

COVER STORY

WOVEN IN HISTORY

Saiful Islam, MD of Majority World and Bengal Muslin, is the creator of 'Legend of the Loom', a film that illustrates the rich history of the legendary muslin cloth. In this interview with Rafi Hossain, he talks about the history of muslin, what he and his team of researchers and craftsmen have done to revive it, and what we can do to preserve it.

Rafi Hossain: Welcome to Uncensored with Rafi Hossain. Today, we are here with Saiful Islam, MD of Majority World and Bengal. Thank you so much for being here today.

Saiful Islam: Thank you for having me here. **Rafi Hossain:** We have heard how the muslin of the past was so soft that it could fit inside a ring. However, the new fabrics is not as soft. Can you give a brief history of muslin?

Saiful Islam: If we look at muslin, we might think it is an ordinary fabric because it is white, light and thin fabric. So, why was it so famed? To understand that we have to realise that when it was discovered, cotton clothes were very heavy and thick. Muslin was made from a very specific cotton plant cultivated on the bank of Meghna River, called Phuti Karpas. Muslin was so famed, that it travelled from the borders of China to Indonesia, and through India to the Far East. From the 10th century to the 18th century, such a fabric was unique. Unfortunately, there aren't many samples left in Bangladesh, compared to the museums of many foreign countries. With the absence of the Phuti Karpas plant, people are mixing different materials to achieve the softness, but all this is doing is making a bad name for muslin. When I visited China, I found 128 variants of 'muslin'. Even in other countries, including Bangladesh, many mixed fabrics are being sold as muslin, but when we touch those, you can tell the difference.

Rafi Hossain: You have had an illustrious career. Can you tell us how you developed an interest towards muslin?

Saiful Islam: I worked for around thirty-five years in different companies, and have been abroad for eighteen years, but when I retired, for a while, I was associated with DrikPicture Library in Bangladesh. In 2013, an East London-based cultural organisation approached me for my help in taking an exhibition they made about muslin to Bangladesh. I felt that they needed more information about the fabric for that exhibition. Then I started this project with Drik, Bengal Muslin in early 2014. I talked to many researchers and craftsmen, and realised that there hasn't been much research done on this famed piece of fabric. This isn't just a fabric for us, it is our culture and history, and the knowledge about it is at the risk of becoming obsolete. If people don't think of muslin as a tangible idea, they might not even believe such a thing existed. So, we worked with weavers in an attempt to revive the famed muslin. As a country, we truly failed to keep the history alive of muslin. We tried to establish muslin's historical and cultural significance, along with its part in the colonial rule. That's why we tried to propagate its history with support from Aarong, BNM and the Ministry of Culture in the form of an exhibition, a book, a children's comic, fashion design, and even a film, Legend of the loom.

Rafi Hossain: How successful, do you think, were you in fulfilling what you intended by your methods mentioned above?

Saiful Islam: Our initial goal was to educate the people on the history of muslin accurately, but we then had another goal: to bring back its production, not in the sense of commer-



cially producing it, but at least, bringing it to a place where we can say that it exists and it's here. I think we were quite successful in achieving the first goal.

We tried searching for Phuti Karpas from Barisal to Mymensingh, and even Assam. I went to Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in London and Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden in Kolkata to look at samples of the plant. We found a plant that we regarded as the closest possible plant to Phuti Karpas. We arranged a DNA testing for the samples in London, and matched it with the plants we found to get a 70% match. Weavers weave clothes in counts of threads. Muslin starts from 250 counts and goes up to a thousand. We arranged a Muslin Festival where we introduced the new muslin with 300 counts. There was a lot of trial and error involved. Our first saree took seven months to make. All in all, I think that we managed to do a lot with the financial constraint that we had. We are still working on taking the weaving and the production of the cotton to a higher level of count and complexity of design. This has been our journey for the past five or so years.

Rafi Hossain: Did you sell the clothes that were made of the new muslin?

Saiful Islam: Our first motive was to make it for the exhibition, for research, and to bring back the confidence of the weavers to weave higher counts. There are many factors making the weavers unwilling to weave higher counts than what they are used to. We tried our best to facilitate their needs by acquiring the appropriate materials and technology required. Some of the materials required for making muslin were not available anywhere in the country, but we did our best to work with what we have and make new materials when possible. I think that my engineering knowledge helped a lot in this. We made the sarees to show people a part of Bangladesh that was at risk of extinction, and to encourage other weavers to employ more counts of thread when weaving their fabrics. I think that we were able to do that. In the Jamdani Festival, there were all sarees of 200 count, which shows a major improvement. After making muslin with 300 counts, we went on to make it with 400 counts. That saree was exhibited in a museum in Manchester for a year. Now our goal is to reach 500 counts. If we are able to

do that, I would think that we have achieved our goal. When I talk about 500 counts, I don't mean 500 counts of plain fabric, which is relatively easy and is done at some extent in India. I'm talking about fabric with intricate designs which is only taking place in Bangladesh.

Rafi Hossain: To further propagate the sales of muslin items, I think that establishing a brand is necessary. Can you share your thoughts on that?

Saiful Islam: I think that it is very necessary to establish a branding for muslin products. There are many products in the market now, making it difficult to distinguish between what's real and what's not. If we look back at our history, muslin was, perhaps, the biggest brand in the world. In undivided India, muslin was known as mul-mul. Marco Polo coined the term muslin in the 15th century, but people from Europe and Asia knew about muslin. We have to realise what a powerful brand it was based on how it spread in a world without mass communication. Our work in developing a brand for this would be to let it be known that muslin is from Bangladesh. The way to do is by research and using the information we find from that to be integrated in our brand image. It is true that muslin has never been a fabric for the poor because the time, effort and skills required to make muslin made it quite expensive. But, I see people wearing very expensive clothes in different events and ceremonies, so it is possible to purchase a muslin saree at equivalent price.

Rafi Hossain: If somebody would want to acquire your book on muslin or the children's comic, how would they go about that?

Saiful Islam: We're selling the book for around three thousand to three thousand and five hundred taka. As for the comic, we even sold it sometimes for ten taka because it wasn't about profits. I see many children reading English comics, but our history of muslin is just as interesting, if not more. It is available in both English and Bangla, and can be bought from Drik Gallery, as well as twelve other stores in Dhaka and Chittagong, like Aarong for example. However, almost all copies are sold-out as of now. We were in the talks of reprinting, but the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and production was put to a halt. However, we have arranged for reprinting now, and I hope that the new copies will be available within a few months. As for the film, I'm not too enthusiastic on uploading

it to YouTube. The film is forty-two minutes long, and is available in both English and Bangla. It has been showed in many festivals, cultural events, discussions, and even on Zoom because of the lockdown. This creates a scope for discussion because there may be latent questions even after watching the film. I want to show the film in such a way that there is space for discussion. I'm also very glad that the government has issued a GIs for muslin. GIs is a geographical indicator that is issued by the World Trade Organisation to countries that want to claim a products as their own. However, when issuing a GIs, the government needs to have accurate information on why the product requires such. Our journey began at the end of 2013, and we have travelled very far with the revival. I feel that we must give credit to the weavers who worked relentlessly to make this a possibility. When we did our firsts muslin exhibition, we recruited designers from Bangladesh, India and England and gave them the fabric to design clothes from. Some designed sarees, some designed dresses, but one renowned Indian designer beautiful-

establish its brand, and now, we're at a place where we're losing it. Jamdani, a sub-category of muslin, is, perhaps, the only surviving form of muslin in Bangladesh. We showcased a 100-150 year-old jamdani saree at our exhibition. It was battered and worn-out, but it was devastatingly beautiful. If we compare it to jamdani sarees of today, the newer ones pale in comparison. I feel that our quality is deteriorating, and we must put a stop to it. To do this, we have to show the weavers that they're capable of weaving fabrics that are just as high in quality as of the past.

