

ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

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Bangladesh in 2050: Vision of a climate resilient society



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What will Bangladesh look like in 2050? A layman's projection allows us to draw a picture of its basic parameters. In terms of population, Bangladesh can reach a number of 230-240 million, with an average growth rate of 1.2 percent/year. The density of population will be

USD 2.5 trillion in 2050. This will give a per capita GDP of over USD 12,000 in current prices. So, the vision of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will come true by 2041—a developed Bangladesh.

Can such an uninterrupted trajectory of rapid growth be ensured, while maintaining environmental sustainability? This is a hard question to answer. We already see not a single drop of fresh water in Bangladesh's rivers and canals, not to talk of its chemical composition. What will happen when the size of the economy trebles in the next three decades? Based on global experience, we must say that Bangladesh cannot afford to traverse the trajectory of environmental Kuznet's curve, with bending the pollution curve after the now rich countries have reached a per capita income of 5-6 thousand US dollars. Ours is a small sized country with unprecedented biotic pressure, both from poverty and rapid economic growth on very limited natural resources.

So, we have to proceed with a strategy simultaneously of growth, equity and environmental protection, not growth first and environment later. We actually need more of development—an improvement in quality of people's lives, not just growth—a physical expansion of the economy, which not always leads to development. The case of Dhaka city is an example. We must have the vision of liveable cities in Bangladesh by 2050. Then comes the main challenge of the day—the increasingly frequent climate events like floods, cyclones, tidal surge, sea-level rise and the resulting salinity intrusion and permanent inundation of



Coastal areas in Patuakhali being inundated during cyclone Amphan. PHOTO: STAR

our coastlands. The world has already crossed the one-degree temperature rise, compared to the pre-industrial level. For all practical purposes, the world cannot meet the aspirational target of maximum rise of 1.50 degrees Celsius agreed under the Paris Agreement. According to IPCC report (2018), global greenhouse gas emissions will need to be halved by 2030 and reach net zero by mid-century in order to have a good chance of holding temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C. Against this, there are estimates that given 100 percent compliance of the submitted NDC pledges of emissions reduction, the world will witness a rise of over 30C. And this is the average.

In tropical countries of Africa and Asia including in Bangladesh, the rise

is likely to be more than the global average. Already extreme climate events with its higher frequency and severity have become the "new normal". In this unfolding scenario, Bangladesh is recognised globally as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. There is yet no authoritative national assessment of loss and damage costs from climate impacts, or the need for adaptation and mitigation investments. However, a number of multilateral development agencies, few international think tanks and the Bangladesh government have many different cost estimations—both current and future, which cover economy-wide, sectoral and disaster type-based climate impacts. The estimated loss to GDP ranges from

0.5 to 2 percent by 2050. Overall, total costs vary between USD 3 billion to USD 5 billion a year up by 2050, while the investment needs for adaptation in agriculture sector and infrastructure range from USD 1 billion to USD 10 billion a year.

During the next three decades, absolute costs to the economy will go higher and higher. In such circumstances, can Bangladesh, with its sandwiched geographical location between the Himalayas in the North and Bay of Bengal in the South, aspire to be a climate resilient society by 2050? We believe it can, given a well-planned strategy that we follow with total commitment.

We may recall that the 2041 Perspective Plan relies on four institutional pillars to be harnessed by the people, who are the principal drivers of growth and transformation. These are: (i) democratisation; (ii) decentralisation; (iii) governance; and (iv) capacity building. In this short space, we will focus on three pillars, beginning with decentralisation, then governance and capacity building.

With prioritisation of climate change adaptation as a central strategy of development, Bangladesh is already a recognised leader globally in adaptation and resilience. The former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon calls Bangladesh a "teacher" in adaptation for the global community to learn from. By taking over the leadership of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) for the next two years, Bangladesh

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around 1700/sq.km, the highest ever in the world. Considering a consistent economic growth rate of 8 percent/year, the size of our economy, i.e. GDP will be more than three times larger—this means from its current volume of about USD 270 billion, it will shoot up to

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