

Perils of climate change: Time for action

SULTANA YESMIN

THE 25th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 25) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), known as the UN Climate Change Conference COP25, has been taking place in Madrid from December 2-13, 2019, under the presidency of the Chilean government and with logistical support from the Spanish government. Leaders and representatives from across the world—with the notable absence of the US President Donald Trump—gathered at the UN Climate Change Conference in the Spanish capital. However, the House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is leading a bicameral Congressional Delegation to the annual international climate summit on behalf of the United States Congress.

The climate summit in Madrid is being held shortly after the emergence of some crucial issues at the forefront related to global climate change. First, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) released its annual report on "emissions gap" referring to "commitment gap" on November 26 this year. The UNEP in a new report also warns that the world will fail to get on track towards 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature goal of the Paris Agreement, unless the emissions of global greenhouse gas fall by 7.6 percent in each year between 2020 and 2030.

The report shows that despite the pledges by several countries, the amount of greenhouse gases is increasing at an alarming rate, where it urges for deeper and faster cuts of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. It should be noted that the global temperature is already 1.1 degrees Celsius warmer and has been warned to rise by 3.4 to 3.9 degrees Celsius in this century if current trends persist, and that may result in wide-ranging and destructive climate impacts, including extreme weather, droughts and storms across the globe. Besides, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reports that, the period from 2010 to 2019 is "almost certain" to be the hottest decade on record and 2019 to be the second- or third-warmest year since 1850.

Second, the European parliament declared a global "climate and environmental emergency" on November 28, 2019, calling for all European countries to fight against the existential threat of climate crisis and commit net

zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Third, thousands of global climate protests took place in 153 countries just few days before the COP25 urging the global leaders to take stronger and collective steps on fighting global climate change.

It is important to mention that earlier the parties to the UNFCCC reached a landmark agreement, known as Paris Agreement on climate change, at COP21 held on December 12, 2015, bringing all nations into a "common cause" for the first time with the crucial objectives of combating climate change with sincere and collective efforts, limiting global warming and accelerating as well as intensifying the actions and investments

The climate summit also underscores the urgency of taking the next crucial steps in the UN climate change process.

Being disappointed with the global efforts in limiting emissions and the countries' heavy reliance on coal production, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres mentioned in his opening address, "...Do we want to be remembered as the generation that buried its head in the sand and fiddled as the planet burned?" As far as the rising temperature is concerned, he has urged for the limited use of fossil fuels to control the temperature of the planet. The head of the UN has also articulated two paths—such as "the point of no return" and "carbon neutrality by 2050" with

carbon to GHG emissions reduction targets. This is why much attention has been paid to the full operationalisation of the Paris Agreement to facilitate carbon trading or emissions trading for tackling greenhouse gas emissions.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has also attended the "Heads of State and Government Summit" of the annual climate summit and urged the global community to address the needs of climate migrants under an appropriate framework at the opening session of COP25. She has also called for facilitating climate finance for the vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change based on the principle of "common but differentiated responsibility".

The UN Climate Change Conference COP25 kicked off in Madrid with increased ambition and commitments. The summit urges for making serious progress on climate action over the next sessions. Leaders from over 200 countries have pledged for "green revolution" on the first day of the COP25 climate summit to combat the devastating effects of global warming. Delegates have reiterated deep cuts to emissions (over 7 percent each year) and adopt cleaner technologies at a faster rate.

On behalf of the House of Representatives and the Congress of the United States, Nancy Pelosi has reaffirmed the US' commitment to fulfilling its goals of combating the climate crisis despite its formal withdrawal from the Paris climate accord. Poland, one of Europe's largest coal producers with its dependency on fossil fuels for 80 percent of the country's energy, has reaffirmed its goal to redouble efforts to cut carbon gas emissions and develop new clean energy sources.

Hence, the consensus on putting a price on carbon and markets-based concept of emissions trading through the full operationalisation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement seem crucial for limiting the rise of global temperature and tackling existential threats of climate change. Most importantly, the call for ensuring at least USD 100 billion a year to developing countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to build resilience to climate change reiterates the urgency of combating the perils at hand with collective, but sincere efforts.

Sultana Yesmin is a PhD Candidate, School of Politics and International Studies, Central China Normal University (CCNU), Wuhan, Hubei, China.



Protestors in Spain said they want world leaders to take immediate action to protect the planet.

PHOTO: G BOUYS/AFP

needed for a sustainable low carbon future. As per the vision, the world leaders agreed to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the increase of temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels laid out in the Paris Agreement.