Rafi Hossain: Can you talk about your association with Novera?

Saiful Islam: When I was working with muslin, Novera's husband came to Bangladesh to attend an event at Dhaka Art Summit. I was asked to take an interview of him, and we got along quite well after that. He was fascinated that I was working with muslin. There was a film screening about the history of muslin at Shilpakala, and he came to watch it. He asked me to visit him if I happened to be in France. A month after that, my film was selected at a film festival in Nice, and I went to France to attend it. We met up, and that is the first time I saw Novera's house. This took place in at the end of 2017, two years after her death. We talked a lot about Novera in the few days that followed. I realised that even though we wrote a lot about Novera, some people might have misconceptions about her, and she wasn't being talked about internationally. If we don't talk to a global audience now, our culture will not be able to be dispersed further. I tried taking pictures of her art, along with a photographer later, in hopes that something would make of it. I hope that, in the near future, something will come out about Novera, so that she gains recognition worldwide. I want to showcase the talents and stories of Bangladesh to an international audience.

Rafi Hossain: Have you taken your amazing work to our Prime Minister?

Saiful Islam: When we started this project, we started in association with the government. However, we haven't been able to present our work to the Prime Minister yet, but I hope we can do it soon.

Rafi Hossain: Would you like to add something more to the discussion?

Saiful Islam: I don't have much to say because this is something that can be talked about for hours on end. We have a duty of preserving what we have been given, and make sure we do our utmost to prevent it from becoming obsolete. Japan is an example of a highly developed society, but it still holds craftsmen to the highest regard. However, if we think about jamdani weavers of our country, we can't name a single one. We need to give them the recognition that they deserve. Another challenge is, if we don't teach the younger generation about our history of muslin, they won't develop the understanding that we have a history with muslin that spans for thousands of years. We must remember that.

Rafi Hossain: Thank you again for being with us today and having this discussion. Good luck on all your endeavours. Stay safe, stay well.

Saiful Islam: I would like to thank you, the Daily Star and the readers for letting me be a part of this discussion. I hope that this has helped in further projecting the importance of our work.

Amina Hossain
PHOTO COURTESY: SAIFUL ISLAM



ly amalgamated the two, creating a modern dress with traditional muslin elements. The fusion creates something unique.

Rafi Hossain: How do we go about putting a price tag on an item that is a part of our heritage?

Saiful Islam: We have to see it in two ways: price and value. They are vastly different. Similarly, the market for muslin can't be understood by the price of the fabric. The effort, craftsmanship, history, and heritage also have to be taken into account. If I go back to what you said about branding, it takes a considerable amount of time to develop a brand. It took a hundred years for muslin to

Pori Moni Coming this March



The Tauquir Ahmed directed film *Sphulingo*, starring Pori Moni, is set to be released in theatres on the 17th of March. The film also features Shamol Mawla, Zakia Bari Mamo and Rownaq Hasan, among several others. The cast appeared on a teaser for the film and also the video for a song from the movie, which is called *Tomar Name*. It garnered a lot of praise from audience. The film's story is based around the band culture of the youth. The film was made to commemorate the birth anniversary of Bangabandhu, and the songs on the film were directed by Pintu Ghosh.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub



PUJA CHERRY AS SOHANA

Qazi Anwar Hussain's thriller series, *Masud Rana*, is coming to the silver screens. The movie for the series was announced a few years ago by JAAZ Multimedia. The work on the film was delayed a few times, but now finally it is in process. While JAAZ is producing the film, it will be directed by Saikat Nasir, and we will also get to see Puja Cherry as Sohana. The budget for the film is around three crore fifty lakh taka. The action sequences for the film will be coordinated by experts from Bangladesh, Chennai and Indonesia.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

DOYEL RIGHT NOW

Actor Dilruba Doyel gathered a lot of attention from audiences for her performance in Nasiruddin Yousuff's film *Alpha*. Last year, she also finished working on the Nurul Alam Atique movie, *Lal Moroger Jhuti*, which received government grant. Doyel plays a very important character in the movie which is currently awaiting release. Recently, Doyel was also seen on the drama made from the Hasan Azizul Huq written story, *Uttor Bashante*. Doyel received a lot of praise for the drama, which was directed by Akram Khan and produced by Mahafuza Aktar.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub



Don't use 'public safety' to muzzle protests

Govt must ensure citizens can hold peaceful protests

In politics, especially in Bangladesh, some excuses never seem to be out of fashion. They remain in circulation regardless of how ludicrous they sound, and how consequential their effects may be. One such excuse is "public safety", an otherwise legitimate concern, but one which is often used by the authorities to curtail the opposition's freedom of assembly. This week, we saw protesters allied with BNP being dispersed by police even before they could congregate for a planned rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club. After sporadic clashes—during which 75 bullets, 26 pellets and four teargas shells were fired by police—nearly 300 leaders and activists of the party were sued, and 13 placed on remand.

One wonders what endangered public safety more—a protest rally that was never held, or clashes leading to injuries and lawsuits triggered by police intervention? Police officials, some of whom also reportedly faced assaults from BNP men, may have pre-empted the rally on safety grounds but their action amounted to depriving them of their constitutionally guaranteed freedom of assembly. This is totally unacceptable in a democratic country. The opposition parties have the right to congregate to express their grievances, and police can only ensure they do so in a peaceful manner, not pre-empt their gathering altogether.

We have seen similar pre-emptive tactics used in Rajshahi where all transport services were abruptly suspended in a bid to foil BNP's plan to stage a rally on Tuesday. The "transport strike" was apparently orchestrated to pre-empt their mobilisation. But, according to our reports, it was the ordinary citizens who suffered the most because of the transport crisis. The Tuesday rally was part of a BNP plan, announced on February 5, to hold protests in six city corporations across the country demanding fair parliamentary elections, and unsurprisingly, all planned rallies since then were foiled using similar excuses. All this adds up to the suspicion, as one political commentator told *The Daily Star*, that the government is unwilling to "give any political mileage to its opponents."

We believe ensuring public safety should be the top priority for law enforcement agencies whenever a rally is held or planned, but it doesn't give them *carte blanche* to do whatever they want. "Public safety" cannot be used as a pretext for stifling dissent or criminalising peaceful expression. The government must respect and protect people's right to register their protests, both online and offline, and must try harder to address their concerns. Using undemocratic means to counter its opponents may give it a short-term victory, but it harms all of us in the long run.

