

The summer scorched earth was beginning to show signs of cracking. There was dust collecting on the spring-green leaves. The 'mango showers' were in the horizon and the barn swallows were riding the incoming storm.

As a whirlwind moved through the village, dust particles, grime and loose grass were picked up from the fields and hurled into motion. The summer storm was coming. And for many it was a breath of fresh air. The mangoes would ripen; the jackfruits burst open, emanating their sickly sweet smell.

With the storm approaching the little blue-green Blue-tailed Bee-eater

the number of available roosting (resting or perching) trees for birds putting them in line of threat against many natural disasters especially nor'westers and tornadoes.

In 2015, a group of researchers came across an odd phenomenon. Local newspapers in Kushtia and Jhenidah districts were reporting deaths of birds in large numbers following a storm in April. Some reported numbers as high as 30,000.

This prompted them to dig deeper and consequent analysis of data and interview of locals in Kumarkhali upazila in Kushtia and Shaikupa upazila in Jhenidah revealed that in fact a total of

which has been reviewed and submitted for publishing in an international scientific journal.

They looked at tree cover in the areas where high mortality was reported to find possible links between the deaths and availability of trees for roosting and shelter during such disasters.

The duo found that the proportion of native trees meaning local varieties such as mango trees or the towering fig trees were significantly lower than the non-native (foreign variants) trees. Inspection of the trees also revealed that these plantations are fairly new.

A clear picture was beginning to emerge from the findings. The storm-

"Further study at nor'wester prone areas and comparing results could give more concrete answers on this phenomenon," says Mohsin Kabir Miron, one of the authors of the paper.

"These are just primary findings, but it throws light on the changing rural landscape. And for now, the key issue remains that environment is being rapidly degraded in Bangladesh and if continued like this, we stand to lose much much more," says Miron.

The impact of a storm are far and wide and in many landscapes especially forests, it can offer a unique scope for the ecosystem to thrive. Upheaval will give chance of revival. Branches and leaves

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By the time you read the piece, the entire world would still be waiting for the American president Donald Trump to make his "final decision" on the Paris climate accord. Despite immense pressure and lobbying from fellow G7 powers, he has failed to endorse the deal at the summit, forcing the rest of the members to formulate a pro-accord communiqué in support of the deal excluding the United States.

While he insists that he is yet to make a decision on whether to honour the only global commitment to save the planet from a premature doomsday, he reportedly told his close confidants that he would exit. However, his defense secretary James Mattis says the president is "wide-open" on the issue.

The Paris accord, set out in 2015, aims to keep the increase in global average temperature to below 2°C, requiring countries to reduce their carbon emission significantly. Even though environmental groups insisted that it was not enough, the deal remains the most comprehensive climate agreement ever. It came into force on November 4 last year, after 55 countries collectively responsible for 55 percent of global carbon emissions, including the US, ratified it.

Trump's refusal to commit to the deal is absolutely in line with his electoral pledges and policy decisions since coming to power. He has promised to increase jobs and strengthen the coal industry by scrapping the deal. He has filled his cabinet with all climate change deniers, with a few exceptions.

Scott Pruitt, a climate change denier and close friend to the fossil fuel industry, for instance, was appointed to lead the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)—an organisation he has long opposed. EPA has since taken some astonishing measures including removal of climate science websites, containing detailed climate data and scientific information.

In fact, the president himself is skeptical of man-made climate change, insinuating that global warming is a hoax. "The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive," he once tweeted. He also voiced support for Keystone pipeline and drilling off the Atlantic coast, which

DEAL OR NO DEAL

What would Trump's refusal to commit to the Paris climate accord mean for the environment?

NAZMUL AHASAN



PHOTO: AFP

will result in irreparable damage to the global environment.

"Trump's election is a triumph of climate denial," Clare Foran, associate editor at The Atlantic, declares. However, she also points out that his views are no different than that of prominent elected officials of the Republican Party. The election was also far from a referendum on global warming, as the issue hardly surfaced in the presidential debates and was rated

among the least serious concerns by the voters.

Trump, therefore, doesn't have any incentives to honour the Paris deal, which promised to reduce carbon emissions. If he really ends up withdrawing from the accord, it will be difficult for the deal to achieve its goal because the US is the second largest carbon emitter after China. In addition, a withdrawal by the US will encourage other countries to follow its footmark.

While other big emitters like China and India pledge to keep up their end of the bargain, America's exit will lessen the significance of the treaty.

A US withdrawal will also hurt Bangladesh's prospect of getting finances to combat the disastrous climate change effects, as we are among the most imperiled victims of the phenomenon. While the Paris accord notably avoided any mention of compensation or liability, it does acknowledge the need for "averting, minimising, and addressing loss and damage" of the worst affected countries, like Bangladesh. Within the framework of the deal, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) was set up to expectedly channel additional financial resources to worst affected countries. An \$80 million project financed by GCF, Germany and Bangladesh is already being implemented in Bangladesh, with a second Bangladeshi project proposal being considered.

