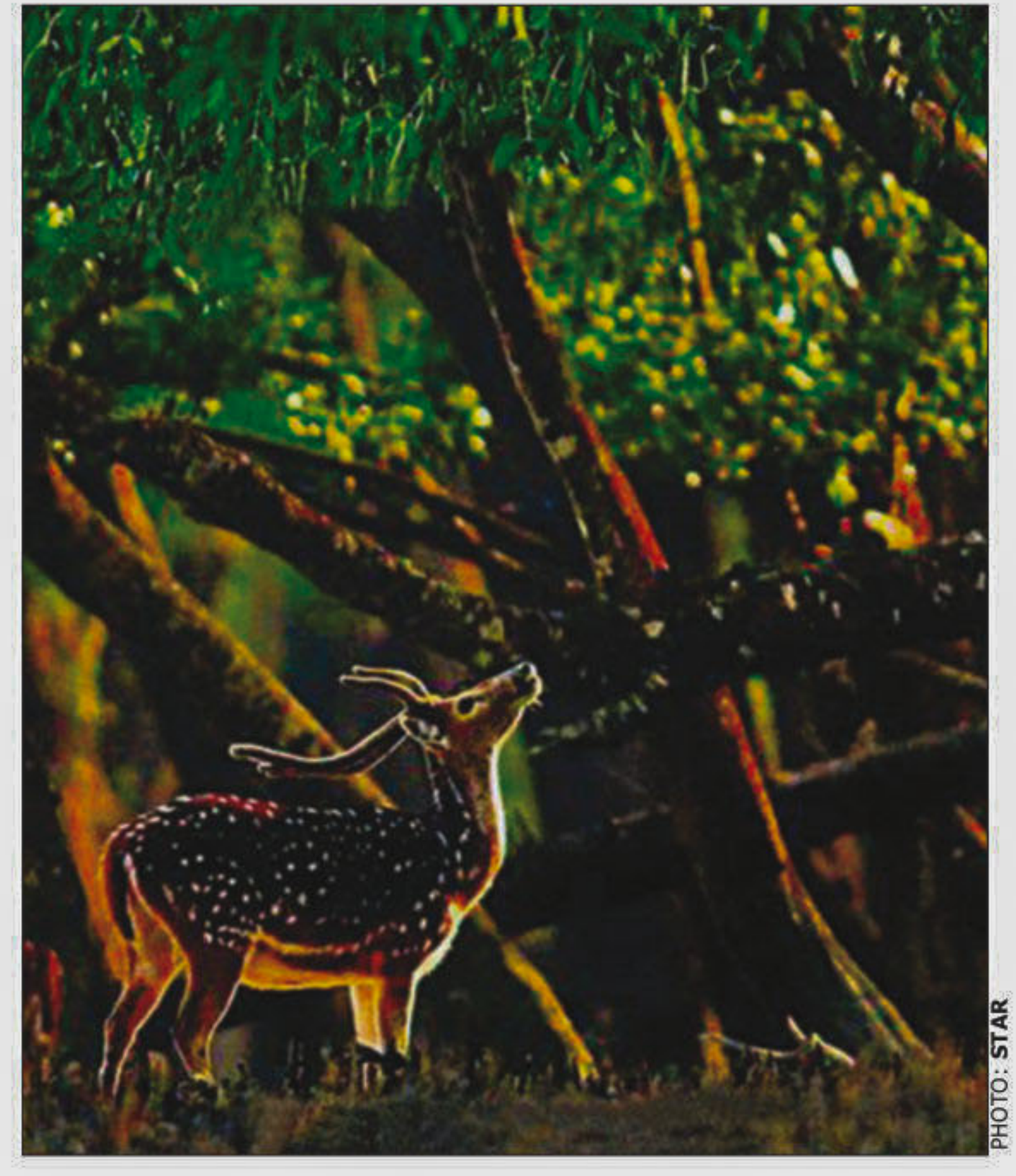
TED Hughes, England's former Poet Laureate who is better known as Sylvia Plath's delinquent husband, once penned a paean to the Sundarbans. In 1989, while visiting Bangladesh as an official guest of the Government, he took a leisurely trip down the Rupsa River. At Hiron Point, as his slow moving steam boat approached the Sundarbans, he was struck by the quiet beauty of the world's largest mangrove forest. Later he wrote the following lines, dedicating them to the Sundarbans:

I slept here a night of chaotic dreams,
I could not keep my dreams inside the rest-house,
They spread out through the forest
Real tigers trod on them.
In the morning the sea
Was a bed of pink rose petals
Where somebody very beautifully had slept
A perfect sleep.