Decaying masterpieces at DU Library

Artworks by renowned artists must be conserved

We are deeply dismayed to learn of the sorry state that the artworks of two of Bangladesh's most notable artists are currently in. According to a report published in this daily yesterday, a sculpture by Novera Ahmed and three murals of Hamidur Rahman are rotting away on the walls of Dhaka University Central Library due to negligence and lack of maintenance by authorities.

Besides becoming difficult to view, the artworks also bear other signs of abandonment such as dust, cracks, lack of light and ventilation, spider webs, discoloration, termite infestations, and splatters of paint from when adjoining walls and roofs were being repainted. Such neglect for the works of two artists who collaborated to design the historical Central Shaheed Minar in memory of our Language Martyrs is indeed shocking.

The original design of the Dhaka University library building by renowned architect Muzharul Islam has also been disrupted with new constructions.

Although both Novera Ahmed and Hamidur Rahman were great artists in their own rights, their work (most of which portray concepts of family, religion, nature, and everyday Bengali life and patriotism) holds national importance and needs to be cared for, wherever in the country they are situated. The neglect of these artworks is also the neglect of Bangladesh's own rich cultural history, whose conservation and preservation are already in dire straits due to lack of proper manpower and resources.

Hence, we would urge the concerned authorities to maintain and/or restore not only these four pieces by Novera Ahmed and Hamidur Rahman, along with Muzharul Islam's DU library building, or say, the Kamalapur Railway Station Plaza, but all other similar works of art and architecture which are in danger of being overshadowed by "development".

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Misuse of sitting service buses

There are numerous passenger-faring vehicles on our roads, with buses mostly being used for commuting. While passengers get on sitting service buses to get to their destinations comfortably, these buses do not follow any of the set rules and regulations. They increase the rent in the name of sitting service, but run them as if they are following a rental business, "No half pass" being a common sticker on their buses. Thus, no fare considerations exist for students. And "sitting service" is used as a stretch, as passengers often don't manage to find a seat and still pay full price. It is high time that this issue be handled by the authorities responsible.

Md Sirazul Hossain, Dhaka College

Death in destination countries

Avoidable tragedy and accountability



C R ABRAR

A few days ago a news item carried by *The Guardian*, a UK daily, created a major stir in the national media of several Asian countries. The piece was an expose of an ongoing tragedy involving deaths of migrant workers in Qatar. It revealed that more than 6,500 migrant workers from South Asia have died since the country earned the right to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. On average, every week, 12 migrant workers have died since December 2010 while working on various infrastructure projects including stadiums, an airport, roads, the public transport system, hotels and a new city.

The report stated that 69 percent of deaths among Indian, Nepali and Bangladeshi workers were officially categorised as "natural". Other significant causes were road accidents (12 percent) workplace accidents (seven percent) and suicide (seven percent). Interestingly, the classification of natural death was usually made without an autopsy and thus failed "to provide legitimate medical explanation for the underlying cause of these deaths".

The Qatar government did not dispute the number of deaths. The figure includes white collar workers who have died naturally, and the government insists that "the mortality rate among these communities is within the expected range for the size and demographics of the population".

The Guardian report was revealing in many ways. Not only has it highlighted "the lack of transparency, rigour and detail in recording deaths in Qatar", it maintained that embassies in Doha and labour sending countries were "reluctant to share the data, possibly for political reasons". The reluctance of the labour sending countries in engaging with the issue is palpably demonstrated in the inconsistencies between figures furnished by various government agencies, largely due to the absence of a "standard format for recording causes of death".

In view of the massive infrastructure development that is taking place in preparation for the World Cup, *The Guardian* report has zeroed in on Qatar. While such a spotlight helps generate awareness about the ongoing tragedy in the country concerned, we must bear in mind that avoidable premature deaths of relatively young migrant workers is a pervasive phenomenon in all the Gulf states. The deaths in Qatar have given rise to some important insights.

Firstly, the unwillingness of both countries of destination and origin to share information and data on deceased workers is a major challenge. Further, lack of clarity and transparency impedes

framing of appropriate policies and actions to address problems. It also works as a major barrier for the families of the deceased migrants to access justice and claim compensation.

Secondly, the propensity of receiving states in asserting that most workers die of "natural causes" is unacceptable. There is an urgent need for amending laws for ensuring "autopsies to require forensic investigations into all sudden or unexplained deaths". It is worthwhile to mention that as early as 2014, in a report, the Qatar government's own lawyers recommended commissioning an independent study into the deaths of migrant workers from cardiac arrest, and amend the law to "allow for autopsies...in all cases of unexpected or sudden death". There is also the need for labour receiving countries to pay heed to the call of Human Rights Watch to "pass legislation to require that all death certificates include reference to a medically meaningful cause of death".

As an overwhelming majority of migrant workers are the principal breadwinners of their families, the slackness in identifying actual causes of death not only ruin those families, it fails to bring proper closure to the loved ones of the deceased migrants.

Thirdly, heat stroke has been identified as an important cause of death of many migrant workers. The ineffectiveness of the summer working hours ban as highlighted by a ILO commissioned study in October 2019 was acknowledged by the Ministry of Labour and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy of Qatar. The study found that workers working outdoors were "potentially performing their job under significant occupational heat stress conditions for at least four months of the year". The Ministry of Labour disseminated enhanced guidelines on heat stress aimed at workers and employers earlier, but unfortunately those were neither comprehensive nor obligatory for employers and did not come with any enforcement mechanisms. It is also pertinent that *Cardiology Journal* in July 2019, based on a study on 1,300 Nepali workers between 2009 and 2017, found "a strong correlation between heat stress and young workers dying of cardiovascular problems in the summer months". The study was conducted by a group of

climatologists and cardiologists.

In official records, deaths deemed of "natural causes" include cardiac arrest, heart attack, respiratory failure and "sickness". Analysts have argued that such terms make it impossible to understand whether they may be related to working conditions such as heat stress. Once categorised as "natural causes", labour laws in most of these countries, including Qatar, deprive the families of any compensation. As an overwhelming majority of migrant workers are the principal breadwinners of their families, the slackness in identifying actual causes of death not only ruin those families, it fails to bring proper closure to the loved ones of the deceased migrants.

Cardiac arrest as a cause of death has been viewed as "highly problematic". The United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) offers guidance to doctors that "The mechanism of death (for example cardiac or respiratory arrest) should not be reported as the immediate cause of death as

under the auspices of the Wage Earners' Welfare Board from 2011 to 2020. A majority of those were from the Gulf states. Stroke, heart attack or accidents were assigned as prime reasons for death of men, while women were alleged to have committed either suicide or died of torture. On average, more than seven families received the bodies of their migrant loved ones each day (54 returns per week).

Evidence from the field informs us that there have been cases in which bodies with obvious injury marks were certified to have died from proverbial "natural causes". So far, such malfeasance of the state authorities of destination countries with the acquiescence of the authorities of countries of origin has allowed the tragedies to persist. There is an urgent need to put a halt to this avoidable misfortune. The process should start with the recognition by state authorities of the reality that young migrants are indeed dying of causes that are preventable.

