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## A clarion call to climate action

World must realise the urgency to tackle global warming

IT'S no longer a secret that climate change is taking place at a faster pace than we had predicated, and its effects are already punishing. Among countries that are most vulnerable to climate change is Bangladesh, where, according to the latest assessment by IMF, one-third of the population is at risk of displacement—because of rising sea levels caused by global warming—although the country accounts for less than 0.35 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. These dire warnings are being validated by news of displacements in our coastal regions. Around the world, in the first six months of 2019, more than seven million people had been displaced by extreme weather events, while as many as 22 million might be displaced by the end of the year. These assessments are surely cause for concern and anger, but a reason for hope this week has been the powerful call to action that came through the global climate strike, which kicked off on Friday.

The strike, led by schoolchildren, saw millions of people worldwide, including in Bangladesh, calling for “an end to the age of fossil fuels and climate justice for everyone.” There is something beautiful yet profoundly sad about these youth-led mobilisations. It shows that children are stepping up for a safer planet for their future; it also demonstrates our failure to stop the environmental disaster as well as the urgency of tackling global warming, a major aspect of the current climate change. The children are showing us the way and the adults, most specifically policymakers and business leaders, need to listen and learn.

Although countries like Bangladesh are at the frontline of the crisis, climate change is affecting all of us, some more than the others, and it is only through our collective action that we stand a chance of fighting it with any degree of success. All focus should be on cutting global emissions and building clean energy for all and helping more vulnerable countries in their adoption measures on a priority basis. “Everything counts,” as Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg has said, and as things stand, we’re left with no choice but to give our everything.

## EU’s call on UN for Myanmar embargo is timely

Will the P5 step up?

THE European parliament has called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to impose a wide-ranging arms embargo and targeted economic sanctions against the perpetrators of the massive human rights violation against the Rohingya populace. UNSC has also been urged to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Unfortunately, as experience has shown us, the permanent members of the UN have divided opinions on taking a tough stance against the Myanmar regime, although ample evidence of gross human rights violations against Rohingyas exist. Despite the fact that UN independent investigators have repeatedly labelled the situation against this persecuted community as one of continued discrimination and facing the ever-present threat of genocide, the UNSC has not spoken in one voice.

The EU had, earlier in the year, imposed a ban on the sale of arms to Myanmar and put on notice high-ranking officials for their role in the Rohingya crisis. This crisis has been ongoing since 2017 and more than a million Rohingyas are now living in Bangladesh in refugee camps. International media has reported recently that the remaining 600,000 Rohingyas still in Myanmar are increasingly under threat. Precisely what other proof is necessary for the world community to take action against a regime that has systematically brutalised and forced so many Rohingyas to leave their homes and the country they have resided in for generations is beyond our understanding. The atrocities against the Rohingyas will only stop if and when the UNSC imposes tough sanctions against the Myanmar government, which has actively helped perpetrate crimes against the Rohingya community. The UNSC has the power to put a stop to this crisis, the only question is, are the permanent members of the UNSC willing to step up and do what needs to be done?

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Taking climate change seriously

COP21, widely known as the Paris Agreement, one of the United Nations more ambitious endeavour, has been struggling since its formation in 2015. Although the agreement was enthusiastically supported by 197 nations, including the USA and China (the top two carbon-emitting countries), it currently stands as something far from what it was initially envisioned to be.

In the wake of the UN Climate Conference that is to be held this month, an evaluation has been made by scientists which states that China’s promise to decrease carbon emission by replacing its existing power plants with renewable sources (up to 20 percent by 2030) has made slow progress. On the other hand, the United States’ withdrawal from the agreement has put the treaty in jeopardy. Moreover, President Trump’s declaration to invest more into coal-based power plants and automobile industries has shocked world leaders.

With all this happening, a new “climate model”, released this week by the UN’s climate scientists, predicts that planet earth’s temperature could rise by 6.5-7.0 degrees Celsius by 2100. Scientists warn that this may lead to massive disruptions.

Therefore, world leaders should come forward, understand the situation and act together to mitigate carbon pollution in order to maintain temperature below the risk rate.

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# Time to address youth unemployment



CREATING employment for its large young population is one of the major policy challenges in Bangladesh at this moment. According to the Labour Force Survey 2016-17 of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the national unemployment rate is 4.2 per cent. However, youth unemployment rate is 10.6 percent, more than two and a half times the national average. The survey also reveals that the share of unemployed youth in total unemployment is 79.6 percent.