Not a particularly good poem, but the poet's adoration for the great Sundarbans is clear. Today, nearly three decades later, if he could visit once more, Ted Hughes would be shocked to see the slow death of his beloved forest. The Sundarbans is now a sad reminder of its past glories. Devastating storms have left much of the forest decimated. With sea levels quietly rising due to climate change, the mangrove continues to lose much of its salt-tolerant trees. For centuries these trees have offered

protection from storms that lash out at regular intervals. As trees disappear, so do tigers. Now comes the promise of a coal-powered 1320 megawatt power plant, a joint venture between Bangladesh and India, to be built at Rampal near the Sundarbans. This year in July, the Government of Bangladesh celebrated the signing of a contract with India's Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited to build the plant by 2019, calling it a friendship project. The USD 1.49 billion dollar plant will be largely funded by India. Coal, its power source, will also be supplied by India, which already has more coal than it can make use of.

This could be the last nail in the Sundarbans' coffin. Everybody, who is somehow not connected with the Bangladesh government, has opposed the construction of such a massive power plant so close to the Sundarbans. A civil society movement has sprung up in Bangladesh resisting the power plant. The initial opposition came from the local people who feared the loss of their livelihood. It was soon embraced by various environmental and human rights groups in Bangladesh and by a section of the academia. Once resisting Rampal became a potent political cause, the opposition BNP and Jamaat leaped to its support. That led the government to paint the entire Resist Rampal movement with a broad stroke, lumping them together as anti-government. Ironically, resistance to Rampal comes not only from Bangladesh's home grown environmentalists but also from those in India and elsewhere in the world. A fact often glossed over by officials in Dhaka is that India itself had opposed such a power plant



anywhere near the Sundarbans on its side. Dr Kalyan Rudra, Chairman of West Bengal Pollution Control Board, has called such a project "a red category industry." Given the amount of toxic substance the plant would emit, "there cannot even be a question of setting up such a plant near a reserved forest," he told a Dhaka newspaper. One of the fiercest oppositions to the project has come from UNESCO, keeper of the world's common legacy,

largest population of tigers in the world which have adapted to an almost amphibious life." UNESCO is unambiguous in its assessment of the impact of the Rampal power plant. This year in March, a three-member team from UNESCO visited the Sundarbans and later submitted its recommendations on the Rampal project. It concluded that there is a strong likelihood that the power plant, if built in the current location, would contaminate the air and water of the Sundarbans and its surrounding forests, and the substantial shipping and dredging and the removal of a large amount of fresh water would seriously impact the region's ecosystem. Availability of water is one reason why the Rampal location was chosen. According to the project's own environmental impact assessment, water use at the plant could reduce the downstream flow of the Passur River by as much as 35 billion litres annually. Much of the water would later be discharged into the same river, only this time as treated waste, causing untold devastation to the nearby communities, mangrove forests and marine animals. 350.org, an international environmental group that opposes the project, has pointed out another important fact. To keep the plant running, Bangladesh will need to import about 4.72 million tonnes of coal each year. This coal, brought in by ships to the port some 40 kilometres away, will later be trucked to the plant using a route cutting through the Sundarbans. The environmental impact of such a massive operation would be devastating. The Netherlands' BankTrack, an international think tank monitoring

operations and investments of private sector banks, has been very specific in its arguments for opposing the project. The technology required at Rampal will emit 30 percent more sulphur dioxide than state of the art technology, it says. There are no technologies required at Rampal to specifically eliminate such harmful emissions, including those of mercury, nitrogen oxides, and chromium though widely available technologies exist to do so. Avaaz, an international rights organisation, has also voiced its protest. In a mass petition campaign, it has urged UNESCO to recognise the threat on the Sundarbans and to officially enlist it into the "List of World Heritage in Danger". It has also urged the world body to take concrete and deliberate action to ensure the future protection of the forest from commercial activities. UNESCO's response has been clear. It has advised Bangladesh to cancel Rampal and move the power plant to a location that would not impact negatively on the Sundarbans. Why is the Bangladesh government so determined to go ahead with a project that every sane-minded person not affiliated with the government thinks will do more harm than good? In September, I put this question to the members of the delegation accompanying Prime Minister Hasina who was in New York for the annual UN General Assembly. One of them, speaking on behalf of the group, replied with a counter question: Do you think our Prime Minister would do something that would go against our national interest? We certainly hope not. The writer is a journalist and author based in New York.

