

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SECURITY

# What the discourse is all about



MIZAN R KHAN

**W**E, the global community, already live in a climate-changed world, evidenced by the successive reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Even President Trump cannot deny that climate disasters in the US have increased in frequency, severity and magnitude in recent decades. Extreme climate disasters have become the “new normal”, with devastating effects on the rich and the poor alike. Obviously, the risks to economies and societies have become an issue of security concern for the academic, policy and military communities. However, there seem to be widely differing perspectives on this issue among these communities.

The word “security” comes from the Latin phrase *sine cura*, which means “without worry”. This root meaning conveys what security should actually mean as a spaceless/timeless concept. In fact, the genealogy of climate-development-security linkage goes back centuries. Many authors then sought to explain developments and conflicts in the American South and other regions by climate determinism. During the first half of the last century, Huntington and others tried to move beyond this climate historicism to naturalising the causes of conflicts and political unrest. Now, a group of academics argue that the ideology of this climate reductionism has seeped into the consciousness of the national security community.

From the perspective of national sovereignty, beginning with the state-centric military security, we witnessed the framings of economic security in the 1970s, followed by a quest for *redefining national security*, with rapid environmental degradation. This new discourse argued that the traditional view of military-focused “national security” is growing to be irrelevant as it could not address new global issues which were non-military security threats such as poverty, underdevelopment and environmental threats. The term “environmental security” first appeared in the 1987 landmark report titled “Our Common Future”; this was the



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first authoritative source that broached a linkage between security risks and environmental degradation. Climate security is the latest accretion to this discourse, pioneered by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher when she declared at the UN General Assembly in 1989 that climate change threatened life itself that “we must battle to preserve”.

From a review of academic and policy literature of the last two decades, I could make out at least three distinct framings about the relationship between climate change and security: environmental conflict, human security and climate resilience. The first is the environmental conflict perspective, according to which the security policy community, such as departments of defence, plays the lead role, while in the vulnerability-focused human security perspective, finance, planning and development agencies play the lead role. The former focuses on state-centric security, with military preparedness

to address “threat multipliers” emanating from climate change. But the human security lens places citizens’ wellbeing at the centre. Here, definitional expansiveness is a powerful attribute of the human security lens, developed in the mid-1990s by the late Dr Mahbub Ul Haq and UNDP.

The third is the climate resilience discourse. This framing avoids the language of threats/conflicts and focuses on risk governance as a shared responsibility by the whole range of actors involved in development, security and disaster governance. It attempts to bridge the two groups, focusing on resilience, meaning the ability of a system to withstand shocks and improve, through addressing both direct and indirect risks from climate change. Direct threats/risks include the loss of supreme value of a nation, i.e. threat to statehood from sea level rise for many Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which are likely to face “watery death”. This raises

legal complications with novel problems of whether it is viable to maintain statehood without territory and its attendant problems of exclusive economic zones and other marine sovereignty issues. There is also a host of indirect or second-order risks regarded as “threat multipliers”, which are likely to weaken global economy/security. The Western policy community sees climate refugees as a big threat as these refugees risk taking perilous journeys to reach the shores of Western countries. Conflicts may also arise from climate change-induced potential availability of resources, with serious geopolitical implications, or from adaptation measures as in water management in the Indus basin, Ganges or Jordan rivers.

One interesting aspect to observe is that the role of proponents has also changed. Initiated by academics to reconceptualise security grounded on environmental resource scarcity, the discourse on climate security is

now dominated by the policy and military establishments. Most of the political leaders across the globe pronounce climate change as a security threat. Over 70 percent of the countries which submitted their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to the UNFCCC have included climate change in their national security strategies. The General Assembly on June 3, 2009 passed Resolution 63/281 in which it acknowledged that the impacts of climate change could have serious security implications, reaffirming the UNFCCC as the key forum to address climate change.

But because of the snail’s pace in climate negotiations under the UNFCCC for the last two decades, there is a search for alternative forums to address the issue of climate security. The UN Security Council emerged as an alternative forum and potentially the most powerful supranational organ. Already, it has convened several formal and informal meetings, the latest being in January this year. But there are sharp differences among permanent members of the Council, with France, UK and US supporting its role, with China and Russia opposing it. The Group of 77 is also divided as to whether the involvement of the Security Council will lead to a positive outcome. The argument in support asserts that since climate change poses grave security threats, the Council has the mandate to involve itself in the deliberations and actions. The opposing group argues that the Council, in expanding its role, trespasses to other territories of the UN organs, where climate change and sustainable development issues are considered. As of yet, there is no consensus on whether the Security Council should have a proactive role in addressing climate change. But the debate is likely to continue.

