

Climate change will hurt Bangladesh

World Bank report paints grim picture

ACCORDING to a World Bank (WB) report titled "South Asia's Hotspots: The Impact of Temperature and Precipitation Changes on Living Standards", more than 75 percent of the population (13.4 crore people) will be adversely affected by rising temperatures which will result in a rise of vector-borne and other infectious diseases. If the WB report predictions come true, we could be looking at a loss of nearly seven percent of our GDP, or USD 171 billion. The numbers are mindboggling because entire population centres in the country have been mapped out and the cost of inaction by global powers is going to be borne by Asian countries including Bangladesh.

While major economic powerhouses in Europe, Asia and the Americas continue to bicker over the preventive measures outlined in the Paris climate change agreement of 2015, the cost of inaction will mean that countries like Bangladesh may see the average annual temperature rise by 1-1.5 degrees Celsius by the year 2050. We could be looking at wiping out achievements of preceding decades and a return to earlier poverty levels as agriculture production takes a hit thanks to submergence of low-lying regions and lower annual rainfall.

The report singles out Chittagong as the third most affected region. That is bad news for Bangladesh. The port city is the second largest urban centre in the country and it is also a major commercial and economic hub that hosts the country's premier sea port. At the end of the day, we need to take cognisance of these hard truths and start investing in new economic areas. We must look beyond agriculture so that when these climatic shocks hit us, the populace and the economy are better equipped to handle them.

Show a little compassion

Allow Toriqul to attend exams in sick bed

IT is shocking to learn that Toriqul Islam, a student of the Department of Islamic Studies at Rajshahi University and a victim of a BCL-led attack during the quota reform movement, was denied permission to attend his Master's exams in sick bed. He is still having difficulty walking or keeping balance and clearly, it is very difficult for him to take a four-hour exam sitting like a regular student. In spite of that, he was denied permission by the university authorities when he applied to take the exams at the university's medical centre.

Such a decision by the RU authorities displays an abject lack of sympathy for a student who has suffered immense physical trauma. And now he is being subjected to mental trauma by the authorities. While the university authorities should have played the role of his guardian, they have taken a decision that totally goes against his interest.

He is now facing a double setback. First, he is severely injured and unsure of when he will get back the use of his right leg fully. Second, there is the uncertainty of taking the exam. We are worried about what the future holds for Toriqul if he fails to complete his Master's studies. It is common practice in our educational institutions to allow sick students to sit for exams at the medical facilities of that respective institution, and this should be followed too in Toriqul's case. Can we not expect a little more compassion and empathy from the university authorities towards this unfortunate student?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Rohingya crisis: Int'l community must do more

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a recent interview with Reuters accused—and rightly so—the Myanmar authorities of using delaying tactics to block the Rohingya repatriation process. She also expressed her government's inability to take in nearly a million Rohingya refugees permanently in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh opened its borders on humanitarian grounds to these refugees fleeing the Rakhine State of Myanmar, their ancestral land, after a violent crackdown on them by Myanmar's brutal security forces.

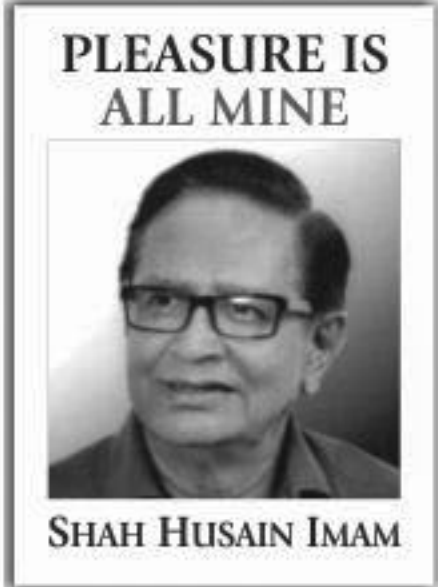
The responsibility to pressurise Myanmar's military regime to take back these refugees lies with the international community. Bangladesh alone cannot do that.

With a huge population of 160 million, Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. It's simply impractical and unfair to ask the country to accept a million more on a permanent basis. Providing for these refugees dispersed in makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar is straining the country's resources and discontent is fast brewing among locals. The world must come forward and extend a helping hand.

Myanmar's military junta must not get away with committing what many have called ethnic cleansing and even genocide. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has decided to launch an investigation into the military operation that led to the Rohingya exodus into Bangladesh. The world community must express their unconditional and unequivocal support for the investigation.

Tahfim Hasan
Chittagong University

Our women migrant workers must be protected



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

TRY as we might to reconcile the two trends in Bangladesh's development story, one consistently positive and the other indicative of a lack of distributive justice, we may fail to make the pieces of the puzzle fit, and therefore, marvel at it as a "miracle" development.