Ironically, unemployment rate seems to be high among youth with higher education. For example, unemployment rate is 13.4 percent among youths having a tertiary level education and 28 percent among youths having secondary level education. This striking feature of the unemployment situation in the country indicates that education offered by our institutions cannot empower the youth with income and decent living, as one would have expected. The other aspect of youth unemployment is the existence of NEET, that is, youth who are “Not in Education, Employment, or Training”. Youth NEET is as high as 29.8 percent.

Where does the problem lie? Talk to an employer. You will learn how eager they are to make good recruitments. In desperation, they choose to hire from abroad providing high benefit packages. In a country with a large population size, we cannot find enough employable youth! One would have expected that a country such as ours, where we have a large share of young population, would benefit from “demographic dividend”. That is, with a high share of working-age population, the ratio of dependent population would decline. Thus, it is imperative that policymakers give more attention in engaging this young workforce in productive activities.

Not only can this increase economic growth further, but can solve many social problems including demoralisation, depression, social exclusion and crime. Most importantly, it will also help in

reducing inequality, a phenomenon that Bangladesh has to address proactively. We should also not overlook the political threat of prolonged and high unemployment. Thus keeping the multidimensional implications of youth unemployment in purview, we have to address the issue right now.

But the recognition of youth unemployment as an emerging problem for the economy is absent in our policies. The national youth policy 2017 has paid inadequate attention on

universities do not meet the expectation of employers. Conversely, job seekers find jobs that are low paid and informal in nature. Youth unemployment in many advanced countries has been solved by technical and vocational skills. Not everyone has to go to universities. But in Bangladesh, poor families would even sell land and valuables—often their last resort for emergencies—to send their children (mainly sons) to universities. Little do they know that the certificate is only a piece of paper when they cannot



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SOURCE: A2I

employment creation for the youth. There is no concrete plan of action for generating employment for young people in the policy. Of course, given that the private sector’s contribution is higher in the economy, the major source of employment will have to be the private sector. The government has to provide policy support towards creating more jobs there.

While talking of creating opportunities, quality of education and skills come to the forefront. Graduates coming out of

enter the highly competitive job market with the type of education they receive. This mentality has to change. We should rather focus on the comparative strength of every individual. The need for skill development is being pronounced loudly.

There is the National Skills Development Council, there are private sector and non-government sector initiatives for skills development. But here again, expectation of employers is not met fully. Skills are not forward-looking—which not only would think

# Trump, Johnson and globalisation’s discontented



world who on any given day can blithely contradict in the afternoon what he says in the morning. Imagine our shock and bafflement to see a similar (if not worse) calamity unfolding in one of the proudest and oldest exponents of western democracy—the United Kingdom.

As it is twisting itself into knots over Brexit—the ham-handed effort of the Brits to leave the European Union—it is heartbreaking to watch a train wreck in slow motion. Brexit’s searing divide runs right through British society, creating bitter divisions among friends and families.

It has a leader to match: its new Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has more than a passing similarity with his US counterpart. No wonder Trump likes him. When it comes to mendacity, Johnson can give Trump a run for his money—no small feat. Here’s a man who has the dubious distinction of being fired twice for being economical with the facts.

But there’s far more to these crises than Trump and Johnson. When you think about it, what’s so baffling about the rise of these leaders is the fact that the shortcomings of either leader are one of the worst kept secrets in the world.

Yet both have almost a cult-like following. Trump once joked that he could shoot a person in broad daylight and his supporters wouldn’t bat an eyelid. He is on to something, as polls consistently show.

Trump and Johnson are bad enough. What’s scarier is the strong possibility that their blind support represents something more sinister.

It’s hardly news that the fruits of globalisation have not benefited everyone. What’s worrying is that the discontent among those left behind is curdling into something disquieting.

“Over the four years during which he has dominated American political life, nearly three of them as president, Donald Trump has set a match again and again to chaos-inducing issues like racial hostility,

authoritarianism and white identity politics,” Thomas B Edsall wrote in a column in the *New York Times*.

Edsall quotes from an academic paper, “A ‘Need for Chaos’ and the Sharing of Hostile Political Rumors in Advanced Democracies,” by Michael Bang Petersen and Mathias Osmundsen, both political scientists at Aarhus University in Denmark, and Kevin Arceneaux, a political scientist at Temple University in Philadelphia.

