

Climate destroyers’ pledge to save Earth too little, too late



A Native American proverb that says it all in such abundant eloquence, and we wonder, was the half-naked old chief of the misty mountain an illiterate man, or a wise one who knew what was going to happen to Planet Earth?

Men of the world, through their third eye, could envision what calamity would befall humans as they cut down trees, levelled hills, blocked streams, and polluted oceans with felonious consistency in the name of modernity and progress. The greedy men laughed away the words of caution and went about digging a mile-deep pit in search of diamonds and gold. The more they found them, the deeper they dug.

There are more plastic bottles and nylon nets in oceans than mackerels. Deep forests where birds and animals once built their safe homes now get bulldozed by humans to construct multistorey concrete cages for themselves. Mechanised vessels on rivers pollute water with burnt oil for fishes to choke on and die. Industries produce medicine for humans, but spew black smoke in the air for humans to choke and die. The more fossil fuel is burnt, the more the air heats up. The

“ONLY when the last tree has been cut down, the last fish been caught, and the last stream poisoned, will we realise we cannot eat money.”

forests heat up. Clouds heat up. The cold Arctic zone heats up. Millennia-old ice melts down. Water level around the world rises. Torrential rains and floods hit low coastal areas. And then we hear the echo of the wise words of the old men of the misty mountain. They warned us: Do not abuse nature, for nature will strike back.

We see all around the vicious manifestation of calamities of unparalleled ferocity. Global temperature is about to cross the threshold. Massive ice blocks in the Himalayas are slowly melting to crash down on the human abodes below. The century-old climate pattern is no more familiar. Rains linger unabashedly; winter bids farewell sooner than expected.

Nature is on a path of revenge all around the world. Environmentalists may not want to say it in such a blunt way, but deep down they know there is truth in it. The seven-billion-plus human population is ripping asunder this little planet in their infinite greed for material gain, to make profit by selling whatever they can grab with their two hands. Their uncaring atrocities are contributing to severe disequilibrium in nature, which in turn is hastening the process of climate change globally.

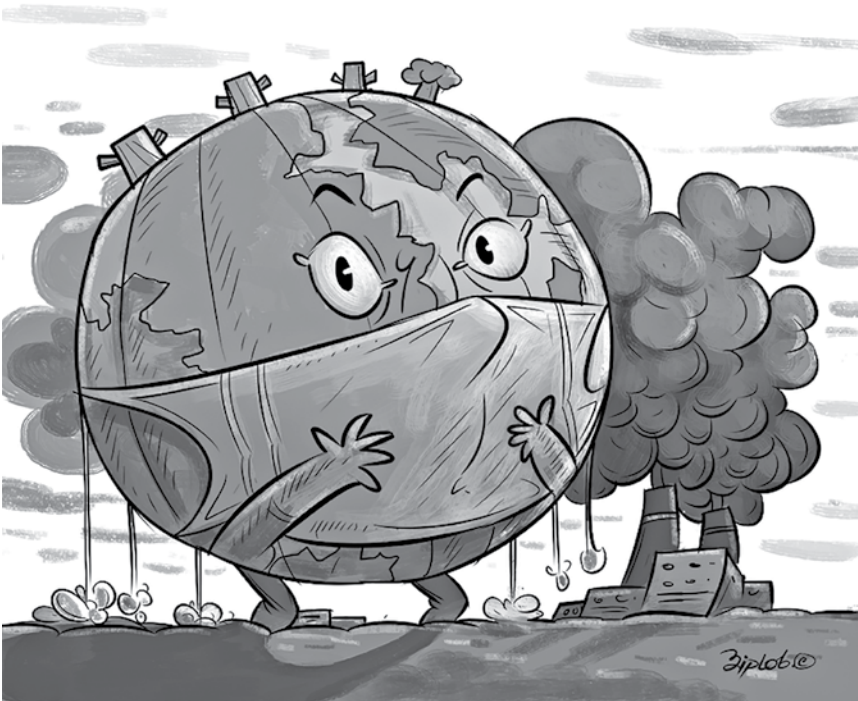
Climate change is causing sea levels to rise, storms, cyclones, drought, land erosion, landslides, flooding, and salinisation, and these extreme weather conditions are forcing people to find refuge elsewhere in search of livelihood. Bangladesh finds itself on the forefront of these impacts.

The geographical location with low elevation, Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to the frequent whims of nature. The high population density exacerbates its attempts to keep the wheels of the economy turning.

A study shows that by 2050, one in every seven people in Bangladesh will be a victim of climate change. And it further says that up to 18 million people may have to migrate because of sea level rise.

While humans continue to destroy nature to satiate their greed, they also take the liberty to coin the phrase “Climate Refugee.” This is irony at its

worst—a caustic joke on the hapless people in refugee camps. The term climate refugee connotes: “Persons or groups of persons who, for reasons of sudden or progressive climate-related changes in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.”



After suffering centuries of abuse in the hands of humans, Mother Nature is striking back with rising sea levels and devastating calamities.

ILLUSTRATION: BIPOLO CHAKROBORTY

Here are some grim facts about Bangladesh. It is estimated that two-thirds of Bangladesh is less than five metres above the sea level. And as much as 28 percent of the population lives on the coastal belts, where frequent tidal flooding caused by sea level rise forces them to migrate to high grounds.

Another estimate says that by 2050, with a projected 50cm rise in sea level, Bangladesh may lose approximately 11 percent of its land, affecting an estimated 15 million people living in its low-lying coastal region. Farmers face

took the declaration with a great deal of scepticism and demanded more urgent action to save the planet. Though the pledge is backed by almost USD 20 billion in public and private funding, and has been endorsed by more than 100 leaders representing over 85 percent of the world’s forests, including the Amazon rainforest, Canada’s northern boreal forest and the Congo Basin rainforest, environmentalists are not convinced as to how much it will help to heal the deep wounds and stop the bleeding.

The leaders of the “industrialised” countries argued that the agreement on deforestation was important to the overarching goal of limiting temperature rises to 1.5 degrees Celsius—which was the most ambitious Paris Agreement target. But the fact remains that the extent of damage done to this beleaguered planet for the last 300 years or so, in the name of industrialisation and modernity, has been more severe than what the naked eyes can see.

The same destroyers and polluters from the industrialised countries, and their paid agents, said in sugar-coated words: “We can’t deal with the devastating loss of habitat and species without tackling climate change and we can’t tackle climate change without protecting our natural environment and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples. So protecting our forests is not only the right course of action to tackle climate change, but the right course for a more prosperous future for us all.”

We wonder why it took them waiting for conferences like COP25 and COP26 to say all these things, and why could they not take actions decades ago?

The following countries are responsible for accelerating massive-scale deforestation in their respective territories: Brazil, Russia, the United States, China, Australia, and France. And they all put their signature on the agreement. They have done so before in many other summits and conferences on climate change and related issues. We are witness to their follow-up actions. Nothing worthwhile has been done as yet.

It is being said that it was a case of too little, too late at COP26. Planet Earth will not sit idle for the polluters to release their money for their pet organisations and groups to organise seminars to create awareness among the people about the adverse effects of climate change. Planet Earth will continue to take revenge.

Unfortunately, the polluters will read about this in newspapers, while the innocent victims will drown in distant Bangladesh.

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There are more plastic bottles and nylon nets in oceans than mackerels. Deep forests where birds and animals once built their safe homes now get bulldozed by humans to construct multistorey concrete cages for themselves.

Is Bangladesh at risk of falling into the Chinese debt trap?

HUSSAIN SHAZZAD

BD ANGLADESH, the second highest recipient of China’s investment in South Asia after Pakistan, imports the highest volume of goods from China, making the country Bangladesh’s largest trading partner. This is the beginning of the story where China offers Bangladesh financial assistance and development experience for its “big-ticket megaprojects” to fulfil the latter’s “Vision 2041”—a well-crafted dream to be a developed country. However, the massive amount of funding from China makes critics ask, citing the example of Hambantota in Sri Lanka: “Is Bangladesh getting entangled in China’s ‘debt trap’ diplomacy?”

Debt-Trap Diplomacy, a widely used narrative against China, is thought to have originated from the “infrastructure war” between China and the Western world. It’s an apple of discord regarding whether China

needs external funding for its flagship development projects, the financing of which goes beyond domestic affordability. This has led to Bangladesh looking for external funding options under conducive conditions. Bangladesh’s loss of substantial financial assistance from global lenders—e.g. World Bank’s rejection to finance the Padma Bridge—and the attractive nature of China’s investment created a gateway for the country to step into Bangladesh’s economy. On the other hand, China, as a part of its external orientation, comes closer to Bangladesh by affiliating the country with different China-led regional platforms, e.g. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), etc.

The Sino-Bangladesh relations, which began in 1976, were limited to trade deals until the first decade of the 21st century. The bilateral relations have experienced two different phases before and after the initiation of the BRI. The relations turned into strategic partnership after

calculus, since it can connect the south-eastern landlocked province of China. Besides, the cheap workforce of Bangladesh offers China an opportunity to relocate its sunset industries. Yet, critics give a contentious look on this relationship by denouncing China’s role—or lack thereof—in resolving the Rohingya crisis.

According to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), that a country will cross the danger mark if its external debts exceed 40 percent of GDP ensures that Bangladesh is in the “safe zone,” as its total foreign loan is less than 15 percent of its GDP. “Flow of External Resources into Bangladesh,” a publication by the Ministry of Finance, reported that the total outstanding foreign loan of the country was nearly USD 44.06 billion, depicting per capita loan to be around USD 278 in 2019-20 fiscal year. This clearly shows how the reality differs from the assumption that Bangladesh is overburdened with external debts. Another misconception that Bangladesh is going to be a victim of the Chinese debt trap, pointing the finger to the growing Chinese investment, also doesn’t reflect the ground reality. Of Bangladesh’s total external debt in the 2019-20 fiscal year, 38 percent was from the World Bank, 24.5 percent from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), 17 percent from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), 6.81 percent from China, 6.14 percent from Russia, and 1.3 percent from India. This data shows that Bangladesh is on the right trajectory.

The strategic advantage of cross-border trade tilted Bangladesh exponentially towards China, which has led critics to say that too much reliance on China’s money will make Bangladesh beholden to it. But Bangladesh’s diplomatic manoeuvres of the last few decades demonstrate that the country has been striking a fine balance among its donors. By pumping money into Bangladesh, China is actually trying to take the longstanding relations to a new height. Albeit, there is a narrative that Bangladesh is going to be a victim of “payday loan diplomacy,” but the counter-narrative explains how Chinese soft loans reduce the pressure of Western donors for economic and political reforms.

Bangladesh perceives Chinese investment as a welcome addition to existing sources along with creating a competitive environment. Before reaching foregone conclusions by tagging China’s debt trap with Bangladesh, it needs to be remembered that the funding options for Bangladesh are very limited. Besides, a loan becomes a burden if it is not optimally utilised. To date, all the Chinese-funded projects in Bangladesh have been proven to be financially viable. There is no instance where Bangladesh has accepted all the diktats, while signing financial agreements blindfolded.

The current stronger position of Bangladesh, in terms of external debt from China, will alter with the rise of Chinese investment, but the long-run returns will be more attractive if funds

are effectively utilised. Bangladesh needs to negotiate carefully before signing any financial agreement, focus more on soft loans, and ensure timely implementation of projects. Along with taking funds for infrastructural boost, Bangladesh may also leverage the development experience

of China to create a win-win situation. Not to mention, the macro-economic management policy of Bangladesh is prudent enough to avoid China’s debt trap, even if there is one.

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Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Over the last two decades, the bilateral ties between the two countries have grown from a trade relation to a strategic partnership.


FILE PHOTO: STAR

really has any “Machiavellian strategy,” as Chinese projects in Bangladesh are too fragmented to achieve such cunning strategic objectives. Once “the sleeping giant,” now the “second most influential economic superpower,” China follows socialist ideology in political affairs, but adopts open market policies under the name of “market socialism.” The historical data demonstrates that China always has strong affiliation with the South Asian countries because of the region’s “big bazaar.” The geopolitical eminence and commercial noteworthy of Bangladesh has made China pay special attention to cash in on this money-making market.

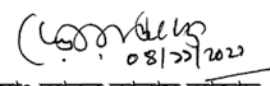
To utilise the potential of becoming the “economic hub” of South Asia, Bangladesh

2010, when the countries signed a number of trade, transit and defence procurement agreements. Both countries are working to alleviate the huge trade-deficit by establishing free trade zones. China is trying to prove itself as Bangladesh’s time-tested friend by entwining diplomatic, defence and economic ties.

Though Bangladesh and China have distinct political and social status quo, collaborative efforts brought them closer. China’s non-intervention principle to the domestic affairs of its partners leads Dhaka to welcome more and more investment from Beijing. As an emerging economy, Bangladesh requires hefty investment to tackle its socioeconomic problems, which China can support. On the other hand, Bangladesh is all-important in China’s strategic



গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
বাংলাদেশ চলচ্চিত্র ও টেলিভিশন ইনস্টিটিউট
তথ্য ও সম্প্রচার মন্ত্রণালয়
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লেখা আহ্বান
বাংলাদেশ চলচ্চিত্র ও টেলিভিশন ইনস্টিটিউট জার্নাল-এর ১১তম সংখ্যার জন্য লেখা আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। চলচ্চিত্র ও টেলিভিশন বিষয়ে গবেষণামূলক এবং বিশ্লেষণমূলক লেখা, চলচ্চিত্র সমালোচনা, নিউ-মিডিয়ার গতিপ্রকৃতি ও ব্যাপ্তি, বিশ্ব চলচ্চিত্রের তুলনামূলক আলোচনা, অনুবাদ ও সাক্ষাৎকার, প্রযুক্তি ও প্রয়োগ ইত্যাদি বিষয়ে আগ্রহী লেখকদের নিকট থেকে বাংলা ও ইংরেজি ভাষায় লেখা আহ্বান করা হচ্ছে। লেখা পাঠানোর শেষ তারিখ ৩০ ডিসেম্বর ২০২১। জার্নালটি Peer Reviewed Journal বিধায় লেখার শেষে গ্রন্থপঞ্জি ও তথ্যসূত্র যথাযথভাবে (APA ফরমেট-এ) সন্নিবেশিত থাকতে হবে এবং বিসিটিআই-এর ওয়েবসাইটে আপলোডকৃত লেখকের জন্য জ্ঞাতব্য নীতিমালা অনুসরণপূর্বক প্রবন্ধ লিখিত হতে হবে। উল্লেখ্য, লেখার শব্দসীমা হবে অনূর্ধ্ব ৬,০০০ (ছয় হাজার)।
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মোঃ আবুল কালাম আজাদ
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