

Ruin nature, ruin planet

Noted naturalist Dwijen Sharma sees conflict between nature and development

PINAKI ROY

Prof Dwijen Sharma, an eminent naturalist, said it would not be possible to stop the conflict between nature and development as long as capitalism controls everything. The planet would be awaiting an apocalypse if people continued to exploit nature, he told The Daily Star in an interview on the eve of World Environment Day, which is today. This year, the theme of the day is "connecting people to nature".

These days, a much-talked-about campaign is going about sustainable development. But as long as capitalism is there, such development cannot protect the world from destruction, he said. "We all know capitalism is a mystery. It controls everything."

"They think sustainable development would be able to save the world. But that's not true," the professor said.

While describing nature's importance for human beings, he said the human race has been on this planet for "the last two lakh years or so". But they learnt agriculture just 10 to 15 thousand years ago. "Before that, people lived extremely close to nature and still today, they share a close bond."

"That's why people's mood shifts with natural events like the sunset, sunrise, moonlight, fountain sounds etc. If people are disconnected from these, their physical and mental health is harmed."



On the occasion of World Environment Day, naturalist Dwijen Sharma speaks to The Daily Star about people's primal connection with nature and the dangers of unplanned development.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

When humans started to form societies, they made rules and laws, ultimately chaining themselves within them. The conflict between nature and development began soon afterwards. Later, humans started waging war

against nature for their own benefits, he said.

People evolved from the agricultural age to the industrial age and the war just intensified. The conflict between nature and development only increased

with people's never-ending hunger for development.

For ages, people believed that nature was an endless resource but the view is now changing. They have understood that putting pressure on nature only

increased threats to their own civilization.

Development has a limit and history shows how dangerous it could be if the limit is crossed, he said, adding the solution was not easy.

"If we stop the development works, our economy would suffer a setback. It would turn disastrous. Tens of thousands of people would become jobless and anarchy would rule the world."

For many days, people believed communism may solve the conflict. Karl Marx once said the exploitation in the society and destruction of the nature would be over if communism is fully established in the society.

"But we do not know how far communism can reach. The destination of communism looks foggy."

On the other hand, what the radical environmentalists say about the conflict between nature and development is not clear. They say the community ownership of natural resources would help reduce the conflict.

"Wise men say people have lost their foresight. They are destroying the planet earth and also destroying themselves."

However, Rabindranath Tagore was hopeful. He said it is a sin to lose faith in humanity. Someday a new civilization will emerge and that will happen after an apocalyptic event.

But it is hard to say more about that at this stage regarding what will happen at the end, said the professor.

GREEN GARMENT FACTORY

It's saving, nearly on all accounts



Plummy Fashions Limited, a leading green garment factory, located in Narayanganj, blazes a trail in going green. Their adoption of green technologies reduces the cost of production through efficient use of water and energy.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

It was around 10:45 on a sunny Saturday morning. Production was going on in full swing at Plummy Fashions Limited, a Narayanganj-based knitwear garment factory.

Consumption of electricity was 350 kilowatt per hour for the 56,000-square-foot, two-floored factory. Usually, 550-kilowatt electricity is needed to run such a big production house.

However, Plummy Fashions could make it in less than 200kw by adopting green technology. The factory which started operation in mid-2015 uses sunlight during production hours.

"I do not face any problem in doing finer works like sewing or fixing small needles in the machines as there is enough sunlight in the factory," said Shahnaj Parveen, a sewing operator.

Plummy saves up to 39.1 percent electricity by using natural light. Similarly, the factory could spare 41 percent groundwater by preserving six lakh gallons of rainwater and maintaining a natural water reservoir with 60-lakh-litre storage capacity at its premises.

These are the two major components, which could minimise the operational costs of any factory. Plummy Fashion has also 38 percent less carbon emission and spared 64 percent space around the factory located on 6.5 acres of land as per the requirements of green technologies.

The factory produces 65kw electricity from its solar panels and also reuses the dyeing water by recycling it at effluent treatment plants. Its use of daylight is one of the major conditions for obtaining green certification.

By doing so, Plummy has met the highest requirements of the US Green Building

Council and scored 92 out of 112 points.

The USGBC has awarded the highest platinum rated certification on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) to Plummy Fashion for its efforts to save the environment and energy in 2015.

In the process, Plummy has earned the prestige of becoming one of the highest rated green garment factories in the world.

Like Plummy, several other garment factories have already adopted green technologies to reduce production costs to make their business sustainable.

Apparently inspired by Plummy's achievement, local textile and garment makers are turning their factories green to make the business more internationally compliant, a fact that helps them attract more retailers.

They are doing so also to be the premium suppliers to the western retailers and brands, industry insiders say.

The renowned retailers and brands place work orders at relatively higher prices to the green factories for their efforts to make the earth more habitable.

So far, 67 garment factories in Bangladesh have achieved the LEED certification by the world's renowned rating agency USGBC for their green initiatives.

Bangladesh hosts seven of the top 10 green factories in the world now. Moreover, the country has the world's top three platinum rated garment factories, according to Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Currently, Bangladesh has 13 platinum rated, 20 gold rated, 27 silver rated and seven LEED certified garment factories. As many as 222 garment factories have registered for the LEED certification to the USGBC, the BGMEA says.

The USGBC awards the highest platinum

certification if any factory scores 80 or above.

Likewise, it awards gold for 60 points, silver for 50 and only certification for below 50.

Turning the existing factories to green is a good response to the international communities as they criticised the garment sector for poor compliance, the insiders add.

"Green factories not only save energy, water and environment but also offer a safe workplace," said KM Rezaul Hasanat, chairman and CEO of Viyellatex Group, which operates two gold rated garment factories -- one in knitwear and one in woven.

One of the buildings has been made in an opera house concept and the other followed the resort concept, he said. Hasanat saves up to 40 percent energy in the green buildings.

In the green initiatives, the factories also have schools, childcare, healthcare and recreation facilities, and training programmes for workers.

The international retailers are very satisfied with the green initiative, said Abdus Salam Murshedy, managing director of Envoy Group, which also received the LEED certification in platinum category last year for its Bhaluka-based Envoy Textiles.

Envoy Textiles, which mainly produces denim fabrics, follows the requirements of the green initiative, he said, adding, they save 30 percent electricity at their factory.

The green initiatives adopted by different factories help Bangladesh brighten the image of the country as well as the garment sector, said Siddiqur Rahman, president of BGMEA.

"The apparel export growth remains unhurt even after the deadliest Rana Plaza building collapse due to our resilience and green initiatives. Now the international retailers are happy with our compliance and workplace safety," Rahman observed.

Choice organic

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monoculture, which extracts nutrients from soil, but organic farming contributes to multi-cropping. For example, if mustard oil, radish and maize are grown on a piece of land at the same time, their combined residues will make up good natural fertiliser for soil.

If crops were grown without using chemical fertilisers and pesticides, birds and beneficial insects would be in the fields to eat up the harmful insects, making it a natural pest control mechanism, Farida added.

These factors inspired many people to go for organic farming in Bangladesh, she said.

ORGANIC FARMING IN BANGLADESH Non-government organisation Proshika first began organic farming in the country in 1976 on its land in Koitta of Manikganj. Over the years, it trained some 2.5 lakh framers on organic farming, said Proshika General Manager Kayes Shamim Polash.

After the devastating flood in 1988, Ubining officials realised that the flood-hit farmers in Tangail were failing to restart farming as they had no seeds and capital to buy fertilisers and pesticides.

"Farmers were totally dependent on the seed, fertilisers and pesticides from multinational companies," said Farida.

Ubining then conducted a research and started training farmers on preserving local seeds and growing crops using organic farming methods.

Since then, over 50 NGOs and some business outlets came forward to produce and promote organic food.

NO STRONG MARKET LINKAGE Farida said although the NGOs trained up farmers, who then started using organic farming methods, they could not establish a market linkage. Subsequently, many initiatives could not be completed, she added.

"Many farmers produce organic food, but we can't collect their produce and help them market as we can't operate like other businesses," she said.

Some educated youths have got involved in organic farming. One of them is Delowar Jahan, a journalism graduate from Chittagong University. He along with

some of his friends opened an organic food shop, Prakritik Krishi, in the capital in 2014.

"Being a small venture, we too have been facing challenges in managing the supply chain. We are working hard to overcome the challenges," he said.

However, the case of Kazi and Kazi Tea is different. It began farming organic tea on a vast land in Panchagarh's Tetulia in 2000. Apart from the tea, certified by three certifying agencies of Europe, Japan and the US, the company also produces herbs, rice, oil seed, honey and vegetables.

"We are exporting organic tea to the United States, Germany and Japan. We are on the way to export tea to France," said Syed Shoaib Ahmed, chief executive officer of Kazi and Kazi Tea.

According to him, his company's business grew by 114 percent over the last five years.

"It takes three years to turn the soil organic. We have dug canals along the farmland to prevent chemical ingredients leaching into the farm from nearby fields," Shoaib said.

The company used neem and other herbs as natural pest controllers in the Tetulia farm, he added.

CERTIFICATION A NECESSITY Shaheen of Gemcon Food said they mostly sell organic products grown in their farm.

"Many farmers come to us to market their organic products. If we are convinced, we get their samples tested by the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research before selling those," he told The Daily Star.

Certification of organic products is very crucial. Many might claim their produce to be organic and cheat consumers if there is no certification body, Shaheen added.

Nazim Uddin said the government last year approved Bangladesh Organic Agriculture Policy with a provision of forming a certification body.

Kayes Shamim of Proshika said there had been very little government support for organic farming.

"Promoting use of organic fertilisers should be a priority of the government if it really wants to promote the eco-friendly farming," he observed.

World unites

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OCEAN WOES

The world just marked its three hottest years in modern times. And the oceans have absorbed about one third of the carbon dioxide released by human activities, protecting the planet from the full brunt of climate change.

Melting glaciers and sea ice at the poles threatens swell sea level to the point of washing away entire islands and populated coastlines -- home to 37 percent of the planet's population -- in the coming decades.

Just 20 inches (half meter) of sea level rise could displace 1.2 million people from islands in the Caribbean Sea, Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Recent studies have shown the troubling extent of plastic pollution, even in the most remote parts of the world.

An uninhabited island in the south Pacific, Henderson Island, thousands of miles from civilization was recently shown to be piling up more than 3,500 pieces of plastic per day.

Every year, more than eight million tons of plastic washes into the oceans, costing at least \$8 billion in damage to marine eco-

systems and killing an estimated one million sea birds, 100,000 sea mammals and untold numbers of fish.

And famous coral reefs, such as Australia's Great Barrier Reef, are suffering from hot temperatures like never before in modern times, with mass bleaching and die-offs continuing unabated for the past two years.

"Small island states cannot afford to be dismayed or feel down or depressed about any of this," said Jumeau during a UN press conference.

"We are reaching out to all the friends of the oceans that you can think of to meet the challenges that we face."

CALL TO ACTION Previous global meetings on problems facing the oceans have taken place, but the World Wildlife Fund's John Tanzer described this one as "historic" because the talks are under the auspices of the United Nations for the first time.

"The reality is that oceans have been in steep decline for at least the last 50 or 60 years," Tanzer, global oceans lead at WWF, told AFP.

"Here we are in 2017, and it is impossible to talk of anywhere in the world's oceans as being pristine," he said.