Paris Agreement Coming into Force by COP22! What should Bangladesh do?

MIZAN R. KHAN
WITH formal deposition to the UN Secretary General of instruments of joining the Paris Agreement (PA) so far by 60 countries, COP22 of the UNFCCC to be held in Marrakesh between November 7 and 18 is also likely to be the first Meeting of Parties to the Agreement. The Paris Agreement will come into force on the 30th day after at least 55 countries covering 55 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions deposit to the UN Secretary General their instruments of ratification, acceptance or approval. The first threshold has been crossed, but these countries cover only 48 percent of global emissions. If Australia, Canada and Japan or the EU ratify as they are expected to do, the PA can take effect by the beginning of COP22. By joining the Paris Agreement a little earlier, China and the US, the two largest emitters, surely encouraged others to follow their lead. This will make history as no other global agreement has ever come into force so quickly. The Agreement reflects the US internal politics and constraints of domestic law, where the president has subtle executive power to accede to certain international agreements, bypassing Congressional ratification. The Paris Outcome includes two documents: An Agreement consisting of 29 Articles and 139-para decision text. The PA can be viewed as an excellent patchwork of compromises, kind of an anodyne political narrative, soothing to all the disparate coalitions representing 195 parties. While the procedural aspects, such as submission of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to mitigation and their reviews every five years are legally-binding, the substantive issues, such as emission

reduction targets remain voluntary, though a process of progressively dynamic differentiation has been structured. Again, the compliance mechanism based on peer review remains facilitative and non-punitive. In terms of finance, the PA is no better than its parent, the Convention. However, there are a few silver linings as well: The Paris Agreement is the first law where state obligations to climate finance have been linked to avoidance of 2 degree Celsius threshold of temperature rise, also adaptation linked with mitigation, explicitly recognising it as a global responsibility. Such a rapid entry of PA into force reinforces the global desire to build a zero-carbon, climate-resilient future. Now Parties have to adopt procedures for operationalising the new frameworks, institutions and processes established under the PA: a transparency framework for mitigation and finance, global stocktaking every five years, a 12-member compliance mechanism, a clearing house for risk transfer and insurance, a task force to devise integrated approaches to deal with climate-induced displacement, formation of the Paris Committee on Capacity Building and adopt a five-year work plan, the Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency, development of modalities for accounting of public climate finance, a new market mechanism and a global sustainable development mechanism. So the plate appears full for COP22/CMA1. But what should be the role of Bangladesh and LDCs in general? Climate finance stands at the core of concerns for the LDCs, which being nano-emitters, are already losing the most from increasing climate impacts. Though the PA has added renewed focus on adaptation, the

means to realise the global goal and responsibility remain vague. The record of preferential treatment to the LDCs is not encouraging, with one-fifth of adaptation finance allocated to them. As the LDCs have neither positive (material) nor negative (emission) power, they must marshal and hone discursive and argumentative power, reinforced by building alliance with progressive groups and countries. Bangladesh obviously has the parameters to lead the process. First, poor and vulnerable countries (PVCs) need to fight for expanding the climate fund (CF) cake, focusing particularly on mobilising extra-budgetary resources. The polluter-pays-principle (PPP) as a payment against pollution, either ex-ante or ex-post is the most basic of economic principles, which originated as an economic and

ethical principle since the days of Plato and Kautiliya, then gradually evolving into a legal one in the EU and elsewhere. Now many governments from North and South apply the PPP domestically. It remains also implicit in the Paris Agreement's expanded principle of CBDR +RC (Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities) in light of different national circumstances. This can only be realised through the global application of a carbon tax, instead of its truncated practice currently. The funds generated either nationally or internationally can finance for low-carbon and climate resilient development. Many scientists including Nobel laureates like Stiglitz and Krugman question the anomaly in which the earthly garbage dump is not free, why should atmospheric dump be treated freely?

Is it because the earthly dump has state boundaries, while the atmospheric dump straddles borders? This is a gross free-riding by major emitters. Already there is an emerging consensus on carbon pricing, as evident from the World Bank's Declaration on Carbon Pricing, endorsed by several dozen governments and hundreds of companies, and the recent letter addressed to G20 leaders by investors controlling over USD 13 trillion of assets urging for introducing carbon pricing. Who then holds us back? Second, instead of whining, the LDCs need to raise their voices louder for implementation of the long pledged elimination of subsidies to fossil fuel. This pledge goes back to the G8 meeting in Pittsburgh in 2009. The G20 just ended with no roadmap for elimination of funding the problem rather than investing for its solution. Third, ambitious mitigation brings in the most adaptation benefits in the form of avoided loss and damage. Under French leadership, the Agreement rightly linked adaptation and climate finance to the level of mitigation and temperature rise. So adaptation framing must include prevention of harm and ex-post payment for unavoidable loss and damage, at least through underwriting premiums for insuring the poor. Fourth, even under neoliberal thinking, which the PA embodies, funding for adaptation can bring in both direct and indirect global benefits, such as R&D on improving drought and flood-resistant crops, control of climate-sensitive infectious diseases, vulnerability of over 100 trading partners, reduced dislocation and migration, reduced pressure for violent conflicts, avoiding threats to human and global security, etc. Such

benefits may not be enjoyed equally by countries and citizens. So what? The tax-funded national public goods do not benefit citizens equally, or some may not benefit at all. Fifth, to follow through these cerebral exercises, the PVCs must build stronger alliance with progressive groups and countries. France, for example, leads an initiative in the EU to levy a little on financial transactions, to be distributed as CF. Some other countries already contribute 0.7 percent of their national income as overseas aid. They will be willing to realise the long-agreed principles of CF - new and additional adequate and predictable funding. This is exactly what is needed, to plug double counting of overseas aid also as CF. Finally, basic human rights and no-harm rule are long regarded as sacrosanct in western countries. Obviously, holding on to centuries-old lens of Westphalia sovereignty and national interests cannot deal with emerging global public evils like atmospheric pollution; so a new type of what Igne Kaul calls 'smart/pooled sovereignty' is warranted. Joseph Nye recently in a *Washington Post* piece cogently argues that while the US led in production of global public goods since World War II, now cooperation of other powerful states is needed, because power has become a positive-sum game for achieving global goals. LDCs must be louder in their voices to reach out to the major emitters, old and new, to solve the most diabolically complex global problem. We hope Bangladesh can play a leading role in showing the world how to adapt in the best possible way. The writer is a Professor of NSU, Dhaka.

