

Election manifestos, climate change and cities



THE GRUDGING URBANIST
ADNAN MORSHED

IN their election manifestos political parties would appear prudent if they address cities as the frontier for fighting the adverse effects of climate change. In the era of global warming, smart climate-change strategists around the world view the city as both a villain and an opportunity. Because, as much as they contribute to economic growth, cities also produce more than 75 percent of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions. With their industrial activities, population density, transportation, and energy usage, they are key contributors to global warming.

This is counterintuitive because when we think of the effects of climate change we usually conjure up haunting images of coastal areas, melting icebergs, deserts littered with animal carcasses, and drought-hit territories with burnt trees.

But we seldom think of the city as an affected area due to climate change or, more importantly, as a cause of it. We rarely see how the processes of urbanisation and climate-related vulnerabilities are deeply interconnected. It is essential to understand how urbanisation has become one of the most powerful and visible anthropogenic effects on Earth. The world's urban population will rise from less than 30 percent in 1950 to 75 percent by 2050. Cities are the engines of economic growth. South Korea's 50 percent GDP is attributed to Seoul; in Bangladesh, 36 percent to Dhaka. However, the flipside of the city's heroic economic narrative is that cities are also the most corrosive pollutants of the planet's environment.

Mitigating climate change problems, thus, requires a sustained engagement with the



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ways cities are designed, governed, maintained, and developed.

Bangladesh has missed this policy focus so far. Here, the climate change conversation has been singularly dominated by the spectre of a "southern threat." That is, with ongoing global warming and the resultant sea-level rise, a significant landmass of Bangladesh's coastal south would disappear under water. And, a vast coastal population would lose their livelihood and become climate refugees, destabilising local and regional security. Al Gore's Oscar-winning documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), helped popularise this particular view of Bangladesh among the global community concerned with climate

change and its disastrous effects on such low-lying countries as Bangladesh and Maldives.

The susceptibility of Bangladesh's southern seaboard to global climatic catastrophes could not be underestimated. But a linear emphasis on the southern threat, unfortunately, blurs the urgency of the country's more immediate environmental threats due to rapid, ecology-defying urbanisation. An immediate environmental menace with long-term climatic implications lurks at the geographic centre of the country because of the monstrous urban growth of Dhaka and its deleterious effects on the fragile land-water ecosystem that has historically sustained the capital and its

surrounding regions. Dhaka's frenzied growth in all directions, devouring rivers, water bodies, and agricultural lands, is as serious an environmental threat as the sea-level rise due to global warming.

The capital's urban growth not only exemplifies the dire environmental consequences of uncontrolled, profit-driven, and icon-centric urbanisation in Bangladesh, but also alarms us, more generally, about the collective need to view cities as the frontier of climate change. With sustainable environmental policies cities present the single most potent weapon to combat climate-related environmental problems.

Three urban policies, by no means exclusive, should be considered for cities to be an efficient defence against climate change.

First, a city's growth must take into consideration the ecology of the place. Altering the fundamental geography of a place in the name of development would mean tampering with nature's *balance* which is essential for a place's continued ecological harmony. Consider Chittagong. Rampant hill-cutting in the port city changes its land form (which is nature's trial-and-error method of perfecting a geographic condition through millions of years), exposing it to natural calamities caused by climatic abnormalities. River-filling in Dhaka would mean fewer drainage arteries for the snow-melted water that descends from the Himalayan plateau and passes through the flat Bengal delta.

Second, cities must be compact, so that they can foster walkable communities and a culture of smaller carbon footprints. Compact cities are served well by a mass transit system, reducing the need for personal cars and carbon emissions from them. A compact metropolis with an urban growth boundary stops sprawl, generates fewer heat-producing surfaces, and preserves carbon-reducing agricultural fields. Lest we forget, buildings and transportation together account for 37

percent of global carbon emissions. A perpetually expanding city, with its built-up area and dependence on personal transportation, is basically a heat island and a carbon factory. Urban compactness has become one of the essential mantras of sustainable urbanism and an efficient strategy against global warming.

