

It’s time to popularise climate resilient housing

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WHAT does one imagine when thinking of a house? A place that is safe and secure, that can provide privacy and, most importantly, protection from extreme climates. For someone belonging to the most vulnerable and marginalised communities of Bangladesh, living in regions plagued by constant natural disasters, the above-mentioned concept of “a house” is simply an unobtainable dream. But does that have to be the case?

Bangladesh is a hotspot for natural disasters. About 40 percent of global storm surges have been recorded here. Cyclone Amphan (May 2020) alone caused damages amounting to more than USD 130 million—approximately 10 million people from 19 districts were affected and more than 330,000 houses were destroyed. Annually, there is not one but two cyclone seasons in Bangladesh. Aside from that, the country also experiences a wide selection of other climatic disasters—namely flooding, river bank erosion, flash flood, drought, landslide, tidal surge, and salinity intrusion. In the year 2020, the combined loss from all these natural disasters amounted to a staggering USD 11.3 billion, according to a report by World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

This number alone reflects the desperate need for climate resilient housing, which could be the key to preventing hundreds of millions worth of property damage. The regions most affected by climate change induced disasters are also amongst the poorest in the country, where a huge number of people live in substandard housing. This constant battle with nature not only threatens the lives of these vulnerable people but also dwindles their chances of a prosperous future, as they have to constantly spend whatever little savings they have, in rebuilding their houses and their lives. While moving to the multipurpose cyclone shelters during disasters can save their lives, they may still end up losing all their livestock and belongings. Women risk exposing themselves to physical abuse, harassment and molestation, which are common occurrences in these cyclone shelters. Hence, it doesn't come as a surprise that people sometimes choose to risk their lives in order to save their livestock and protect their family members from abuse. All these could be avoided if they had resilient housing.

So, why is this an unobtainable dream? Firstly, there is a lack of awareness about

the existence of feasible climate resilient housing. Concepts and designs for such housing are also not available for the general public who can afford them. The simplest of modifications can transform a substandard house into a disaster resilient one. For example, changing the shape of the roof can provide better protection against strong winds in

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cyclone prone areas; building the base of the house a few feet higher than usual is effective against tidal surges; adding a loft to the house design can help protect valuables during floods. It is just a matter of disseminating the knowledge and techniques to the local population.

Secondly, financial barrier is a much bigger challenge. Climate resilient houses are more expensive and the poorer population hardly have the means to afford them or access bank loans. Lack of information regarding lending institutions, high interest rate and procedural complexities discourage a big percentage of the rural population

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microfinance in Bangladesh) itself is looking for innovative sustainable solutions to mitigate the impacts of climate change. A loan which covers 90 percent of the construction cost for a specific resilient house design appropriate for a specific area could be an excellent option. Given these housing designs are fairly feasible, even the poor should be able to pay back the loan. Another loan package idea could be for a single climate resilient room in their regular house. This would be enough to protect the clients and their belongings from disasters. A third option could be a package providing enough fund to make

the communities can also benefit from a new income generating source, as the materials and workforce will be local. This also means that the locals can obtain the knowledge and skills to become experts at building climate resilient houses.

Being able to live in a house that will protect from climatic disasters is not an unobtainable dream, not even for the most vulnerable and marginalised people. It is just a matter of spreading awareness and organising. So why not work towards this and save hundreds of lives from the next environmental disaster?

Commemorating Europe Day in solidarity with the suffering of the Ukrainian people

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Anne van Leeuwen is Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the People's Republic of Bangladesh,

Francisco de Asís Benítez Salas is Ambassador of Spain to the People's Republic of Bangladesh, and

Alexandra Berg von Lind is Ambassador of Sweden to the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

TODAY, May 9, we mark Europe Day and commemorate the vision of the then French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, who presented in 1950 a far-sighted blueprint to prevent war from happening again. This is traditionally a time to remember the founding values of the European Union and its evolution since the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, including the progressive construction of political and economic links amongst its member states.

At present, the European Union (EU) counts 27 Member States and 450 million citizens within its borders. Those citizens are not only citizens of their own nations, but also of the EU, entailing numerous rights and opportunities. The EU has fostered the largest single market in the world, with free movement internally of people, goods, services, and capital. The euro was launched as a currency in 1999 and now stands as the second largest reserve currency in the world. The EU has constructed strong central institutions, including the European Parliament, European Court of Justice, Council and Commission.

The EU also engages in the wider world and takes its international responsibilities seriously, not least as the largest provider of development and humanitarian assistance worldwide. More than 140 EU Delegations around the world support trade, political, economic and development ties with their host countries.

Here in Bangladesh, many of the EU's Member States have been celebrating

the 50th anniversary of their relations with Bangladesh and the EU itself will do the same next year. Such an important staging post is an opportunity to reflect on how much our ties with Bangladesh have deepened in five decades. This engagement now goes way beyond traditional areas such as trade and development assistance and encompasses policy priorities such as connectivity, climate change, renewable energy, human rights, security and digitalisation. The EU's new Global Gateway strategy—which is designed to deliver investment in sustainable, high quality projects in infrastructure and other linkages—affords new opportunities for EU-Bangladesh relations. As does the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy, which was adopted last year and which foresees deeper engagement with our partners in this region.

On the trade front, the EU is the largest destination for Bangladesh's exports, reaching around 20 billion euro annually. There is much potential for increased investment by European businesses, particularly if the business climate can be further improved. Our Team Europe partnerships—bringing together the EU and EU Member States—are delivering cooperation with Bangladesh in new fields, including decent work and the green transition. This complements our longstanding development assistance in areas such as education, food security, governance and support to civil society. As a major provider of humanitarian assistance, we will continue to stand by Bangladesh's endeavours to provide a

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Whilst the European Union has delivered stability and peace within our own borders—recognised in the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU in 2012—the European continent is now again tragically scarred by war. The Russian aggression in Ukraine, with its unfathomable cost in human lives, suffering and economic devastation, has lasted almost three months. It is a violation not only of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, but also of the UN Charter. It has far-reaching consequences for the whole world.

First, in the chilling message it sends regarding the violability of internationally-recognised borders. This is not only a fight between the Ukrainians and the Russian aggressor. It is also a fight for democracy. For countries' right to self-determination and against colonisation.

Second, in the economic hardship the Russian invasion is inflicting through rising commodity prices, threats to food security and disruption to transport and other modes of connectivity. All this compounds the economic hardship wrought on the globe by the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU and its partners are striving to address this hardship, including through the Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission (FARM) initiative for food security in the most vulnerable countries.

Third, in the war crimes that have been reported on Ukrainian soil. As the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, so powerfully articulated when she witnessed on April 8 the site of atrocities inflicted on Ukrainian

civilians in the small town of Bucha, “The unthinkable has happened here. We have seen the cruel face of Putin's army. We have seen the recklessness and the cold-heartedness with which they have been occupying the city.”

The EU is doing its utmost to ensure a return to peace and to support the people and democratically elected government of Ukraine in this terrible struggle. As close neighbours, EU Member States have risen to the challenge of providing a safe berth to millions of Ukrainians. More than 11 million people have fled their homes since the conflict began. Over five million have left for neighbouring countries, where ordinary people have opened their homes to provide shelter.

The UN estimates that more than 12 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian aid, including medical supplies and shelter. The EU and its Member States are delivering massive support to the people of Ukraine, including humanitarian assistance and urgent supplies. Last week Poland and Sweden, along with the European Council and European Commission, convened a High-Level International Donors Conference for Ukraine in Warsaw on 5th May which yielded further pledges of support for Ukraine. The international community's solidarity in support of the suffering Ukrainian people is a ray of hope at a bleak time.

As we mark Europe Day 2022 in Dhaka, we will reflect on the bonds that have been forged amongst European nations and the wide-ranging relations that the EU and its Member States are building with Bangladesh. We will also hold the people of Ukraine in our thoughts and hope that peace returns swiftly to our continent.