Given this backdrop, the world leaders endeavoured to discuss the effective ways of tackling the climate crisis. Most crucially, the UN Climate Change Conference COP25 sets the clarification of rules for all participating states in fulfilling the agreed goal of limiting global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius in line with the Paris Agreement.

collective efforts to face the fast-rising perils of a global environmental challenge and win the war against climate change.

Controversial carbon markets also take centre stage at the COP25 climate conference in order to build a regulatory framework for a global carbon trading system. The participating countries at the earlier session of COP24, in Katowice, held in Poland last December, could not reach an agreement on the implementation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement—integrated, holistic and balanced approaches to assist governments in implementing their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) as well as voluntary international cooperation by paying global price on

Drug trade in broad daylight

Bring the culpable officials to book

A report published by this daily on December 7, on the dominance of smugglers on trains connecting Khulna to Benapole via Jashore, is alarming. According to the report, smugglers use the train service to illegally bring in banned and illegally imported goods and substances, including yaba and phensedyl, to the country. Not only that, a racket controlling the train operations does not allow the passengers to take their due seats unless an additional fee is paid to them.

While such incidents are unacceptable, they also pose several questions for the authorities: who are these smugglers, and how are they operating right under the noses of the law enforcement authorities, including the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB)? The report further suggests that the trains are stopped at random on the route to evade scrutiny by the law enforcers—sometimes by smugglers pulling the chains, sometimes by snapping the coupling hoses between compartments. And according to a trader, everyone from the drivers and law enforcers to the ticket checkers are on the payroll of the smugglers.

And it is the common people that suffer because of all that. They have to rely on the trains to commute from Khulna to Benapole because the roads are not in good condition. At a time when the government is committed to rooting out the problem of drugs from the country, such rampant smuggling of narcotics under the very watch of the law enforcers is surprising.

It is high time the government looked seriously into the problem and addressed it with a strong hand. The culpable law enforcers and train officials must be brought to book for their involvement in this. The government's efforts to curb drugs should not only be directed against the drug dealers, but also all the others who are facilitating this illegal trade.

Illegal stone crushers are degrading the environment

How could their numbers increase despite an HC order?

A report from Sylhet in this paper yesterday has revealed some very concerning news. At present there are over a thousand stone crushers operating in six upazilas of Sylhet, most of them without permission or clearance. The result is a frightening destruction of the environment with once scenic greenery or paddy fields being replaced by piles of stones as stone crushers have come in and invaded the land. The destruction has happened over years with those operating these machines doing so with absolute disregard for the law. There is a rulebook that gives guidelines on how stone crushers can be used but nobody has bothered to enforce these rules. Even a High Court order to remove all illegal stone crushers, establish specific crushing zones and enforce the rules have been completely ignored. The question is, why has the administration not implemented the order? How is it possible that parts of the Surma riverbank is occupied by stone crushers? How can stone crushers operate on other river banks, in front of highways, educational institutions and even in Jaflong which is an ecologically critical area?

The answers to these questions are not hard to come up with. The news report quotes the general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon saying that many influential people especially those with political links are behind the business of stone crushing which provides a plausible reason for this strange reluctance to apply the law that would save the environment and also a lot of the farmlands in these areas. Such allegations have been denied by the DC of Sylhet who says that the reason behind the inaction is that the administration first wants to find a designated land where stone crushers will operate and then conduct a drive against illegal traders. We cannot help but wonder whether we can afford to wait that long as already many areas have been destroyed with others facing a similar fate.

Moreover, the land selected to create a stone crushing zone is next to a protected forest which will only add to the environmental destruction. Many other forest lands have been grabbed by stone crushers.

It is time the administration takes a proper look at the situation. Illegal stone crushers have to be banned or phased out completely and designated land must be carefully selected, making sure it will not lead to another wave of environmental degradation. Nothing can justify this brazen onslaught on precious greenery and riverbanks that are actually killing the lifeline of the people.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The EU must recognise Palestine



DAOUD KUTTAB

THE United States may have just obliterated any remaining hope for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's declaration that

Israeli settlements in the West Bank do not violate international law defies a longstanding global consensus. The rest of the world must push back.

There can be no doubt that Israel's settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories violates international law. In the wake of World War II, the Fourth Geneva Convention established that an occupying power "shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." According to the Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court in 1998, such transfers constitute war crimes.