Third, implementation of environmental laws should be an unflinching urbanisation policy to ensure the preservation of a city's "lifeline" like rivers, hills, wetlands, etc. The protection of natural resources provides cities and their regions with the best ability to be resilient in the face of natural disasters. Cities provide easy access to transportation hubs. Thus, factories tend to flock to cities, so that they can easily and quickly export their products. But, as much as they are stimulants of national economy factories are also environmental pollutants, unless strict environmental laws are enforced. Consider the air-polluting brickfields on the outskirts of Dhaka. Their environmental hazards may seem local and temporary, but they severely harm the region's long-term climate resiliency.

The best way to tackle climate-induced vulnerabilities is to protect and preserve nature's way of balancing itself. When development takes precedence over nature's balance, when human activities radically alter a place's elementary geography, their environmental consequences are bound to be calamitous. Since Bangladesh's future is urban, the best place to ensure the country's ecological wellbeing is its cities. This basic understanding should frame the next government's climate-change strategies.

Adnan Morshed is an architect, architectural historian, and urbanist. He teaches in Washington, DC, and serves as executive director of the Centre for Inclusive Architecture and Urbanism (CI+AU) at BRAC University. He is the author of *DAC/Dhaka in 25 Buildings* (2017) and a member of the USA-based Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI).
 Email: amorshed@bracu.ac.bd

Awaiting justice for the Boroitola mass killings

EMRAN MAHFUZ

THE Pakistani occupation forces with the help of their local collaborators started their campaign of genocide and torture in a planned way from the beginning of 1971, with the aim of suppressing Bengali nationalism.

Their target was to capture all the big towns in the then East Pakistan by March 26, and eliminate the political and military opposition within the month.

The most glorious history of the Bengalis was written in 1971. The most painful memory of 1971 is the barbaric genocide of Bengalis by the Pakistani Army. Many atrocities committed by Pakistani troops and their local collaborators are still unknown to us.

Freedom fighter Lt Col (Retd) Quazi Sajjad Ali Zahir Bir Protik roamed the different localities in the country and documented various incidents of genocide through his investigations.

Boroitola mass killing ground in Sadar upazila of Kishoreganj district is one of the scenes of such atrocities. A total of 365 innocent people from different nearby villages were brought here and killed on October 13, 1971.

Boroitola is under Joshodol union in Kishoreganj district. Boroitola is considered as the biggest mass killing ground in Kishoreganj Sadar thana.

There was some confusion regarding the information on the mass killing that took place there in *Kishoreganjer Itihas* compiled by Mohammad Saidur and Mohammad Ali Khan, and *Rokte Bheja Kishoreganj* written by Jahangir Alam Jahan. The correct information was later incorporated in *Muktijuddhe Kishoreganjer Itihas* by Jahangir Alam Jahan.

On October 13, 1971 (Ashwin 28, 1378 Bangla year) Wednesday, at around 2:30 pm

about 20 Pakistani Army troops in black uniform and another 20 Razakars came from Kishoreganj to Joshodol village in a special train after crossing Joshodol rail station.

The Pakistani troops and Razakars came down from the train and entered Dampara village near Joshodol. They indiscriminately set fire on houses in the village including that of Hafez Touhid's. They killed Gurudayal Nomodas, Kadu Nomodas, Dengu Nomodas and Abdul Mannan in the village.

About 500 innocent villagers from Dampara, Chiknirchar, Kalikabari, Tilaknathpur, Gobindapur and some other villages left their homesteads and took shelter in a sugarcane orchard near Narosunda river adjacent to the house of Azizul Haque, a teacher of Azimpur High School in Kishoreganj. But members of the Pakistani Army and the Razakars detained them there

It has been estimated that 365 persons were killed during the Boroitola genocide on that day. Names of many of those who were killed there on that day still remain unknown.

and gathered near the rail line adjacent to Boroitola.