There are two patterns in the performance scorecard that don't mesh. On the one side, we have had improving socioeconomic indicators projecting a shiny sheen in the region; even the HDI ranking notched up by two points. Demand-driven economic dynamism is a robust sign of maturity. On the other hand, we see default and land-grabbing cultures, not to mention flight of capital robbing us of what could have been yet more substantial GDP growth.

The size of our GDP is respectably high and the annual budget has been "overambitious", if not oversized, as is borne out by slower-than-expected implementation rate in the first quarter. The GDP growth rate is posted above seven percent, and the big head-turner is our topping the list in terms of rapid acquisition of wealth. Even the US and China have been surpassed by this acquisition criterion.

What stand in stark contrast to such achievements are the tales of horrific physical indignity, mental torture and rude repatriation of an increasing number of Bangladeshi migrant workers from the Middle East back home. But in spite of all these stories reportedly coming out of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, etc,

women workers keep going to the Middle East through legal or illegal channels. They are even landing in Libya and Syria in search of household jobs. But going through the mill of repression and various forms of indignities amounting to human rights violations, they soon become desperate to return home via a "safe house" or "shelter home", if they are lucky to get to one. Insensitive to human values, the employers treat women not as human beings but as commodities or mere chattels to be bandied about in a medieval-age fashion.

Firstly, these women are human beings. Secondly, they have brought their

2,34,831 went to Saudi Arabia alone. But Saudi Arabia, the principal destination for manpower export from Bangladesh, raising allegations of irregularities, lack of professionalism, commission of crimes and violation of local laws, put a lid on worker migration in 2008. The authorities arrested many "illegal immigrants" on that occasion.

However, three years on in 2011, the Saudis took a U-turn proposing intake of women workers from Bangladesh free of cost. This was purportedly done on an unwritten understanding that male workers will be taken conditional upon sending in female workers. Accordingly, Bangladesh resumed sending women

"underpaid and overworked, domestic workers perform services essential for many households to function and to allow others to participate in the formal economy."

Actually, the IOM and ILO as organisations and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families as instrumentalities will have harnessed for a benign impact on migration.

The nine causes cited for the growing ranks of returnees are homesickness, food habits, language problem, transport



minds to be working as domestic aids. And last but not least, they opted for a harsh climate compared to a home environment. So they deserve all the civility and consideration that a host should be capable of.

Countries like the Philippines, Nepal and Sri Lanka had stopped sending their women nationals to work as housemaids in the Middle East. In 2011, a parliamentary delegation from the Philippines brought up the fact that repression in Saudi Arabia of women workers happened with routine regularity.

According to the statistics of Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), from January 1991 to April 2018 some 7,35,575 female workers were sent to the Middle East of which

workers to Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, the Saudi government withdrew the restriction on male workers. Between 2015 and 2017, 1,72,592 Bangladeshis had gone to Saudi Arabia, of them 3,339 returned to the country. The latest figure for returnees is 5,000.

The cumulative figures of wage earners and returnees from their workplaces as well as those languishing in safe homes or jails to be repatriated should be made known to the public. Also it is important that we get a move on to create and update a data bank in our missions abroad on workers entering into and exiting from a host country. Without such inputs in place no effective policy formulation is possible.

The importance of migrant workers is underlined by the fact that though

difficulty, lack of physical fitness, excessive work pressure, work at more than one place, verbal abuse and physical torture.

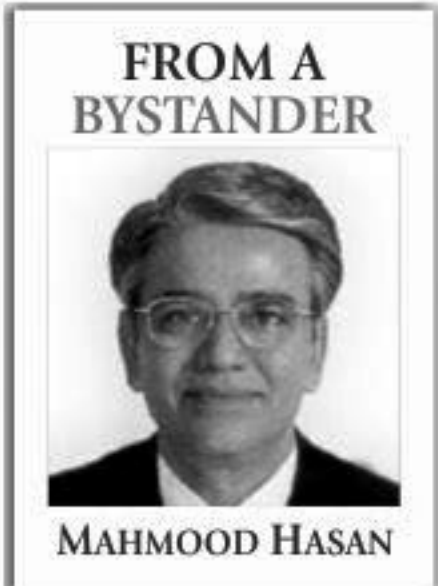
The question is, why send them out with such problems? While we do the grooming part, it will be of little avail if workers will be subjected to verbal and physical abuses which fall on the part of hosts to correct and reform.

In the end, as a country championing gender equality and women's empowerment, we must execute zero tolerance to undermining our women. Mistreatment of them is tantamount to an affront to us.

