

Populism and how it impacts democracy

ZIAUS SHAMS CHOWDHURY

In recent times, the socio-political scenes in scores of countries around the world have been turning toxic. A creeping polarisation among political forces is taking hold, accompanied by a culture of demonising the adversaries, use of vitriolic and bareknuckle hate rhetoric. The norms of civility and tolerance are eroding rapidly. A complex array of factors is driving this venomous trend, with the result that even in countries that had earlier experienced decently democratic governance, people, especially minority ethno-religious groups, now live in a stifling atmosphere of insecurity.

Recently, the UN Secretary General Mr Antonio Guterres in his address to the Human Rights Council in Geneva on February 25 voiced deep disquiet about this trend.

Turning to the deplorable and spreading breaches in multiple areas of human rights, the SG observed: "I am also deeply alarmed by the shrinking space in every region of the globe and every corner of internet... One thousand human rights defenders and journalists were killed in the last three years... we must hold accountable those who commit such acts. We must not tolerate the outrageous near impunity for crimes against journalists and media workers." The SG drew attention to how the political processes in every region is being poisoned; "Indeed, hate is moving into the mainstream in liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes alike. Some major parties and leaders are cutting and pasting ideas from the fringes into their own propaganda and electoral campaigns."

The Secretary General's angst over a trend which will increasingly destabilise societies and fuel strife and conflict, and perhaps beget worse things, was not vented merely as a ritual. He pointed to a gravely real and insidious phenomenon that civilised minds everywhere need to combat collectively before it eviscerates civilised political templates across the face of the globe and enmesh humanity in unspeakable misery.

In the later part of 2018, a scholarly

violent and confrontational." They agreed that populism can be hostile to liberal democracy. Bonikowski observed that this hostility is exhibited in the politics of the radical right that subsumes populism, nationalism and authoritarianism. Kafman noted that populism can be a negative force. It erodes respect for liberal institutions, minorities, and reason. These features of populism are afflicting many nations and are in frequent discussions.

Roodjuin Matthis argues that populism is



exchange among four intellectuals, Daphne Haliokopoulou of University of Reading, Bart Bonikowski of Harvard, Kaufman of University of London and Roodjuin Matthis of University of Amsterdam explored in some depth how populism shapes political behaviour and mindset. These scholars looked at the working of populism and the way they affect societies. Their consensual view was that populism is a form of nationalism that is "exclusionary,

incompatible with the liberal pillar of contemporary democracies and tends to breed "the tyranny of majority". Haliokopoulou contends that populism is always negative, rejects democratic institutions and processes and also the very basis of democracy. Though "linked with the will of the people", she points out that in practice, it undermines institutions that underpin checks and balances which are the

bedrock of democracy's functionality.

All these four scholars attempt to draw a distinction between right-wing and left-wing populism. They agree that while right-wing populism sets people against the cultural elite, left-wing populism pits the people against an economic elite. What is common between the two types is that they both create an animus between the people and the elite.

An important aspect of right-wing populism that needs to be recognised is its affinity with "ethno-traditional nationalism" (Kaufman's term). This version of populism does not so much as oppose a minority presence but is fearful of, and tries to prevent a change of the demographic structure that may make a minority morph into a majority. In other words, the movement works to prevent traditional ethnic composition.

Left-wing populism tends to imbue their populism with an inclusive, civic character, in contrast to the exclusionary version pushed by the right-wingers.

A brief reference to some specific cases of how populism is expressing itself in terms of political realities will provide some clarity.

The case of how Victor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary and an outspoken nationalist, is trying to destroy the democratic institutions and turn Hungary into a repressive authoritarian state deserves attention. Orban, in power since 2010, has moved inexorably towards concentrating unbridled power, eliminating constitutional safeguards and reshaping the state to his agenda and "posing a threat to even the European Union" (*Atlantic*). The main centre right party of EU parliament is furious, and

threatened to expel his ruling Fidesz Party from the grouping. His hard-line policy on immigration and undermining of the rule of law has utterly alienated the EPP, European Parliament's biggest group. The European Commission Chairman Jean-Claude Juncker backs this move. The Chairman of the European Stability Union think tank Gerald Knaus has called him "the most dangerous man in the European Union."