The fund targeted to raise a massive \$100 billion per year by 2020, but only \$10.3 billion has been pledged so far. Nonetheless, contribution from the US is one of the main sources of its financing. However, Saleemul Huq, an internationally renowned climate change expert, says, "it is far better" for the US to withdraw. "The US actions both at home and the fund contributions have already been halted even without their withdrawal from the Paris Agreement," he argues. "Hence, the only consequence for the rest of the world if the US stays in it is a very negative one of having to fight them on every little issue in the negotiations, as they will inevitably try to hold back all our actions."

The move also risks leaving America isolated, leading the State Department to lobby in support of the deal. Trump's reluctance to stick to the obligation at the G7 Summit has already irritated his allies, with influential German Chancellor Angela Merkel saying, "The entire discussion about climate was very difficult, if not to say very dissatisfying." Trump will also be rebuked in his own country, as New York and California have already promised to combat climate change without help from the Trump administration. So, a shred of hope still remains.

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HOW NATURAL DISASTERS AFFECT BIRDS



PHOTO: NAZIMUDDIN PRINCE

Blue-tailed Bee Eater

Finding the link among loss of tree cover, greater non-native or introduced trees and higher bird mortality

ABIDA RAHMAN CHOWDHURY

frantically looked for shelter, a roosting tree maybe, but fly as it might a sturdy familiar tree was far from sight.

As is usually the case after any disaster, the loss and impact on people and their lives is on everyone's mind. But, eventually curiosity turns us onto other impacts of a natural disaster—the wildlife and surrounding habitats that the storm also left in its path. In this particular case, how do birds fare after a tornado or after an especially intense nor'wester tears through an area?

With loss of habitat and growing population, old-growth and indigenous trees are being cut down thus reducing

771 birds did die within the first half of April that year.

"These deaths were a result of just one nor'wester in two upazilas. Bangladesh is hit by many such nor'westers during the pre-monsoon or summer time. If birds, species who are naturally inclined to move to safer places continue to die in such numbers, this would spell disaster for bird populations," says Sayam U Chowdhury, Ornithologist and Conservation Biologist, currently working on threatened species research and conservation in Bangladesh and abroad.

Mohsin Kabir Miron and Sayam U Chowdhury revealed their findings in a paper titled, 'Impact of pre-monsoon storm on resident birds in Bangladesh'

affected areas lacked old-growth native trees and traditional village groves. Meaning most of the trees were very young, non-native with fragile wood and they would be unable to sustain the lashes of a nor'wester.

Extrapolating from these findings, the researchers put forward the idea that large-scale monoculture plantation of fast growing non-native trees such as Acacia and Mahogany and loss of suitable shared roosting habitats makes these resident birds even more vulnerable to natural disasters such as nor'westers and tornadoes.

"This adverse impact on birds matters because they are one of the key indicators of our environmental health, if they react adversely then there is surely something fishy going on," opines Chowdhury.

Birds are also key pollinators and seed dispersal agents and their conservation is important to maintain a healthy balance in the ecosystem.

fall and rot spurring growth. Insects and animals find new nooks and crannies to take cover.

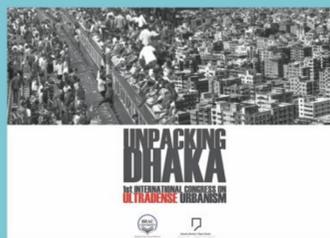
However, deliberately stripping birds and other wildlife of their habitat and reducing tree cover can be detrimental to the conservation of these resident birds. As we encroach into forest-land and destroy habitats it puts our wildlife at significant risk. Wildlife and among them especially birds do not live in the forest alone, they share our living spaces as well.

"Establishing a network of village groves supporting native trees will provide safe resting and nesting habitats for birds," says Miron.

Not birds alone, village groves and native trees can benefit us too. The rays of scorching summer sun will be a little cooler, the blow of heavy winds a little slower and in the shade of the mango tree, the Mynas will call.

Abida Rahman Chowdhury is an online journalist, The Daily Star

ABOUT TOWN



UNPACKING DHAKA

Organiser: BRAC University
Architecture department
June 4-5, 3 pm, BRAC University,
Mohakhali



**PORISHKAR HOK
RAMNA PARK
BATAMUL**

Organiser: Dhaka Clean - Dhaka
June 3, 3-6 pm, Ramna Batamul



**GOOGLE I/O RECAP
BANGLADESH**

Organiser: Google Developers Group
June 9, 8:30 am - 1 pm, TCB Bhaban,
Kawran Bazar