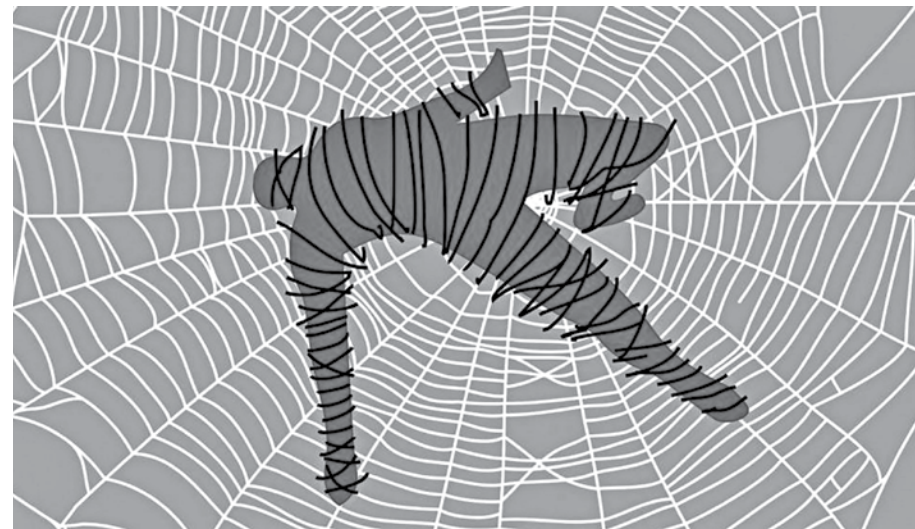


ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

it is a statement not specifically related to the disease process, and it merely attest the fact of death" (emphasis added).

The Guardian report has drawn attention to the dark reality of labour migration in the Gulf states. In many instances, contract substitution after arrival, not being placed against jobs as per the contract, non-payment and irregular payment of wages, ill treatment and abuse by employers and supervisors, and lack of access to healthcare and redress mechanism—all inflict immeasurable mental harm on the workers. Also, poor living conditions including cramped settings, inadequate water supply, lack of sanitary toilet facilities and the like hinder migrants' enjoying quality rest during breaks. All these factors, among other conditions, are likely to contribute to hypertension, respiratory or cardiac arrests or exacerbate existing conditions.

More than 28,000 bodies of deceased Bangladeshi migrants were repatriated

This should be followed up by proper investigations in suspected cases after the bodies of deceased migrants arrive in countries of origin.

The origin countries should demand that destination countries ensure that all migrants, male and female, in public or domestic spheres, work and live in decent conditions and are able to secure redress of their grievances. They should also push destination countries to conduct mandatory autopsies in all cases of unexpected and sudden deaths and recompense the families if the latter qualify for it. The origin countries should also rally forces in the Colombo Process, Abu Dhabi Dialogue and the Global Forum on Migration and Development to demand an immediate end to this tragedy in the spirit of the much celebrated Global Compact of Migration.

C R Abrar is an academic with interest in migration and human rights issues. He is the Chair of the Bangladesh Civil Society for Migrants.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Tackling the Covid hunger crisis

GORDON BROWN and MARK LOWCOCK

TODAY, 270 million people—equivalent to the combined population of Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy—are on the brink of starvation. This number has doubled over the last 12 months. And it is the world's children who are suffering most.

An estimated 11 million children under the age of five face extreme hunger or starvation in 11 countries in Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Asia. Of these, 168,000 will die of malnutrition by the end of 2022 unless they receive emergency support. And a total of 73 million primary schoolchildren in 60 low-income countries are chronically hungry.

Hunger was already on the rise before the coronavirus pandemic, mostly as a result of war and conflict, and climate change exacerbated it. But the secondary effects of the pandemic have created a global hunger crisis.

One reason for this is that Covid-19 has broken the lifeline of school. More than 1.6 billion children have missed time in the classroom since the pandemic began, and nearly 200 million are still not back at school.

Previous crises have shown that school closures carry huge social and economic costs, including increases in child marriage and child labour. Some young people end up paying the ultimate price: complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 in low- and middle-income countries. Ultimately, crises reverse progress on ensuring that all girls have access to quality education.

Moreover, schools provide many poor children with their only nutritious meal of the day. School closures mean that millions of children have lost their opportunity not only to learn, but also to eat. Children have missed more than 39 billion school meals during the crisis. Women and girls are often the first to miss meals, and account for more than 70 percent of people facing chronic hunger.

The damage caused by just a few weeks of missed nutrition can stunt a hungry child for a lifetime, and malnutrition can stunt a country's economic progress for a generation. So, getting children back into

school where they can be educated and fed must be a high priority.

With relatively little money, the international humanitarian system has achieved much. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), for example, feeds around 100 million people per year. And when Covid-19 severely disrupted commercial airline services, the UN created a logistics system to transport health and humanitarian workers and vital supplies, including food. But a crisis on this scale requires an ambitious plan that involves more than just providing school meals. Humanitarian organisations can't do it alone.

At their June summit, the wealthy G7

and the World Bank—the one wholly global organisation capable of mobilising substantial additional resources on a sustained basis.

But there is a very simple, common-sense solution to the immediate crisis: new international money. At least USD 600 billion in Special Drawing Rights (the International Monetary Fund's reserve asset) can be allocated to poorer countries. Leaders and lenders can agree on up to USD 80 billion of debt relief on the condition that the money goes to education, health and nutrition. And the World Bank and regional development banks can rapidly expand grants and loans.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

economies should commission a long-term plan to address rising global food needs. The plan should include provisions for pre-emptive action: building up food stocks, developing insurance as a protection, and supporting developing-country farmers and food growers with long-term investments to help them become self-sufficient.

Policymakers must also adopt innovative ways to generate financing, including guarantee-based facilities that can maximise the use of development aid and private-sector funding, which was at the heart of the 2015 Addis Ababa proposals for financing the Sustainable Development Goals. Another priority could be a closer partnership between the

With around USD 10 billion this year, the world could stave off famine in Yemen, South Sudan, northeast Nigeria, and the Sahel. And it could prevent mass hunger—which immediately precedes famine—in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia's Tigray region, and other vulnerable places.

This may sound like a lot of money. But it's the equivalent of a dollar a month from each person in the world's richest economies, and represents a fraction of one percent of wealthy countries' pandemic-related stimulus spending. We need to move quickly. This means giving grants up front to the WFP and leading NGOs like Save the Children to feed hungry children and their families.

With only 31 percent of refugee children enrolled at the secondary level, and just 27 percent of girls, Education Cannot Wait—which helps displaced children into school and has raised almost USD one billion in its short existence—needs to be fully funded. By directing additional resources to education, we can get 136 million children in some of the poorest and most conflict-affected countries back in school—and help them stay there.

Covid-19 has also exposed another educational divide: two thirds of the world's school-age children lack internet access at home, which prevents them from online learning. Today, only five percent of children in low-income countries have such access, compared to 90 percent in high-income countries. A UNICEF-led project to connect the world could bridge this gaping digital divide.

The UK government has pledged to play a leading global role in getting all children into school and ensuring that girls receive 12 years of education. But we will not achieve that noble objective unless the G7 summit addresses this issue, in addition to food security.

Time and again, education has demonstrated its power to transform individuals, families and entire countries. But chronic hunger can have devastating consequences: cruel and preventable deaths, violent conflict and mass displacement.