“It argues that a segment of the

information with little evidence. This includes “conspiracy theories, fake news, discussions of political scandals and negative campaigns,” the researchers add.

Petersen, Osmundsen and Arceneaux found that those with a need for chaos express that need by willingly spreading disinformation. Edsall adds. “Their goal is not to advance their own ideology but to undermine political elites, left and right, and to ‘mobilise others against politicians in general’ These disrupters do not ‘share rumors because they believe them to be



PHOTO: ERIN SCHAFF/AFP

### UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and US President Donald Trump.

American electorate that was once peripheral is drawn to ‘chaos incitement’ and that this segment has gained decisive influence through the rise of social media,” Edsall writes.

“The rise of social media provides the public with unprecedented power to craft and share new information with each other,” the researchers write.

This technological transformation allows the dissemination of negative

true. For the core group, hostile political rumors are simply a tool to create havoc.”

This sentiment is echoed in raucous Trump rallies in the US, in the antics of far-right fringe provocateurs in the UK like Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson. Chants from supporters appear to be fuelled more by a destructive rage than a hope for a better future.

Politicians across the Atlantic have been happy to fuel and capitalise on

of the country’s job market, but also outside Bangladesh, and not only for the present, but for the future. We have to take into account the emerging realities, such as the fourth industrial revolution which threatens to take away many jobs, but also holds potential for creating new ones. There should also be access to information on job opportunities, and transparent recruitment policy of organisations.

Given the limited size of the labour market, self-employment should be actively promoted. Opportunities for becoming entrepreneurs ought to be accessible to all aspiring youth across the country, both in urban and rural areas. Globally, start-ups have significantly changed the landscape of job markets. We are observing such a wave in Bangladesh too, but at a rather slow pace. Access to fund and knowledge can help the dynamic and ambitious youth flourish in this arena.

Of course, one of the structural issues of job creation is the lack of adequate investment in the economy. With private investment hovering around 23 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the last couple of years, adequate job creation is impossible. Lack of domestic private investment is not encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI). Though foreign investors are showing a lot of interest in investing in an emerging economy such as Bangladesh, the realisation of such interest is still much less. It is common knowledge that FDI flows in countries which provide enabling policies, better infrastructure, skilled human resource and corruption free environment. However, ease of doing business index for Bangladesh indicates that foreign investors are yet to be adequately confident to invest here.

Our economy, as it stands now, is on a fast-paced journey. With steady high growth in the last decade, the country has experienced positive economic and social spillovers. However, youth unemployment could hamper further progress in the medium term. The materialisation of the aspiration to become a developed country by 2041 will also depend on maximising the potential of young people, as human capital is our key resource.

Dr Fahmida Khatun is the Executive Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

this rage. Former British Prime Minister Theresa May’s tart observation that “if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere” fanned the flames of a desperate xenophobia.

Here in the United States, Trump’s ascent—and the total capitulation of the Republican Party—is perceived by opponents as an assault on all that the western world prides itself upon—rationalism, reason, scientific inquiry, social equality. Climate change is denied, incendiary race-baiting remarks are *de rigueur*, and argument is based on polemics and vitriol, reason and science be damned.

In the United Kingdom, the cursed stubbornness in bringing in Brexit come what may is a dead giveaway. Supporters are not championing a well-considered programme that will address their grievances. They just want to bring down the socio-economic structure that they feel has sold them short.

The most disheartening part of this crisis is how utterly resistant supporters are to reason. Brexit without a deal an economic catastrophe? Trump has not prevented the decline of the coal industry? With climate change uncontrolled, the world will be going to hell in a handbasket?

Who cares? The fact that something Trump or Johnson wants can outrage and scandalise their opponents is reason enough for his supporters to be happy.

I won’t hide the fact that I loathe both leaders. But I also think that the pain that their supporters feel is genuine. The only way out of this current impasse is a dialogue which will lead to a policy that addresses the grievances of the disaffected.

But I can’t honestly say I feel very optimistic. The atmosphere today is eerily reminiscent of Europe between the two world wars. Europe was barely recovering from a carnage of mass murder with the dark foreboding that the schisms and hatreds had not quite been resolved. One thinks of the Weimar Republic, utterly unable to halt the rise of Hitler. Reason was an ineffective, feeble corrective to the fatal, toxic power of jingoism.

In the oft-repeated words of William Butler Yeats: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.../The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity.”

I wish I am proven wrong.

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