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Maldives turns over a new leaf



MAHMOOD HASAN

IT has been a turbulent year for the paradise islands of Maldives. The presidential election held on September 23, 2018 was in many ways a referendum on incumbent President Abdulla Yameen's five-year autocratic rule. The election is seen as a halt to Maldives' democratic backsliding.

According to unofficial results, President Yameen got 47.1 percent of the votes while the only other opposition candidate Ibrahim Mohamed Solih secured 58.3 percent votes. Ninety percent of the 262,000 voters (out of a population of 428,000) went to the polling booths to exercise their franchise. There are no allegations that the Maldives Election Commission has been incompetent in handling the election.

Ibrahim Solih, popularly known as "Ibu", was first elected to the Majlis (parliament) in 1994. Solih played a leading role in forming the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and is a veteran of the Maldives Political Reform Movement. Former President Mohamed Nasheed, who had to resign in February 2012 under disputed circumstances, wanted to run for the presidency. But in June 2018, the Maldives Election Commission declared Nasheed ineligible. Nasheed is convicted of terrorism charges and now lives in exile in Sri Lanka.

Yameen's autocratic tendencies drove the MDP, the Jumhooree Party, the Adhalaat Party and former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's faction of the Progressive Party to come together and push the candidature of Nasheed's brother-in-law Ibrahim Solih to unseat Abdulla Yameen. The decision to present a single candidate by the opposition parties actually changed the dynamics of the election. People saw an experienced parliamentarian as an alternative candidate which eventually undid President Yameen.

Many observers feared that Yameen, known for his undemocratic track record of muzzling the press, declaring state of emergency, sending opposition leaders

and Supreme Court judges to jail would employ dubious means to stay in power. The election was closely watched by India, China, US, and EU.

New Delhi seemed relieved that Yameen lost the election and is quite upbeat at Solih's victory. PM Narendra Modi congratulated Ibrahim Solih on his victory and invited him to Delhi to discuss strengthening the friendship between the two countries. Delhi no doubt is keen to repair ties with Male which were strained under President Yameen. Solih also indicated that he would strengthen relations with Delhi. America too welcomed the victory of Solih—hoping that he will move away from Beijing's ambit.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman also congratulated Solih and said that China respected the Maldivian people's

because the people willed it...The people of Maldives want change, justice and stability."

President Yameen, after the vote, said, "In front of the Maldivian people, my work was sincere. But yesterday the Maldivian people made their decision about me. So, I have decided to accept the results and stay in service to the people in any way I can." After conceding defeat, Yameen said he would hand over power to Ibrahim Solih on November 17, 2018 when his term ends.

The election results bear significance because President Yameen since coming to power in 2013 moved out of the Indian sphere of influence and fostered closer ties with China. That strained relations between Delhi and Male. Yameen also pulled out of the Commonwealth in



Ibrahim Mohamed Solih greeting a crowd after winning the election.

PHOTO: AHMED SHURAU/AFP

verdict and wanted to consolidate the traditional friendship between the two countries. Beijing called for "continuity and stability" in the archipelago. One wonders if Yameen's defeat in the election is a setback for Beijing.

President-elect Solih said after the election, "The will of the people has spoken...For many of us it has been a difficult journey...But it has been a journey that has ended in the ballot box,

2016 after the organisation accused the Maldives government of rights abuse and money laundering. That contributed to weakening of relations with the West.

The tussle between India and China over Maldives is because of its geostrategic location in the Indian Ocean. China wants to extend its naval reach in the Indian Ocean. Chinese investment in modernising the Maldives

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port is a component of Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative. India sees this project as a Chinese attempt to establish a naval base in Maldives—a threat to India's security. The Americans are also suspicious that a Chinese naval facility in Maldives may become a threat to the US base in Diego Garcia.

Maldives under Yameen became heavily indebted to China. According to Maldives Independent, the debt amounts to USD 1.5 billion. This debt trap is seen as a threat to Maldives' democracy. The International Monetary Fund estimated that Maldives' total external debt was 42.8 percent of its GDP in 2018. Solih, before the election, said he would review all Chinese projects as there are concerns about repayment for Maldives' small economy of USD 4.22 billion (WB, 2016). How far Solih will be able to steer Male away from Beijing is something that remains to be seen.

Soft-spoken, consensus-builder Ibrahim Mohamed Solih is said to be a believer in the true spirit of democracy. But he will be faced with a foreign policy dilemma: to strike a balance between China and India. The other challenges that he will have to handle are to get Maldives out of the Chinese "debt trap" and restore the democratic institutions that were undermined by outgoing President Abdulla Yameen.

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