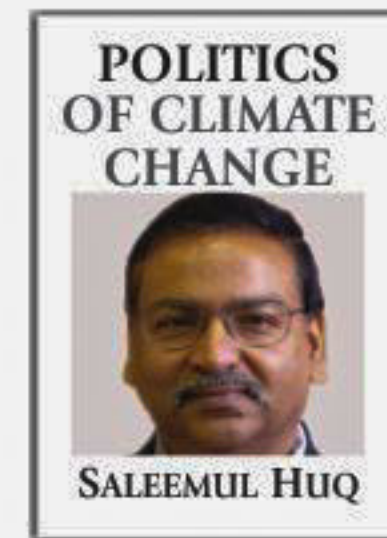
Another example is Brazil's new president Jair Bolsonaro. He is a far-right, pro-gun, pro-torture populist who was elected in Brazil's last polarising election which has the potential to reframe the world's fourth biggest democracy. I do not need to say that there are other very glaring examples which my readers must surely be aware of.

It is a very worrying thing that more and more political personalities now find it convenient to play on certain complexes and proclivities of a given segment of society (e.g. an ethno-religious demographic group) to advance their political ambitions. They fuel these very proclivities which in turn inflames rift and tensions in nations. A consequence of this political contraption is that the groups that feel threatened will react with their own devices, and react with equal rancour and virulence.

Look at what is happening in America after the Democrats retrieved the Congress and the eerie outlook for the next two years leading up to 2020 presidential election! Listen to the tone of how the media is covering events!

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How refugees, migrants and climate change are related



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE words refugees, migrants and climate change are increasingly becoming connected to each other, but sometimes causing more noise than shedding light! The three terms have very distinct origins and global fora for discourse which were quite different and siloed in the past.

However over the last year all of them have recognised the need to connect with each other. I will try to share some basic concepts and avenues to further connect the three discourses and their stakeholders.

Let us start with the word "refugees" which has a very specific definition that derives from the Geneva Conventions and has a specific UN agency called the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) assigned to deal with it. This term is generally used to refer to people who are forced (usually because of conflict) to flee their country and go to another country where they can claim political asylum and then come under the jurisdiction of the UNHCR.

An associated aspect of this category are people who have to leave their homes and place of residence but remain in their own country. Such people are referred to as "Internally Displaced Persons" or IDPs. There is an International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) based in Geneva which tries to gather data and information on IDPs, but they remain the jurisdiction of national governments only.

The word "migrants" has a much more complicated definition as it includes economic, political as well as environmental causes for people to leave their homes and move away, either staying in their own country or crossing into another country. This includes both "push factors" such as environmental degradation as well as "pull factors" such as jobs in host countries.

There is an international agency called the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) based in Geneva which is now a UN agency as well as a global forum called the Global Compact in Migration (GCM) which includes over 160 countries. The IOM deals with international migrants in distress and helps look after them while trying to return them to their

own country of origin.

The third is "climate change" which is a "push factor" under environmental causes of people having to leave their homes due to the fact that human induced climate change makes their ability to remain untenable. There is some evidence of this already happening (although it remains difficult to clearly attribute current displacement due to human induced climate change). However there is no confusion about

At the last COP24 held in Katowice, Poland last year this issue was addressed in the acceptance of the Task Force Report on Displacement, which finally agreed to address climate change caused forced displacement going forward.

There is also a fourth arena of global discourse which was started a few years ago by a handful of countries including Norway, Germany, France, Bangladesh and the Philippines. This has become known as the Global Platform on Disaster

Compact on Refugees agreed at the UN General Assembly in New York last September. In it, human induced climate change was flagged as an important issue that should be addressed going forward. The second major event took place in December last year with the Global Compact on Migration agreed by over 160 countries in Marrakech, Morocco where climate change induced migration was also flagged as an important issue to address. This took place at the same time as COP24 in Katowice where the Task Force on Displacement was adopted by the UNFCCC.