Ignoring the global scourge of hunger is thus not an option. What happens in the world's most fragile places has knock-on effects in the most stable countries.

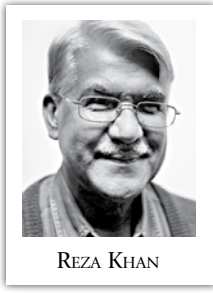
The choice facing world leaders is simple: act now to tackle the hunger crisis, or pay a much higher price later. Immediate action will be cheaper and save more lives than responding only after multiple famines have taken hold and a generation's missed education has exacted a terrible toll.

Gordon Brown, a former prime minister of the United Kingdom, is United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education and Chair of the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. Mark Lowcock is the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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WORLD WILDLIFE DAY

Bangladesh urgently needs a new Wildlife Department



REZA KHAN

DURING my childhood, in the late 1950s, I spent a jovial life in a remote (in those days) village named Borobari, Ballia in Dhamrai upazila in the Dhaka district, some 60 km north-west of Dhaka city. Our only suitable communication link with the capital was a motor launch that was operational from June-July to October, when the nearby Bangshi River became navigable for launches and smaller cargo ships. The rest of the time, we had passenger boats called *gohnar nouka* that would take us to Khushuria or Kalampur. From there, you would have to walk to Dhamrai to avail a small launch bound for Dhaka via Savar, Kornopara Khal, heading to Turag in Mirpur and finally moving on to Sadarghat. We had only kerosene-lit hurricane lanterns at the time, or *kupi bati* or cup lamps, as they were called. Palanquins, horse-driven carts and bullock carts were the other modes of transport. Few used bicycles at the time. When we would cross the many rivers during these journeys—our own Bangshi River, the river by Satura Bazar, the Dhaleswari River near Gopara or Jaigir and Tara Ghat—using wooden boats operated by a single boatman, we would often enjoy the sight of the *Shisu*, *Shushuk* or River Dolphin in every river, sometimes even a few metres from us.

The walk from Ballia to Manikganj at the time was also quite comfortable because all the villages had age-old trees—especially fig, banyan, tamarind, silk cotton, mango and *kalo jaam* trees—as well as bamboo clumps, jute and paddy fields. Along the bridge paths, horse-driven cart tracks and aisles of the fields we passed on those journeys, I would often see jackals, mongooses and sometimes *bagdash* or civets. There was, possibly, not a single moment that passed when I did not see or hear flocks of birds, or hear the melodies of koels, cuckoos, bulbuls, mynas, shrikes, drongos, leafbirds and others.

There were sal forests around Dhaka, Mymensingh and North Bengal, and the greater Chittagong and Sylhet divisions also still had some naturally growing patches of forests holding quality wildlife.

However, exponential and unchecked human population growth always negates the principles of wildlife conservation. This is a picture that has been painted everywhere in the world for many centuries, especially after the Industrial Revolution. Bangladesh is no exception. It is a nascent country—

just half a century old, but its wildlife footprints are as ancient as in other parts of the subcontinent. The dynasties before the Mughals also saw the leasing of the natural wealth of land and animals for human utilisation, but as the human population was proportionately small then, this did not really lead to the massive destruction of forests and wildlife wealth.

The land area under Bangladesh has witnessed two major geopolitical changes, first in 1947 and again in 1971. Both have led to the mass movement of people and the loss of wildlife wealth. When Bangladesh became an independent country in December 1971, it had already lost its megafauna, such as three species of

livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people globally, and particularly of Indigenous and local communities with historic ties to forested and forest-adjacent areas.

Bangladesh does not have virgin forest anywhere in the country—rulers and subsequent governments have leased out forest lands for extracting timber and wildlife from as early as the 1600s. In the forests that were not under any direct control of the ruling powers, the Indigenous populations have cleared large areas in the name of slash-and-burn agriculture, and animals have been hunted as well.

The only exception is the Sundarbans, which has never seen a permanent settlement of people inside

forests. They are part forest dweller and part living with the mainstream populations of the country because they cannot get sufficient livelihoods from the forest to support themselves.

The mainland populations and governments have mismanaged the forestry sector, and the overall environment of the country in water, agricultural and industrial sectors. Also, the subsequent governments after 1971 have had no constructive or sustainable plan to save government-owned forests, privately-managed forests and the forests that are inhabited by Indigenous populations. There were also no plans regarding village groves, rivers, wetlands and coastal areas, and on tackling excessive pollution. All of these

Wildlife, Forest and Climate Change to incorporate the new department and give it more prominence than what it enjoys under the current Forest Department—as a subordinate unit with stop-gap arrangements for employees without clear policies of hierarchical succession.

This Wildlife Department will need to have policies to manage all wildlife wealth—plants, animals, soil, water and air, from the village level to the highest mountain in the country, from the tiniest wetland to all marine resources. In areas with Indigenous populations, the Indigenous people need to be included in a partnership in all field-level activities and management when it comes to village forestry. It will partly be the job of the villagers to provide labour and services at the grassroots level at cost, whereas other, more qualified people will also need to be recruited through government procedural channels.

This new department should have recruitment policies similar to other government departments, where a junior wildlife officer/warden would eventually climb the ranks to become Chief Wildlife Officer/Warden and finally have a rank similar to the current Chief Conservator, Forests, before retirement.

The government must hand over all lands that have so far been declared as wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, Ramsar sites, ecotourist spots, marine parks, game reserves and other reserves or parks, zoological gardens, ecologically critical areas, migratory routes of birds and marine animals, etc, to the Wildlife Department. Even wildlife occurring in private lands, crop or agricultural fields, or on specific trees, waterbodies, etc, will come under the management of this department through revamping and modifying the existing wildlife acts and rules.

This department will manage all treaties related to wildlife, zoological gardens and biodiversity under the United Nations and regional agreements with various governmental blocs, donors, and international and national NGOs. It will be empowered not to cut a single naturally growing tree in any land it owns, unless there is an extreme necessity to have access to this area for better management. In such cases, the department, to supplement the loss of such trees, should plant double the number of trees in suitable areas before the old trees are removed. We need to urgently design and implement a far-reaching plan to save our wildlife and forest ecosystems through a separate department that is specifically designated for this purpose before it is too late.

Dr Reza Khan is a nature-lover and ex-head of Dubai Zoo.



A Pantropical Spotted Dolphin shot in the Swatch of No Ground in the Bay of Bengal in 2010.

PHOTO: REZA KHAN

rhinos, buffaloes, gaur, banteng, swamp deer, nilgai, wolves, possibly cheetahs, almost all three species of bears, two species of peafowl and the notable mugger/marsh crocodile. By this time, most of the surviving wildlife—such as the gigantic Bryde's whales, Asian elephants, Bengal tigers, leopards, dolphins, clouded leopards, binturong, hornbills, gharial and saltwater crocodiles—were already dwindling. These species might disappear from our territory at any moment, in 20 or 50 years.

This year's World Wildlife Day will be celebrated under the theme "Forests and Livelihoods: Sustaining People and Planet", as a way to highlight the central role of forests, forest species and ecosystems in sustaining the

it. However, rulers from the 1600s and finally the British after the mid-1700s started the wholesale removal of trees from the Sundarbans and other forests in mainland areas around Dhaka-Mymensingh, Sylhet and Chittagong divisions. The path of forest and wildlife extraction shown by the British was soon followed by Pakistan and Bangladesh almost up to the 1990s.

So, this year's World Wildlife Day theme applies very loosely to Bangladesh simply because modern forest-inhabiting people—such as the Garo and Hajong in sal forests, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Lushai, Pankho, Bawm, Mro, Khyang, Khumi and Chak in Chittagong and Khamsi tribes in Sylhet—cannot survive on the produce obtained from the

have been compounded with massive changes in world weather patterns and the effects of global warming. The ultimate result is the massive destruction of forests with wildlife, the silting up of rivers, the drying up of wetlands, and polluted water and air. These have had devastating effects on hill/Indigenous peoples and the overall environment of the country.

To manage whatever resources are left in the denuded and human-altered forests, the scanty wildlife populations in disjunct natural and man-made habitats could be partly saved through the creation of an independent Wildlife Department. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change should also be renamed to the Ministry of Environment,

To manage whatever resources are left in the denuded and human-altered forests, the scanty wildlife populations in disjunct natural and man-made habitats could be partly saved through the creation of an independent Wildlife Department.

Building resilient food systems



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

SALEEMUL HUQ

THE Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated a number of ways in which the world, as currently functioning, is not fit for

purpose and is certainly not at all as resilient as we would like it to be. One of the vulnerabilities that have been exposed is food production, processing, trade and consumption in practically every country. In light of this vulnerability of the entire food system from local to national to global levels, the United Nations Secretary General has initiated the holding of a UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) in late 2021, which is an innovative approach to holding such Summits.

The first innovation is that it will not be negotiated between governments, which is what normally happens at UN Summits, but rather the starting point is assumed to be the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have already been agreed upon by the governments. Hence, the UNFSS will look to how things can move forward to reduce the vulnerability and enhance the resilience of food systems from local to national and global levels over the next decade.

The second institutional innovation is that the Secretary General of the UN has appointed a high level individual, Rwandan agricultural scientist and policy-maker Agnes Kalibata, to invite experts and academics to chair each of the five Action Tracks under which the UNFSS is organised. These five Action Tracks are: ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all, shift to sustainable

consumption patterns, boost nature-positive production, advance equitable livelihoods and build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress. I have been privileged to be invited to chair Action Track number five on resilience.

Each of these Action Tracks' chairs and their respective teams have already started to consult with a wide variety of stakeholders from national governments—who obviously will play a very important

role—to the private sector (both large and small), farmers, fishers and herders, as well as women, Indigenous peoples and youth groups around the world. In addition to the widespread consultations being carried out by the five Action Tracks, there is a parallel process of scientific assessments being done by a group of scientists, both on their own and attached to each Action Track. The most far reaching activity is probably the holding of national dialogues on food systems in each country, whose outputs will then feed into the five Action Tracks.

The national dialogue in Bangladesh has already been initiated under the aegis of the Ministry of Food, and they are planning two more dialogues in the coming weeks that will include different ministries as well as non-governmental stakeholders.

There is also another parallel track focusing on youth, as each Action Track has a Youth Vice Chair who is consulting widely with youth from around the world. The inputs that the Action Track chairs and teams will receive are being called "game changing solutions", which could range from new ideas and existing initiatives that can be scaled up to new technologies that can be submitted from any source. The first round of game changing

solutions reached over 500 across all five Action Tracks and these will be filtered into a smaller set over the next few weeks, while we are still open to receiving more ideas over the next months. So if anyone is still interested in engaging or giving inputs, they are most welcome to do so through the website of the UNFSS: <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>.

The Action Track chairs will submit the final list of proposed game changing solutions' ideas to the pre-Summit due to be held in Rome, Italy in July 2021. After that the UN Secretary General, in consultation with the member states, will make the final list for the actual Summit to be held in September 2021.

Dr Saleemul Huq is Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University Bangladesh and Chair of Action Track 5 on Resilience of the United Nations Food Systems.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

College Education Development Project (CEDP)
Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh

www.gsscollege.gov.bd

E-mail: gsscollege_mukta@yahoo.com, shahidsmritigovtcollegecedp@gmail.com
Phone No. 09028-75216, Mobile: 01711 221193

Invitation for Tenders

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Education.	
2	Agency	University Grants Commission/National University.	
3	Procuring entity name	Principal, Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh.	
4	Procuring entity code	N/A.	
5	Procuring entity district	Mymensingh.	
6	Invitation for	Procurement of Power Machinery (Sub-station, Generator, IPS and its related wires, cables & equipments) & Air Conditioner for multipurpose Computer lab, seminar library, departments, Project office, Conference Room etc. G-5, FY 2020-2021.	
7	Invitation Ref. No.	১৯৯৯/প্রকৃ/২০২১/৬-৫/১৭	
8	Date	03/03/2021	
KEY INFORMATION			
9	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (National).	
FUNDING INFORMATION			
10	Budget and source of funds	Development Budget (Government & IDA Credit).	
11	Development partners	International Development Association (IDA), World Bank.	
PARTICULAR INFORMATION			
12	Project code	224017200	
13	Project name	College Education Development Project (CEDP).	
14	Tender package No.	G-5	
15	Tender package name	Procurement of Power Machinery & Air Conditioner for multipurpose Computer lab, seminar library, departments, Project office, Conference Room etc.	
16	Tender publication date	03/03/2021	
17	Tender last selling date	17/03/2021 Time 04.00pm.	
18	Tender closing date and time	18/03/2021 Time 02.00pm.	
19	Tender opening date and time	18/03/2021 Time 02.30pm.	
20	Name & address of the office	Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh.	
	Selling tender document	Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh.	
	Receiving tender document	Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh.	
	Opening tender document	Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh.	
21	Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting (optional)	Will not be held.	
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER			
22	Eligibility of tenderer	1. The tenderer shall have a minimum number 05 years general experience in supply of Sub-station, Generator, IPS & Air Conditioner and physical services. 2. The tenderer shall have satisfactory experience in supply of Sub-station, Generator, IPS & Air Conditioner & similar goods of minimum BDT 50,00,000.00 (fifty lac) only under minimum 01 contract in the last 03 years. 3. The minimum amount of liquid assets i.e. working capital or credit line(s) of the tenderer shall be Tk 40 (forty) lac.	
23	Brief description of goods or works	Sub-station, Generator, IPS & Air Conditioner.	
24	Brief description of related services	Related service shall be in accordance with Section 4; Particular Conditions of Contract, Section 6; Schedule of Requirements and Section 7; Technical Specification of the tender document.	
25	Tender document price	BDT 1,500.00 (one thousand five hundred).	
26	Tender name	Location	Tender security amount (Tk)
	Procurement of Power Machinery & Air Conditioner for multipurpose Computer lab, seminar library, departments, Project office, Conference Room etc. G-5	Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh	1,60,000.00
			60 (sixty) days
27	Name of official inviting tender	Professor Md. Idris Ali, IDG Manager & Principal, Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh.	
28	Designation of official inviting tender	Principal, Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh.	
29	Address of official inviting tender	Principal, Shahid Smriti Govt. College, Muktagacha, Mymensingh.	
30	Contact details of official inviting tender	Tel: 09028 75216	Mob: 01711-221193
		E-mail: gsscollege_mukta@yahoo.com , shahidsmritigovtcollegecedp@gmail.com	
31	The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.		
Professor Md. Idris Ali IDG Manager & Principal Shahid Smriti Govt. College Muktagacha, Mymensingh			



WATER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Fostering Regional Cooperation and Sharing

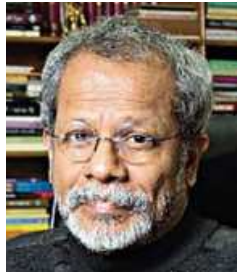
The Daily Star, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) jointly organised an online discussion titled "Water and Climate Change: Fostering Regional Cooperation and Sharing" on December 29, 2020. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.