While almost two trillion dollars are spent yearly by countries on military defence, aimed at addressing *perceived* threats from enemies, the threats of climate change as the common enemy to each citizen and nation-state are *real*. The irony is that even a fraction of the pledged USD 100 billion is not available to address the deadly threats posed by climate change.

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## Turning a blind eye?

*We continue to be apathetic to issues of sexual harassment and violence against women and children*



MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

**N**USRAT Jahan Rafi’s murder is a gruesome tale of the systematic violation of basic fundamental rights of children

and, particularly, young girls in Bangladesh. The statistics pertaining to violence against women and children are a direct contradiction to the nominal development that we have seen in the country over the past decade. The brutal murder of the courageous young girl Nusrat was a tragic reminder of the need to address the plight of women and children across the country.

Before delving into the numbers, it should be made clear that the target of sexual violence, harassment and intimidation has primarily been young girls, often resulting in their deaths or, ironically, them having to live with social stigma. For far too long, men, with a misplaced sense of superiority, have avoided and often mischaracterised women’s safety issues in the country.

The culprits, on the other hand, are another issue altogether. Nusrat’s case has brought to the fore the issue of safety in educational institutions where teachers are the culprits. These are the “teachers” and so-called *Alems*, in almost all cases men, who camouflage their monstrous intentions under the aegis of religion or education. Girls like

Nusrat fight a battle each day just to go to school in rural Bangladesh; issues of patriarchy, legal reforms, and educational structures are areas which need to be looked at, to ensure safety of our girls.

In January 2018, the Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) released a report on the state of child rights in the country. According to the report, as many as 49 children were raped and 28 murdered in Bangladesh each month. The 2017 statistics indicated that 339 children were killed and 593 raped that

year—the numbers increased by a startling 28 percent and 33 percent respectively from 2016. Furthermore, according to a study published by BRAC University in March 2018, around 94 percent of women commuting in public transport had experienced sexual harassment in verbal, physical and other forms. Another study (Zaman, Gansheimer, Rolim & Mridha, 2017) revealed that 73 percent of female internet users in Bangladesh reported cases of cybercrime and cyber harassment to the government’s information

and communication technology division’s cyber help desk. So, there is more than enough reason for the government to take sexual violence against women and children seriously and take measures to tackle these issues.

A study carried out by ActionAid Bangladesh, titled “Sexual Harassment at Educational Institutions and Workplaces: Implementation Status of the 2009 Supreme Court Guideline”, was released in May 2018. The study reported that 87 percent of

university students were unaware of the legal directives given by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, with regards to addressing sexual harassment. In 2009, the Supreme Court issued directives to prevent sexual harassment at workplaces and in public places. The court held that workplaces and academic institutions must take effective measures to prevent sexual harassment. The highest legal office of the land officially directed institutions to increase awareness, form committees and implement their stated guidelines. In the case of sexual harassment, a 2006 High Court directive has also been referred to, as a means to safeguard the existing law and to ensure institutional justice.

However, the reality is more damning. Cases regarding sexual harassment and child safety get sidelined due to a lack of resources, or, more specifically, interest of the state machinery. We have seen on numerous occasions how the attorney general’s office and legislators have expedited legal reforms involving politically sensitive issues (a classic case being that of the Digital Security Act 2018). The law, described as draconian by many, was passed hastily in parliament prior to the general elections last year. It was sent to the president for his assent, subsequently made into law, and implemented. On the other hand, issues of public safety, including demands by stakeholders for a sole legal architecture to address sexual harassment and violence, ensure child safety, or institutionalise road safety measures, remain in the

vicinity of parliamentary committees, discussions and debates. Prisons are being filled up with opposition political activists, small-scale drug users and others who are yet to receive a verdict on their trials. And yet, sexual harassment, rape and child molestation cases make up for a sizeable chunk of the 3.3 million pending cases.

Today, the country remains united in its demands to punish the man and his accomplices responsible for the death of Nusrat Jahan Rafi. I have no intention of mentioning their names in this article; they deserve absolutely no space. Nusrat is not with us anymore but let’s not forget about her quest for justice. Let Nusrat’s murder be a wake-up call for all of us.

The top-down system in our governance structure must be reformed and the issues of women’s and children’s safety must be prioritised. For far too long have we left these issues on the sidelines, and for far too many years have we witnessed girls, women and children suffer the wrath of monsters in our society.