Moreover, when Israel began its occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories in 1967, United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 condemned its actions for violating the post-WWII consensus regarding the inadmissibility of acquiring land by war.

In 2016, the Security Council adopted another resolution, which declared that Israel's settlement-building in Palestinian territory had "no legal validity," constituted a "flagrant violation" of international law, and was a "major obstacle" to the two-state solution. (Rather than veto the resolution, as is the US custom, President Barack Obama's administration abstained from the vote.)

Just days before Pompeo's announcement, the European Court of Justice upheld this logic, ruling that goods produced in Israeli-occupied territories must be clearly labelled as such. In its statement, it declared unambiguously that the settlements "give concrete expression to a policy of population transfer" conducted by Israel outside its territory, "in violation of the rules of general international humanitarian law."

And yet the US has long been reluctant to acknowledge this reality. Only one US administration—that of President Jimmy Carter—has declared outright that Israeli settlement policy is illegal, on the basis of a 1978 State Department legal opinion. Carter's immediate successor, Ronald Reagan, opposed that stance publicly. Other US administrations have criticised the settlements as obstacles to peace and



Leaving Palestinians at the mercy of their Israeli occupiers will only sustain a decades-old cycle of violence.

PHOTO: AFP

urged Israel to halt construction, but refrained from calling them illegal.

Not surprisingly, Israeli officials welcomed Pompeo's declaration. The country's right-wing prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu—who pledged during the recent parliamentary election campaign to expand Israeli sovereignty to all Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank—declared that US President Donald Trump's administration had righted an "historical wrong."

Netanyahu faces his own challenges: he has failed to form a government, and has just been indicted on corruption charges. But his main rival, Benny Gantz (who also failed to form a government), also applauded the reversal, saying, "The fate of the settlements should be determined by agreements that meet security requirements and promote peace."

While the future of Israeli politics remains unclear, the risk of a renewed settlement-building frenzy must not be underestimated. With the US standing firmly with Israel's most hawkish elements, it is up to the rest of the international community to prevent that outcome. The European Union should lead the charge. After the US reversal, the EU's foreign-

policy chief, Federica Mogherini, confirmed that its position on Israeli settlement policy "remains unchanged: all settlement activity is illegal under international law" and "erodes the viability of the two-state solution and the prospects for a lasting peace."

But this is far from the first time the EU has criticised Israel's behaviour. Indeed, from condemning Israel's deportation of the local director of Human Rights Watch for allegedly supporting a boycott to denouncing the Israeli soldiers' shooting of unarmed Palestinian demonstrators, the EU has often been sharply critical of Israel—all while maintaining close diplomatic, economic, and political ties with it.

Rhetoric is not enough. If European leaders—or, indeed, any others around the world—want to advance a vision of an independent Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one, they have only two choices: officially recognise Palestine as an independent state or stop recognising Israel as one until it proves it is serious about reaching a negotiated solution.

Already, most European parliaments have voted in favour of recognising Palestine as an independent state along the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as

its capital. But only Sweden has followed through, with the EU advising others to wait for the perfect opportunity to arise—the moment when a unified decision to recognise Palestine could have a real impact. Now is that moment.

Leaving Palestinians at the mercy of their Israeli occupiers will only sustain a decades-old cycle of violence. Powerful allies like the EU can break that cycle, but only if they back up their words with deeds. No deed would send a stronger message than for all EU countries to recognise Palestine as an independent, occupied state, and engage with it accordingly.

This might not cause Israel suddenly to pack up and leave Palestinian territories. But it could discourage Israel's leaders, buoyed by Trump's latest reckless decision, from seeking to expand existing settlements and building new ones—or even to begin annexing Palestinian territory. In that case, the EU would face the prospect of a full-fledged apartheid state on its doorstep.

Daoud Kuttab, an award-winning Palestinian journalist, is a former Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton University. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2019. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Planting trees is a necessity

We are no stranger to the fact that air pollution and carbon dioxide have destabilised our atmosphere, not only in Bangladesh but globally. We humans are to blame for this. Industrialisation contributed much to the worsening of the situation. Yet our greed for money is so great that some have started to sell oxygen!

While development is surely positive, we should have been careful to regulate businesses and industries that pollute the environment in the name of development.

As we have already caused too much irreversible damage to our planet, we are now left with limited options to improve the situation. Different nations are taking different approaches to tackle the problem and one common and simple strategy many of us have adopted is to plant trees. The more trees we have the more hopeful we can be in our fight against climate change.

Dhrubo Chandro Roy, by email