SHAMSUL HUDA,
Executive Director,
ALRD

Rivers are nature's gift to us. The international rivers in our region have contributed to the expansion of civilisation since ancient times. In recent history, sharing water of international rivers by two or more countries led to concerns and frustrations throughout the region. Nevertheless, international rivers can be looked at as a symbol of expanding cooperation and an opportunity to foster friendships across the region.

Climate change is a similar global issue. Unprecedented human interventions have resulted in global warming and we are observing an increased frequency of natural disasters throughout the globe. The countries in the South are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Today's regional consultation hopes to widen the scope for sharing knowledge and experience among the stakeholders and lead to a concerted and coordinated approach towards a positive change. This discussion will also help encourage the relevant actors of the different states to negotiate through meaningful dialogues the issue of sharing water and promote wider cooperation on climate change responses.



DR IMTIAZ AHMED,
Professor,
International
Relations & Director,
Centre for Genocide
Studies, University of
Dhaka

There is a need for reconceptualization of certain terms. Rivers need to be reconceptualised to be thought of consisting of not just water but also of energy, biodiversity, and sediment. Whenever we talk about river sharing, we only talk about sharing of the water. Furthermore, we need to reconceptualise how we want to share waters.

Bangladesh is a water-centric country. Unfortunately, Bangladesh's entire development agenda is land-centric. There are two political perspectives towards rivers. According to the statist perspective, the upper riparian/lower riparian discourse focuses on why and how states cooperate or do not cooperate in sharing water only. The Water, Energy, Biodiversity, and Sediments (WEBS) perspective focuses on the experiential challenges of living beings. What needs to be done is to make this WEBS perspective more mainstream.

On the side of Bangladesh, there is a serious issue of river erosion. In 2015, a survey was carried out with the help of ActionAid where it was found that river erosion is the main cause of relocation for people. When discussing erosion, we seem to focus only on land loss. There is no system for calculating land gain caused by erosion through the piling up of sediments over the years. In some areas, on average there might be a loss of land but in others, there might be a greater volume of land gain. A problem arises due to the people losing the lands not being compensated for it.



DR A ATIQ RAHMAN,
Executive Director,
Bangladesh Centre
for Advanced Studies
(BCAS)

South Asia has the second largest population in the world. We have two island countries, two landlocked countries, and three riverine countries, making the whole region quite complex. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was supposed to be the regional cooperation mechanism but it has failed because the two greater powers within the South Asian region do not talk to each other. But the South Asian eastern sub region consisting of Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, and Nepal have been able to cooperate in regards to the Himalayan, Ganges, Meghna, and Brahmaputra system. Within this whole system, climate change has been wreaking havoc. Bangladesh itself is facing the various impacts of climate change which include frequent floods, droughts, cyclones, and so on.

There is an urgent need for planning when

it comes to migrations resulting from these various impacts of climate change. Rapid and non-voluntary migration of millions of people is a huge issue.

The reality of global climate change is impact on agriculture, food security, and water security and these impacts are far more complex than the political impacts. Our only way of moving forward is increasing trans-regional cooperation.



M ZAKIR HOSSAIN KHAN,
Senior Program
Manager (Climate
Finance Governance),
Transparency
International
Bangladesh (TIB)

The coastal people are the most vulnerable when it comes to issues of climate change. Globally, around 56 percent of the people reside in coastal regions.

In the context of South Asia, the Himalayan glaciers are melting more rapidly than anything else in the world. In Bangladesh, due to the rising sea level, more than 570 coastal cities could be affected by 2050. 46 percent of the poor of the world live in climate-vulnerable countries and 897 million people lack climate-adaptive capacities. The Paris Agreement needs to work in favour of these climate-vulnerable countries. The developed countries have the capacity to reduce carbon emissions and to mobilise funds and other resources. But the targets of the developed countries are not ambitious enough in the submitted Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Ultimately, the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are targeting emission of less pollution, and are forced to bear the inequitable burden of reducing emissions.

Although climate finance is supposed to focus on the adaptation of the LDCs, the money is only provided as loans to the developing countries. Hence, climate-vulnerable countries are at risk of the climate debt burden.

LDCs need to come together at the national level to demand ambitious and human rights-compliant climate action. The developed countries should create concrete and meaningful commitments under the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) principle. The legal tools under the Paris agreement should be touched upon so that the lack of transparency and ambiguity can also be addressed. Time-bound mobilisation of required funds for climate adaptation is also essential.

Community-led adaptation should be the key to adaptation and resilience.



FARAH KABIR,
Country Director,
ActionAid Bangladesh

We must help decision-makers, legislators, and policy-makers move beyond land-centric thinking and shift to water-centric thinking to formulate legislation and policies accordingly. This cannot be achieved unless there is pressure from the community. Conversations around rivers in South Asia are about managing and controlling the rivers. We must move away from this dialogue and think about how we can learn to live with rivers, recognising them as living beings. If the upper riparian has the psyche and mindset that they control the water, I would recommend they rethink it because it will be difficult for anyone to control rivers.

The economic and funding aspects are usually discussed, but the loss and damage go beyond that. When there is river erosion or the water level rises, people have to move and they lose social capital and entire communities due to uncertainty. Cities are not planning with water and migration in mind. These aspects should be given importance in conversations with policy-makers across South Asia.



PROFESSOR DR LIYAN ZHANG,
Tianjin University,
China

I believe people are the core elements here instead of land and rivers. The common people at the grassroots who have missed

out on formal education are creative because there aren't many limitations in their minds. Their innovative initiatives are valuable. They happen to have many good practices. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a mechanism of sharing knowledge and learning even across different countries' borders. In South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal, educating people can be challenging. Still, if the common people, like garment workers, took on this challenge, they may succeed. Learning and sharing valuable information would benefit everybody.

Water issues are mostly related to pollution because people in different countries pollute their water resources. This leads to suffering for people from other countries who happen to share the same river. But climate change occurs for other reasons, though being closely linked to river issues. Therefore, when it comes to water issues, we should concentrate on pollution over everything else.



DHARITRI KUMAR SARKER,
Deputy Secretary,
Ministry of
Environment, Forest,
and Climate Change,
Bangladesh

Bangladesh's two-fold strategy for facing the climate-change scenario is focused on increasing our resilience to the impacts of climate change. We are also working to achieve lower carbon emissions and more

entities is fascinating and, in many ways, a significant step. However, there is a big debate today about justice versus rights. Sometimes, those who command legal resources have rights and vice versa. So, how will the river represent and speak for itself?

We must de-centre engineers from the discussion surrounding rivers and move forward with new concepts, taking different perspectives into account. The government should be told that implementing policies requires plural methodologies and more understandings than the narrow engineering view of rivers.



ADVOCATE SYEDA RIZWANA HASAN,
Executive Director,
BELA

The rights of the river as an ecosystem should be put above everything else. That should, in turn, dictate the rights of the people and the rights of the state. Rivers or ecosystems are destroyed because there is an upper riparian or mega political power. At the national level, the current mode of development is also contributing to the mass destruction of major ecosystems. We have failed to respect rivers as ecosystems and we treat them as cesspools and mining centres. The damage is happening on both the regional and the national level.

The main problem in South Asia is that, when we talk about protecting rivers

make the water more erratic. There will be more water present at the wrong times and less when we need it. But storage does not only mean storage in dams. Water needs to be stored as groundwater, and in ponds, wetlands, and so on.



BARRISTER RAJA DEVASISH ROY,
Chakma Circle Chief

We do not know much about the rivers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Most of the sources of these rivers lie within Bangladesh. The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change is supposed to protect forests from deforestation and from loggers. But, instead, the indigenous peoples are forced to tell the ministry to do its job.

Indigenous peoples need to be part of the dialogue and work with the Bangladesh government for the benefit of the environment. We can bring vast knowledge and experience to the table. The government of Bangladesh alone does not hold the capacity to stop the logging in the hill forests of CHT. The indigenous forest dwellers, on the other hand, know who these loggers are. So, indigenous peoples working together with the government can bring in more meaningful forest management, water resource sharing, and water resource management.



AJAYA DIXIT,
Editor, Water Nepal
and Chairman, Board
of Directors, Nepal
Water for Health
(NEWAH)

The local ecologies have changed vastly over the last few decades. We need to recognise how these different ecologies interact with each other and how people living in those ecologies respond to environmental stress. In the water terrain, we can see two different universes. One is the world of the experts and the other is the universe of the people who learn from nature. Unfortunately, there is a huge gap between these two groups of people. We do not train our engineers about the social context and challenges present at the local level. Revisiting education can therefore be a good starting point.

Everybody discusses taking water away from rivers but not about putting water back into rivers. So, how can we change the fragmentation of rivers and the loss of biodiversity? The way forward would be to put the vulnerable first such as the smallholders, fisher folk, women and other marginalised groups. Data transparency is also an important issue. How do we then bring in the holistic ecological paradigm? How do we put an economic value on water? We also need to look into depleting upstream dry season river flow. To solve these issues we need a much greater dialogue and conversation across geographical regions.



SHAMSUDDOZA SAJEN,
Commercial
Supplements Editor,
The Daily Star &
Moderator of the
session

We are aware that the trans-boundary freshwater resource management in South Asia has become complex due to water scarcity and climate change impacts. The water basins in these regions show the impacts of climate change on ecosystems and on society more visibly now. In terms of building resilience, it becomes a major issue as climate change affects water quantity, quality, temperature, water-related ecosystems, and the magnitude and occurrence of extreme weather events such as floods and droughts.

Through its impact on water resources, climate change is affecting many sectors including agriculture, fisheries, tourism, health and biodiversity. These impacts will eventually affect the lives of the millions of people dependent upon these sectors. The poor and vulnerable communities are affected in particular. To address this situation, trans-boundary cooperation is a necessity. Trans-boundary cooperation can also help in terms of conflict prevention, socio-economic development, and overall human well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reconceptualise the term river
- Introduce a water-centric development agenda
- Make the WEBS (Water, Energy, Biodiversity, and Sediments) perspective of rivers more mainstream
- Ensure proper compensation for people losing lands due to river erosion
- Increase trans-regional cooperation on river basins
- Ensure time-bound mobilisation of required funds for climate adaption
- Address the pollution of water resources
- Ensure participation of the indigenous peoples in the fight against climate change

resilient development through mitigation. The mitigation measures that have been undertaken include developing utility-scale solar energy, scaling up wind energy, expanding the Solar Homes Programme, scaling up biogas production from waste, and building elevated express highways and Dhaka mass rapid transit systems.

Adaptation priorities include improved early warning systems for cyclones and floods, disaster preparedness for cyclones, climate-resilient infrastructure and communications, climate-resilient housing, stress-tolerant variety improvement and cultivation, biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, research, knowledge management, and capacity building.

Over the last decade, the government has allocated over two billion dollars annually for climate change-sensitive project implementation. So far, Bangladesh has created 200,000 hectares of coastal plantations as shelter belts to save the coastal people from climate change. We are also successfully managing 601,700 hectares of the Sundarbans mangrove forest, which saves lives and resources from natural calamities. Due to lack of upstream water flow in winter, saline water intrusion increases coastal soil salinity. We are coping with this problem by raising embankments and changing planting times.



ROHAN D'SOUZA,
Associate Professor,
Graduate School of
Asian and African
Area Studies, Kyoto
University, Japan

We must reconceptualise the language and understanding surrounding rivers. If we want to formulate new solutions for climate change, we must rethink what we mean by rivers, water, and so on. We need to think of rivers through WEBS rather than their statist concept. We have to go beyond cooperation and think of the idea of sharing and radically rethink how to position the beneficiaries and the cost. We cannot think about sharing without ideas of empowerment. Empowerment is about enabling people to secure their livelihoods, improve their abilities, and build their capacities. We must address that adaptation is not merely about dodging the damages caused by climate change; it is about what people are gaining as benefits and who are paying the costs.

Rivers being accorded the status of legal

as ecosystems, we consider rivers to be a bilateral issue, hence a matter for negotiation between the states. We fail to see the river as an agenda for discussion and dialogue. There is only state-level negotiation, which is devoid of any public consultation. People's voices should be given a place in discourse or negotiations. There is a need for information to be shared among nations and with all relevant communities. A set of guidelines and principles are required to guide future discourse. Climate change, climate challenges, and climate vulnerabilities should shape the agenda.



MR DIPAK GYAWALI,
Former Minister of
Water Resources of
Nepal; Academician,
Nepal Academy
of Science and
Technology

We are all victims of climate change. The energy sector created climate change, and the impact on societies came through the water sector. When Kyoto was first developed, there was a concept of equal but differentiated responsibilities. The equal but differentiated responsibility issue has been thoroughly watered down now and taken a new turn with the China versus US rivalry.

We put the responsibility of the climate issue with the bureaucracy and we expect this bureaucracy to lead us towards finding a solution to this issue. But we have to understand that this bureaucracy might be good at management after a framework has been set but they are not good at setting the framework. The current fight resides at a moral and market level as well. The market can be pressured through moral activism of environmentalists. We are expecting our government and ministries to take the lead and come up with brilliant solutions for us to follow. This will not happen.

We also need to look at water through a much wider lens. The biggest portion of trans-boundary water is not actually the river water but water present in the atmosphere. This water transports far more moisture than rivers, especially in the tropics, and does not recognise any boundaries. The cooperation on meteorology is far more serious and far more doable than the cooperation in trans-boundary river sharing.

We also need to shift our focus to the issue of water storage. Climate change is going to