There is a need to mobilise the attorney general’s office to look into sexual harassment complaints and cases of sexual violence against women and children with the same level of willingness and priority as cases involving political opponents. The ball is in the government’s court and, in time, they will be judged for their actions, or a lack thereof.

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### ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



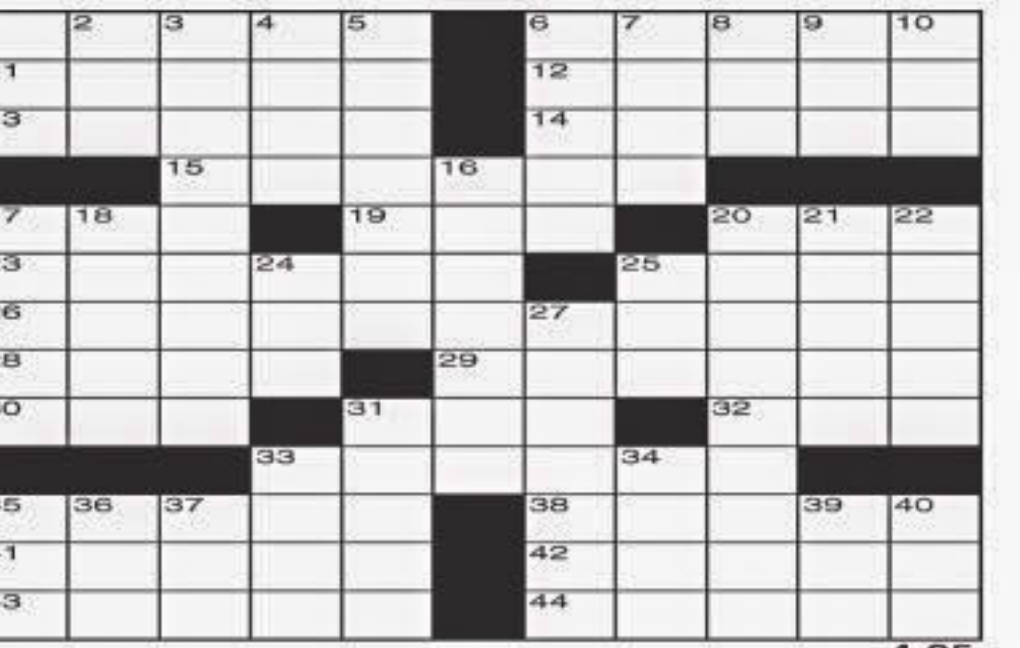
April 25, 2011

The largest tornado outbreak ever recorded hits the US  
348 people in six states were killed during the outbreak, which encompassed a total of 358 confirmed tornadoes.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>             | 32 Jargon ending  | 10 Apiece           |
| 1 Prickly plants          | 33 Fed up with    | 16 Extreme          |
| 6 Cone fill               | 35 Cuban cash     | 17 Cellist Casals   |
| 11 Kind of committee      | 38 Wipe out       | 18 Acrylic fiber    |
| 12 Chicago airport        | 41 Tuned in       | 20 Going rate?      |
| 13 Pitcher Satchel        | 42 Less common    | 21 Car quartet      |
| 14 After a while          | 43 Some messages  | 22 “Skyfall” singer |
| 15 Pantry                 | 44 Derisive look  |                     |
| 17 Okra unit              |                   | 25 Nearest star     |
| 19 Schedule C org.        | <b>DOWN</b>       | 27 Penn’s people    |
| 20 School org.            | 1 Beanie or beret | 31 Shop clamps      |
| 23 Secret stuff           | 2 Oklahoma city   | 33 Ilk              |
| 25 Reached base, in a way | 3 Pediatric topic | 34 Algerian port    |
| 26 Crossword feature      | 4 Forum wear      | 35 Butter bit       |
| 28 Folk learning          | 5 Skating site    | 36 Ram’s mate       |
| 29 Mole creation          | 6 Foot parts      | 37 Jazz instrument  |
| 30 Count starter          | 7 Blacken         | 39 Take in          |
| 31 Through                | 8 Cereal bit      | 40 Slip             |
|                           | 9 Maine matter    |                     |

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### YESTERDAY’S ANSWER

P E E V E      L E F T  
A X L E S      F O L L Y  
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E L I      A D G N E D  
R E V O L V E S  
D E A L      R O A D  
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H A M      G E L I N K  
I C E B O X      T A T A  
T U D O R      G O T I T  
I T A L Y      A R O S E  
T E L L      P O R T S

### BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



### BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