So at the global level there has been a recent set of decisions in the different fora dealing with refugees, migrants and climate change to bring the three issues together and plan better so that we can avoid potential future crisis.

At the national level for Bangladesh, all three discourses are relevant going forward. Just to give an example, the nearly one million Rohingya's forcibly displaced from Myanmar are not climate change refugees or climate migrants, but they will certainly become very vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. So far both UNHCR and IOM have been engaged but not the UNFCCC. It is thus time to bring the UNFCCC into the picture.

Another aspect of potential future climate change induced displacement, may occur mainly from low lying coastal districts where we can expect tens of millions of climate change induced displacement over the next two decades. These climate change induced migrants of the future will be primarily IDPs, hence the responsibility of Bangladesh to plan for their movement with dignity to cities and towns other than Dhaka increases. This can be done by promoting the notion of developing climate resilient migrant friendly towns around the country to avoid them from ending up in Dhaka.

Bangladesh has an opportunity to lead the global discourse as well as actions that link the issues of refugees, migrants and climate change. The first step is to be clear about what we are talking about when using these different terms that are related.

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Rohingya refugees at the Thankhali refugee camp in Bangladesh.

PHOTO: ED JONES/AFP

projecting into the future that many tens of millions of people living in some of the most climate vulnerable places will be forcibly displaced because of the adverse impacts of human induced climate change.

The arena for climate change is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which meets each year at its annual Conference of Parties (COP) where this issue of potential future forced displacement comes under the issue of Loss and Damage as it refers to the loss of livelihood of millions of people over the coming decades.

Displacement (PDD) and holds a major international conference each year organised by the Chair of the PDD. This year Bangladesh is the chair of the platform and recently held the international conference in Dhaka with high level representatives from the UNHCR, IOM and UNFCCC as well as civil society to try to bring these different stakeholders together to focus on potential climate change as a factor in causing more refugees as well as migrants in future.

In the last one year there have been several important events and decisions in the three global arenas mentioned above. The first was the Global

QUOTABLE Quote

MARGARET MEAD
(1901-1978)
AMERICAN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGIST

Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Tightly packed	33 Losing scheme	9 Smooth
6 Handled roughly	34 Roe source	10 Car scar
11 Benefit	36 Ukraine capital	16 "Da-- Ron Ron"
12 Green hue	38 Pan, for one	18 "Let's go!"
13 Pub pastime	40 Make better	19 Lounge attire
14 Weighed down	43 Game place	21 May honorees
15 Deplored	44 Skirt inserts	23 Hotel desk fixture
17 Special talent	45 Peevish	24 Exceptional
18 Riding whip	46 Start	25 Try for a fly
20 General Bradley		27 Class member
22 Do a yard job	DOWN	30 Moose's cousin
23 New arrivals of the 1950s	1 June honoree	33 Evil spirit
26 Past plump	2 Longoria of TV	34 Minor fight
28 Showy parrot	3 Close calls, of sorts	35 Take on
29 Gets comfy	4 Crunch kin	37 Othello's undero
31 Period in history	5 Otherwise	39 Beam of light
32 Carefully select	6 Campaign pro	41 Once known as
	7 Mobile setting	42 "Spring ahead" hrs.
	8 Pass catchers	

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

ZERO! WATCH IT WITH THAT RIFLE! SORRY, SARGE, BUT IT'S NOT LOADED. ARE YOU SURE? I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING!

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

ALL READY FOR SCHOOL TOMORROW, ZOE? YES. IT TOOK ME THREE HOURS, BUT I'M READY. YOU HAD THREE HOURS OF HOMEWORK? NO. THREE HOURS TO FIND A HARP-BAND THAT MATCHES MY SHOES. I DID MY HOMEWORK ON THE WAY HOME FROM SCHOOL.