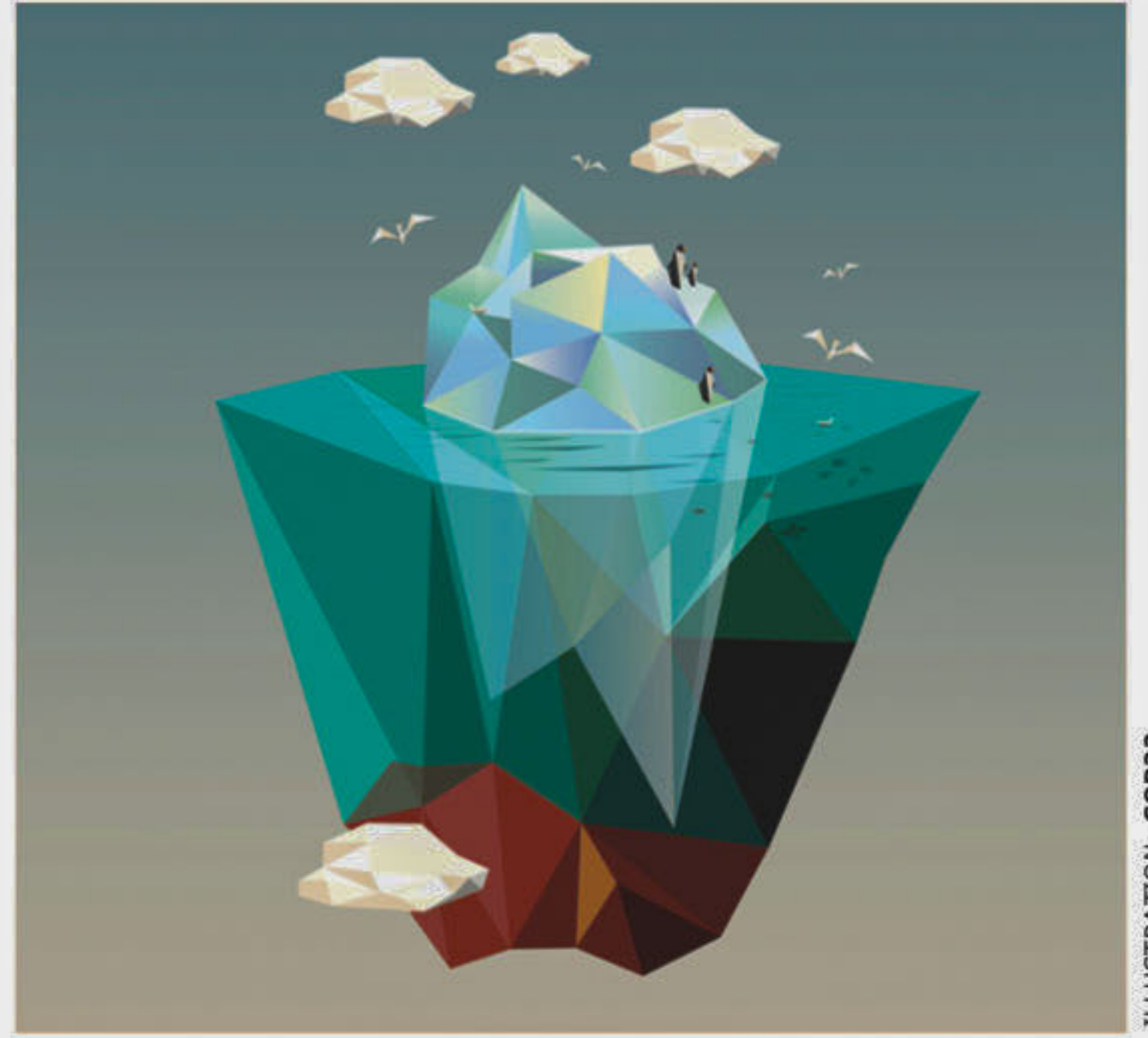


ILLUSTRATION: COP22

QUOTABLE Quote

THOMAS PAINE
If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH
ACROSS
1 In the center of
5 Concede
10 TV's Leary
12 Sculptor Henry
13 "Walking on Broken Glass" singer
15 Sch. support group
16 Sine qua --
17 Lawyer's org.
18 Soup choice
20 Clickable picture
21 Picture puzzle
22 Lusty desire
23 Verdi offering
25 Small nail
28 Church parts
31 Wander
32 Fragrances
34 Hydrocarbon suffix
35 Color
36 Color
37 "Brokeback Mountain" writer
40 Autographs
41 Binge
42 Most high schoolers
43 Thomas Hardy heroine
DOWN
1 Conform
2 Trusted teacher
3 Nominally
4 502, in old Rome
5 Church answer
6 Ho of Hawaii
7 Riviera nation
8 Asimov classic
9 Lone Star staters
11 Parodied
14 Relaxes
19 Dwelling
20 "-- my doubts"
24 Indy autos
25 Fried chicken choice
26 Music's Milsap
27 Get even for
29 Last
30 Modes
33 Sides in a long-running battle
35 Pianist Myra
38 Tavern
39 Make a choice

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER
G U S T A B E T S
A N T I C O B R A S
S T A R C O B A L T
P I L E D O N I V Y
S E L L E R S T A R
L E N D T O G O
G R O S S S I R E N
L E N S H I M
I L L S E L E C T S
D I E T A L L Y H O
E V A D E D E C R U
R E V I V E S L O P
S E G E R S E W S

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott