

The cold facts

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

HERE are quite a few things to be noted about the on-going cold wave. Of them, two are obvious. For one thing, it has been relentless in its pattern, and therefore,

cumulative and gripping in its chilling effect. The wave, said to be a precursor of another one, towards January-end, has been continuing since January 3 without a respite. The stretch itself makes a record of sorts.

The other more weighty, record-breaking feature is the lowest temperature registered in 68 years. The mercury dropped to 2.6 degrees Celsius at Tetulia, followed by 2.9 at Syedpur, 3.2 in Dinajpur and 4.9 in Rangpur as the wave swept through the whole of the small deltaic country.

Dhaka's 9.5 was chilling enough, and interestingly though, it felt colder inside home than outside! A plausible explanation for this paradox is the absorption and retention of cold for a number of days in the concrete structure of the house you live in. By the same token, the concrete jungle that the capital city has become soaks up the chill, leaving the streets perhaps a bit warmer, what with the jammed gas spewing vehicles adding to it!

Besides, in tropical climate, our houses are not built to cushion against nippy weather. Some households may plug into a heating arrangement.

Incidentally, countries with long and severe winters apply two measures to gauge temperature. One is the "windchill" relevant to mobility purposes and the other is the mercury-read temperature. Windchill temperature feels colder to your body as the heat is pulled from your skin or body in the open air.



A family of four at the Musullipara village in Kurigram Sadar Upazila warm themselves up around burning straw on January 6, 2018.

PHOTO: ABDUL WAHED/STAR

of Geoffrey Lean: "As the ice melts it exposes open water which, being very much darker, absorbs more heat. The warmer water then warms the air above it which in turn weakens the jet stream, the high level river of air which does much to determine the weather" (*The Telegraph*, October 27, 2014).

Bangla daily *Prothom Alo*, in its issue of January 9, attributed three reasons to the cold wave sweeping Bangladesh: cold wind from Siberia, severer than before; the jet stream usually stationary 40-45 thousand feet above land came down to 30-40 thousand feet; and the cold wind blowing in an "anti-cyclonic or reverse motion."

However fascinating geo-scientific explanations of the extreme weather episodes may be, they boil down to two intertwined issues on the ground: One, standing by the cold-wreaked urban and rural poor as an immediate step and the other, centred on ensuring survival of the planet. The latter needs to be pressed forward with new urgency to prove equal to the tasks of mitigating and adapting to climate change effects as a force of good for humanity.

In just about a week, 30 persons have died from cold in Bangladesh with the elderly, women, children, the landless and the destitute being the most vulnerable to the calamity. Their plight is imaginable, without adequate clothes to tolerate the chill and blankets to sleep under. One middle-aged man gave a graphic description of the perilous nights he passed without a wink of sleep—sitting and standing in searing discomfort.

One lesson we should have learnt is, we were caught unprepared by the unprecedented cold wave. We must accept the "unprecedented" to be not a new but an old normal from now on.

Shah Husain Imam is adjunct faculty at the East West University, a commentator on current affairs, and former Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*. Email: shahhusainimam@gmail.com

Not only is Bangladesh trembling in the grip of cold, the western world, which is used to snowing, too is going through extreme weather episodes. Last year, New Zealand experienced wintry cold in summer. This year, between two ends of the world, the difference in temperature was as wide as 100 degrees Celsius. In Canada, the temperature plummeted to minus-50 degrees Celsius, while in Sydney, it rose to 48 degrees Celsius, striking fear for bush fire and spoiling a repairing innings by weather-debilitated English batsman and skipper Joe Root in the

last match of the Ashes. Vast areas of north-east America and Canada are reeling under the impact of what is termed as "bomb cyclone." Boston has had the lowest temperature since 1896. A terminal in John F. Kennedy airport went under water after an underground pipe had been breached; air travel was severely affected. All this comes about in the aftermath of Trump's trumpeting his rejectionist policy towards the historic Paris climate agreement and openly bragging that climate change could

indeed bring good to the planet. Climate sceptics often make a skin-deep claim that icy winters disprove global warming. On the contrary, new research suggests that icy weather "reinforces the case for global warming." A Tokyo university research initiative in the polar region produced a vindicating outcome as published in the *Journal Nature*. Geo-science has linked cold weather with "rapid decline of Arctic Sea ice," caused by warming over the past decade. You have an elaborate explanation of the phenomenon in the following words

Why the third world should be worried about technological revolution

MUHAMMAD MUSTAFA MONOWAR

2017 was a year of spectacle for technology enthusiasts. Robotics, Big Data, and social media have enjoyed the limelight while Elon Musk, Nick Bostrom and Stephen Hawking have raised concerns about developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Although most of these warnings have focused on the impact of AI on the western-technology-dependent countries where automation is likely to replace manpower in various job sectors, very little attention has been given to what might happen to the third-world countries due to the repercussions from the first world. As an AI enthusiast, I see a different and more sinister fate awaiting us, the third-world citizens.

Bangladesh has been a source of cheap labour for several decades. With the onset of cheaper but far more intelligent and efficient machines, these labourers will only be a liability. Here's why.

Cheap labour is at the heart of the big industries all over the world. Yet, labourers are also a burden for the companies. In addition to wages, they are liable for their various demands, accidents and deaths. Labour unions pose a major eyesore for the bourgeoisie. In contrast, machines are far more efficient at work and the companies do not have to worry about riots and uprisings.

Given these possibilities, the machines certainly seem better candidates than humans in industrial scenarios.



SOURCE: TECHNOLOGY.COM

This leaves us with a major dilemma. What happens to those people who struggle to live through every day and have to support their families with their limited income?

One possible way out could have been creating low-skilled tech labour force. For a long time, data entry posts were a major source of income for many outsourcing companies. But now that automated data generation systems are being adopted, the need for data entry and computer operators is becoming redundant.

Both the cost of education and competition have skyrocketed in recent years. Since graduates from reputed universities are given priority in the job market, most students are now forced to apply for expensive student loans to certify themselves. As the managerial posts slowly get automated, a majority of these hard-

earned certifications will go in vain, making non-automated job positions even more competitive. Meanwhile, highly specialised positions will likely be harder to achieve for many as the knowledge base is rapidly expanding beyond human limits. All these factors combined, very few among the ordinary people will likely be able to come out of the hard pit of third-world reality.

This is to become even murkier. As job sectors get replaced by automation systems, further contraction will occur due to increase in living expenses. The current trend indicates that lifestyle in the third world will be increasingly dependent on technology. Smartphones and laptops have become necessities as much as refrigerators and washing machines. Keeping up with these continuously upgrading electronics is also becoming

more difficult. The Internet of things (IoT) may arrive in Bangladesh in the near future and such systems will require smart devices that are getting harder to afford. Cheap electronics provide temporary solutions but are vulnerable to data theft and privacy breach. Thus having a secure gadget will become as important as maintaining a bank account. Those who will not be able to afford such products will become vulnerable to cybercrimes, adding to their miseries. Piracy has so far been untracked in third world countries due to many reasons. However, with crackdowns on piracy, content licenses are to become even harder to crack. As

illegal access to video contents, books, and research works becomes increasingly unaffordable for many, independent learning will become a major challenge for these people. On the other hand, available pirated content will further increase vulnerability to hacking and data breach. The wealthy will however benefit most from these kinds of mechanisms. Having more control of the data extracted from the people by various means as well as cash inflow from increasing dependency on legal purchasing systems, wealth inequality will worsen. While corruption at the higher tiers will become extremely hard to detect and publicise, supervision of the day-to-day activities of ordinary people will become more frequent. Any public uprisings that occur will likely be foiled by the use of data politics.

Data politics will be a dominant phenomenon. With public information being constantly extracted through various techno-surveillance systems, the device-dependent masses will have almost zero privacy in the online world. Those who may try to lead resistance movements against the elite may be "pacified" through flushing of private records. As the resistance continues to disintegrate by misinformation-induced confusions by junky media portals, the elite will continue to have more control over social dynamics in the lower tiers of society. Amidst rumours and fake news, authentic media sources will eventually die out. Citizen journalism will gain some ground; yet, it ironically will be used against the citizens themselves.

Thus, on one hand, the elite will continue to enjoy advantageous lifestyles and live longer through technology-induced longevity. On the other, the masses will become liabilities for them.

Increasing digitalisation of 21st-century life will lead to two major issues. One, automated digital appliances will be everywhere, and Internet will be needed to sustain the smooth continuity of such a global system. Two, to sustain the aforementioned infrastructure, power will be more in demand than ever before. To sustain a growing digital infrastructure, more natural resource reserves will be needed. In the world of geopolitics, securing precious minerals takes precedence over the interests of ordinary people. As the existing resources continue to get depleted, more populations will be displaced through crises artificially created with the sole purpose of securing minerals.

And what happens to the huge chunk of the population that cannot be educated or provided jobs or be utilised in any other way? Being totally redundant and unintegratable to elite-controlled institutions, we might, one day, find ourselves being confronted by a handful of people who have no regard for international and humanitarian laws.

The future may hold many promises, but I fear it may not be meant for us, the majority—but only for the wealthy.

Muhammad Mustafa Monowar is assistant manager of human resources at Bangladesh-China Power Company (Pvt) Limited.

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QUOTABLE Quote

WILLIAM BLAKE
English poet and painter (1757-1827)

Great things are done when men and mountains meet. This is not done by jostling in the street.

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

WHY ARE YOU SO LATE FOR OUR DATE?
I OVERSLEPT!
GREG + MORT WALKER

IT'S 8P.M.!!
IT WAS MY AFTERNOON NAP

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

I'M AFRAID OF THE VACUUM CLEANER. I MUST BE PART DOG.
YEAH RIGHT.

THERE'S MORE TO BEING A DOG THAN BEING AFRAID OF A VACUUM CLEANER.

WLN IS OUR SON BUTT-SCOOTING DOWN THE HALL?
HAMMIE!

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