Some Pakistani troops who were separeated from the group entered the village and looted



A monument built in memory of the victims of the Boroitola mass killing in the Sadar Upazila of Kishoreganj.

gold ornaments, cash and other valuables and came to Kishoreganj town through Monipurghat area in the suburbs via Jinarai village. Neither the Pakistani Army nor the Razakars were aware that some the troops had been separated from the main group.

Razakar Abul Hashim of Chiknirchar village informed the Pakistani troops that the people in the nearby village had killed one of those soldiers. Hearing this the Pakistani Army gathered at Boroitola village and killed the villagers using bayonets, iron rods and by shooting them with their firearms. A few villagers took permission to offer prayers and took shelter in the nearby mosque. Some of them are still alive. Many are still bearing the scars of the torture that was done to them. The relatives of the martyrs are still in tears.

The trial of those who had committed such crimes against humanity in 1971 has still not been completed. Many relatives of the victims

of Boroitola mass killing are still struggling to live their lives. None enquires about their conditions. They have not yet been given the status of being family members of the martyrs of 1971.

Kishoreganj-Nikli road runs about four kilometres southeast from Kishoreganj Sadar. The Boroitola ground is by the road. The house of the acting president during the Liberation War time government, Syed Nazrul Islam, is near Boroitola. So the occupation forces and Razakars had their eyes carefully set on the area.

Local Razakars had perpetrated the terrible genocide in the area on October 13. About 400 villagers were gathered at the Boroitola ground. Each of their villagers had their hands and feet tied before being killed. The mosque in the area is a witness to these atrocities.

Abdul Aziz was an assistant teacher of

Azim Uddin High School in the town during that time. Old age now has made him weak. His eyes light up when the atrocities of the day are mentioned to him. His life was saved because he was not in town that day, but four of his family members, including his uncle were killed.

According to Abdul Aziz, all hell broke loose that day. There was none left to even bury the bodies. Many were forced to let the bodies of their near and dear ones float on the river in fear of the militias and Razakars. The former teacher said he had seen 25-30 bodies floating on the Narasunda river.

Many households are still bearing the painful memories of what happened in the villages of Korsha Kariail union.

It has been estimated that 365 persons were killed during the Boroitola genocide on that day. Names of many of those who were killed there on that day still remain unknown.

The relatives of those martyred during the killings could not yet bury the bodies of their loved ones. Many of the men in the village were killed. The relatives of these martyrs were forced to leave the area because of threats from the Pakistani occupation forces and the Razakars. Many bodies were strewn in the area. Many were washed away by the Narasunda river. Many bodies lying in the sugarcane fields were eaten up by jackals and dogs. The waters of the Narasunda river flow, having been a witness to such painful history.

After the independence of the country the villagers changed the name of the village to Shahidnagar and built a memorial near the killing ground. Later, a beautiful plaque containing the names and addresses of the martyrs were erected there.

Emran Mahfuz is poet, researcher and editor of *Kaler Dhoni*.
 E-mail emran.mahfuz@thedailystar.net
 Translated by Enamul Huq

ON THIS DAY
IN HISTORY

Elena Ceausescu (left) and husband Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.
 December 25, 1989

ROMANIAN PRESIDENT NICOLAE CEAUDESCU AND WIFE ELENA WERE EXECUTED

The communist leader and his wife were deposed after a revolution. They were summarily executed by a firing squad following a show trial which lasted for about an hour.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Sighing cry
5 Macho fellow
10 Cavalry sword
12 Select group
13 Makes more efficient
15 -- glance (quickly)
16 Easy victim
17 D.C. baseballer
18 Florence family
20 Tenor Carreras
21 Car type
22 Blown away
23 TV's DeGeneres
25 Seoul setting
28 Clarifying words
31 Skillet

DOWN

24 Talk casually
34 Play division
35 Architect I.M.
36 Have debts
37 Broadway groups
40 Steamed
41 -- Coeur
42 Short jackets
43 Orderly
25 Cochise's people
26 Fragrant packet
27 All told
29 Immediately
30 Dawning period
33 Stopwatch
35 Young dogs
38 Sprint
39 Writer Fleming

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY
BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES
BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT