

Why Bangladesh should seek an observer seat on the Arctic Council

Though miles apart, Bangladesh and the Arctic region face the same threat: the dangers of climate change



KAMRUL HOSSAIN

THE Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum comprising the eight circumpolar Arctic states: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. The council was founded in 1996 through the Ottawa Declaration, its purpose set to enhance regional cooperation on protecting the Arctic environment and promoting sustainable development of the region. The structure of the council allows representation from six transnationally located indigenous peoples' organisations of the Arctic, called "Permanent Participants." Additionally, non-Arctic states, intergovernmental organisations, interparliamentary bodies, international non-governmental organisations and the like join the council with the status of "observer."

While the observers have no substantive role in the decision-making process, they make essential contributions to the council's work. They participate in the ministerial meetings held at the end of each two-year chair period and—at the discretion of the chair—are allowed to present oral or written statements, submit relevant documents, and offer views on the issues under discussion.

Among the observers, the participation and role of non-Arctic states receive specific political attention, often influenced by the prevailing geopolitical trends and interests. To date, 13 non-Arctic states from Europe and Asia have participated as observers in the work of the council. While Bangladesh has not been among these countries and is located far away from the Arctic, the impacts of climate change on Bangladesh and the Arctic—particularly their severity—link the two rather closely, prompting consideration of their interrelationship. Bangladesh's admission as an observer would offer a broader mutual understanding of the links to reinforce a global approach to climate governance.

The impact of climate changes in the Arctic will be striking: for example, the primarily frozen Arctic Ocean is expected to be ice-free during the summer months by 2030. The changes in the region will have profound implications not only for its four million residents, sensitive ecosystems and natural resources, but for the rest of the world as well. The impacts extend well beyond the projected rise in the sea level caused by melting ice, given the role of the Arctic in the global climate system, its influence on ocean circulation, and its impacts on mid-latitude weather. Moreover, an ice-free Arctic Ocean will see an increase in human activities, bringing increased

the global temperature rise remains well below 2 degrees Celsius. Bangladesh will be one of the hardest-hit victims of climate change, with current assessments projecting that it will lose 20 percent of its territory by 2080, if not earlier. Studies suggest that over 20 million people will become environmental refugees due to the rise in sea level. This will not only threaten the existence of a large part of the country's territory, but will also destroy the largest contiguous mangrove forests in the world: the Sundarbans. Furthermore, the salinisation of land and groundwater will destroy agricultural activities and cause a scarcity of fresh and drinkable water.

Climate change will also bring frequent unpredictable natural hazards, such as floods, tropical cyclones, storm surges and droughts. Such events will cause not only the loss of life, infrastructural damage, and adverse effects on livelihoods, but will also create large-scale population displacement—environmental migration—both internally and externally.

What can Bangladesh do in the Arctic Council?

Because of the interlink between the impacts of climate change, Bangladesh can play a meaningful role to further its interests on the climate change agenda if it becomes a part of the institutional mechanisms available in the Arctic, given that one of the crucial goals of the Arctic Council is to further the agenda globally.

representing 2.4 billion citizens of the countries belonging to the former British Empire—whose mission is, among others, to contribute to the environment and promote sustainable use of natural resources both on land and in sea. The members of the Commonwealth include many island nations having concerns similar to those of Bangladesh (e.g. Tuvalu)—in particular, the vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

Among the current observer countries on the Arctic Council, India has representations in both Saarc and the Commonwealth, whereas Singapore and the United Kingdom are members of the latter; China, Japan, and South Korea are observers in Saarc. In its conduct with all these states, Bangladesh maintains neutrality and enjoys a good status as an acceptable third country in regional power politics. For example, India and Pakistan are rivals and have had several armed conflicts—Kashmir being one of the main sources of the disputes. India's relations with China have also been complicated since the former's independence in 1947. In 2020, when armed troops clashed on the Sino-Indian border in Ladakh, this further worsened its relations with China. Additionally, China's emerging role in the great power politics makes it an unreliable partner for India. What is more, China, India and Pakistan all possess nuclear weapons—another arena of rivalry among them. Recent political shifts in Afghanistan and the Taliban's capture of power make regional politics even more chaotic,

Bangladesh in a relatively privileged position to represent the region and its concerns in the Arctic Council as a trustworthy party. Its importance in regional diplomacy and wide acceptance by regional and global actors speak in favour of its candidacy for the observer status on the Arctic Council. Its inclusion

a liberal approach to multilateralism. The country is already a party to major international regulatory mechanisms applicable to the Arctic: the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; major regulatory mechanisms adopted by the International Maritime Organization; the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), its Kyoto Protocol and the subsequent Paris Agreement; and the Convention on Biodiversity, among others. Bangladesh recognises the sovereignty of the Arctic states, including the sovereign rights of the coastal states in the Arctic Ocean as approved by the framework of the Law of the Sea. Being a coastal state itself, Bangladesh has successfully resolved maritime boundary disputes with India and Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal. Additionally, it has filed technical, scientific data with the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, delineating the outer limit of its continental shelf in the Bay of Bengal. In the Arctic, with the exception of the United States, all other coastal states have lodged their submissions to the commission, with those of Canada, Denmark, and Russia overlapping to a slight extent on the central Arctic Ocean seabed. The developments in this regard can further enhance the shared understanding and experiences between Bangladesh and the Arctic.

Most of the Asian observers on the Arctic Council are emerging economies. Given that the Arctic is gradually becoming a burgeoning economic frontier, these states are keen to expand their commercial and geopolitical interests into the Arctic.

will have a symbolic value, which will give it a political significance to benefit from. The country can be in a privileged position to showcase its presence in the Arctic, to have its voices heard, and at the same time, represent not only the Asian region, but also other regions (of the Global South) affected by the impacts of climate change. This involvement will uphold Bangladesh's soft-power role in global diplomacy and increase its credibility in the international political arena.

Furthermore, sharing knowledge and experiences in combating climate change and its effects is a common goal for the Arctic, Bangladesh, and the world. Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries, almost regularly facing natural calamities such as cyclones and floods, which are often considered a consequence of climate change. With the Arctic also facing such natural disasters more often than before, sharing the experiences and knowledge in adaptation, preparedness and responses, and enhancement of community resilience is another area of interest in which both could cooperate.

A favourable ally
Bangladesh's track record in exercising soft power in the issues referred to above reflects its commitment to comply with international regulatory processes and participation in institutional mechanisms. Bangladesh complies with internationally agreed norms, practices, and standards, and maintains

The Arctic's and Bangladesh's experiences in areas such as climate change and its sociocultural and environmental impacts on the people, disaster management, as well as respect for the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples and the importance of their traditional knowledge, offer opportunities for mutual learning. Collaboration in these areas will contribute to creating scientific knowledge and translating that knowledge into concrete actions. The credibility of Bangladesh and its success and capability in maintaining a relatively nonaligned position in regional and global diplomacy suggest that the country could exercise a constructive role to benefit, and to be benefited from, the Arctic politics. Such a role would contribute to and promote science diplomacy drawing on the established links between the Arctic and the Global South on the agenda geared to climate change and climate-induced disaster management. Bangladesh's soft-power role in such diplomacy and in regional power politics, which accords the country a favourable position, justifies its being admitted as an observer on the Arctic Council, where Bangladesh will be well-qualified to ably represent itself and the Asian region as a whole.

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The Arctic's contribution to the rise in sea level will have drastic consequences for Bangladesh.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries, almost regularly facing natural calamities such as cyclones and floods, which are often considered a consequence of climate change.

The engagement would help address related issues more systematically and coherently. As the Arctic is at the forefront of efforts to combat climate change, Bangladesh's partnering with the council would push its legitimate interests (remedy from global climate injustice) resulting from the impacts of climate change. In addition, the Arctic Council would afford Bangladesh a forum, through which the country could engage with the Arctic and the Global North, and express its concerns as well as those of other low-lying and island countries of the Global South vulnerable to climate change.

Additionally, in relation to the climate change agenda, Bangladesh is well-positioned in regional and global diplomacy. Located in South Asia, the country shares borders with India and Myanmar and is situated in proximity to an emerging power: China. Bangladesh's geopolitical importance for regional and global diplomacy is manifest in its multilateral engagements in regional and international bodies. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) is one such body, of which Bangladesh is a founding member, and where it plays a crucial role. Although referred to as a regional intergovernmental organisation and a geopolitical union of South Asian nations, Saarc's status is somewhat comparable to that of the Arctic Council.

Bangladesh is also a member of the 54-nation Commonwealth Association—

further deteriorating bilateral ties and upsetting the balance of power among the nations in the region.

Economic interests and shared experiences

Most of the Asian observers on the Arctic Council are emerging economies. Given that the Arctic is gradually becoming a burgeoning economic frontier, these states are keen to expand their commercial and geopolitical interests into the Arctic. Its hydrocarbon resources are estimated to be one-fourth of the world's undiscovered reserves, as revealed in a 2008 survey conducted by the US Geological Survey. The emerging sea routes for international navigation, such as the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage, are seeing increased use and attention as the shorter distances save carriers one-third of the time and energy required when using older routes like the Suez and Panama canals. With the development of the Northern Sea Route, commercial maritime activities between Asia and Europe are intensifying, the benefits of which are being reaped by the Arctic Council's Southeast Asian observers: China, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea.

Interestingly, almost all of these nations announced their intention to become observers on the council when the Arctic boom started over a decade ago. These countries' engagement, driven by self-interest particularly in the case of economic and geopolitical factors, places

greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions with them to accelerate climate change, leading to a faster melting of the Arctic.

A snowball effect

The Arctic's contribution to the rise in sea level will have drastic consequences for Bangladesh because of its location in a low-lying delta. Per the current estimates, by the end of this century, the sea level will rise by 1.5 metres—unless the GHG emissions are sharply reduced and

QUOTABLE Quote

ALDOUS HUXLEY
(1894–1963)
English writer

What is absurd and monstrous about war is that men who have no personal quarrel should be trained to murder one another in cold blood.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Stone unit
- 6 Abacus parts
- 11 Disconcert
- 12 Snowy wader
- 13 Craze
- 14 Must, informally
- 15 Ritzy home
- 17 That woman
- 18 Director Spike
- 19 Shop sweepings
- 22 Georgia, once: Abbr.
- 23 Summer top
- 24 In the lead
- 25 Volcanic rock
- 27 Scary shout
- 30 Corsairs
- 31 Some amount of
- 32 Goof
- 33 Disney septet
- 35 Does book work
- 38 Words to the maestro
- 39 Foe
- 40 Find darling
- 41 Run-down
- 42 Greedy one

DOWN

- 1 Caravan critters
- 2 Humbles
- 3 Crazy talker
- 4 China setting
- 5 Remark of finality
- 6 Entreat
- 7 Sense of self
- 8 Ygraine's son
- 9 Abhor
- 10 Kick off
- 16 Like a painting in progress
- 20 True state of things
- 21 Performed
- 24 Dry — bone
- 25 One under par
- 26 Come in
- 27 Composer Béla
- 28 Burning
- 29 Pearl producer
- 30 Jury members
- 34 Opera set in Egypt
- 36 Smidgen
- 37 Devious

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১। দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি নং :- ০১-রাউক/০২১-২০২২ইং।
২। কাজের নাম :- রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষের নগদাপাড়াস্থ ট্রাক টার্মিনালের ৩ (তিন) বছর মেয়াদে টোল আদায়ের জন্য ইজারা প্রদান।
৩। দরপত্র দাখিলের তারিখ অফিস সমূহের :- অগ্রণী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড, আরডিএ ভবন শাখা, রাজশাহী।
নাম
৪। দরপত্র দাতার প্রয়োজনীয় যোগ্যতা :- যে কোন আর্থিক ক্ষমতা সম্পন্ন যোগ্য ব্যক্তি ও প্রতিষ্ঠান।
এতদ্বারা রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষের নগদাপাড়াস্থ ট্রাক টার্মিনালের ৩ (তিন) বছর মেয়াদে টোল (ট্রাক টার্মিনালে ট্রাকের ফি) আদায়ের জন্য ইজারা গ্রহণে উচ্চক প্রার্থীদের নিকট হতে সীলমোহরকৃত দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাবে। রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষের অগ্রণী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড, আরডিএ ভবন শাখা, রাজশাহী হতে নিম্ন তফসিলের ০৪নং কলামে বর্ণিত তারিখ সমূহের দরপত্র ফরমের মূল্য প্রতিসেট ৫,০০০/= (পাঁচ হাজার) টাকা (অফেরতযোগ্য) নগদ প্রদানের বিনিময়ে অফিস চলাকালীন ক্রয় করা যাবে এবং তফসিলের ০৫ নং কলামে বর্ণিত তারিখ সমূহে দুপুর ১.০০টা পর্যন্ত প্রধান নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তা, রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ এর অফিস কক্ষ ও শাহমুখদাম থানা, রাজশাহী এর কার্যালয়ে রফিক দরপত্র বয়ে দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে। তবে কোন কারণবশতঃ সন্ত্রস্ত কার্যবিবরণে সরকারি ছুটি থাকলে অব্যবহিত পরবর্তী কার্যদিবসে একই সময়ে দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে এবং দরপত্র গ্রহণের দিনই বেলা ২.০০ ঘটিকার সময় উপস্থিত দরপত্র দাতাগণের সম্মুখে (যদি কেউ উপস্থিত থাকেন) প্রধান নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তা, রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ এর অফিস কক্ষে দরপত্র বাস্তব খোলা হবে। কোন কারণে ১ম ধাপে ইজারা প্রদান সম্পন্ন না হলে তফসিলে উল্লিখিত ০৪ নং ও ০৫ নং কলামের ধাপ অনুযায়ী পর্যায়ক্রমে দরপত্র গ্রহণ করা হবে। দরপত্রের বিস্তারিত নিয়মাবলী দরপত্র ফরমে উল্লেখ থাকবে।

তফসিল
[রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষের ৪.৬৪ একর জমির উপর নির্মিত নগদাপাড়াস্থ ট্রাক টার্মিনাল ইজারার বিবরণী:]

ট্রাক টার্মিনালের অবস্থান	জামানত	ইজারার সময়কাল	দরপত্র বিক্রয় এর শেষ তারিখ (অফিস চলাকালীন পর্যন্ত প্রতি কার্যদিবস)	দরপত্র দাখিলের শেষ তারিখ সকাল ৯.০০টা হতে বেলা ১.০০ টা পর্যন্ত
০১	০২	০৩	০৪	০৫
রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষের নগদাপাড়াস্থ ট্রাক টার্মিনাল	চেয়ারম্যান, রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষের অনুকূলে উচ্চক মূল্যের ১০% টাকা ডিভি/বিডি/পে-অর্ডার জামানত হিসেবে দরপত্রের সাথে দাখিল করতে হবে। যা পরবর্তীতে নির্বাচিত দরদাতার ক্ষেত্রে জামানত হিসাবে গণিত রাখা হবে এবং ইজারার মেয়াদ অতিক্রান্তের পর ফেরত দেয়া হবে। নির্বাচিত দরদাতার দর চেয়ারম্যান মহোদয় কর্তৃক অনুমোদনের পর অকৃতকার্য দরদাতাগণের জামানত ফেরত দেয়া হবে।	কার্যাদেশ দেওয়ার দিন হইতে ৩ (তিন) বছর পর্যন্ত	১ম বার ০৬/১০/২০২১ইং; ২য় বার ০৭/১০/২০২১ইং; ৩য় বার ০৮/১০/২০২১ইং	১ম বার ০৭/১০/২০২১ইং; ২য় বার ২১/১০/২০২১ইং; ৩য় বার ০৪/১১/২০২১ইং

বিঃদ্রঃ ১। বিজ্ঞপ্তি দরদাতাকে উচ্চক মূল্যের উপর ১৫% ভ্যাট ও ৫% আয়কর পৃথকভাবে প্রদান করতে হবে।
২। রাজশাহী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ না দর্শালে যে কোন অথবা সকল দরপত্র গ্রহণ কিংবা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করে।
৩। বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রচারের তারিখ হইতে অফিস চলাকালীন দরপত্র ক্রয় করতে পারবেন।

মোঃ আনওয়ার হোসেন
চেয়ারম্যান
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