



COLLAGE: STAR

## Why people want to leave Bangladesh



**NO STRINGS ATTACHED**

Aasha Mehreen Amin  
is joint editor at The Daily Star.

**AASHA MEHREEN AMIN**

A few days ago, I woke up to a disturbing message from a friend who had migrated to the US, "You should really work on getting a second passport for all three of you." A few years ago, I would have just laughed it off - as I have done many times when such suggestions have been thrown at me by paranoid expatriate Bangladeshis obsessed with the "desher obostha bhalo na (things are not good in the home country)" refrain. But now, I am beginning to wonder whether my decision to come back to live and work in my own country, to contribute in whatever minuscule way, was a mistake. So I texted back with a ghost emoji, "You are scaring me, my friend." Her reply, "That's the idea. I want you to be scared."

I refrained from continuing the conversation because, honestly, I didn't want to hear why. I do not want to entertain the idea that the country I was born in, where I spent my childhood, adolescence and most of my adulthood, where my most intense emotions are enmeshed and where I discovered who I wanted to be, has suddenly become so full of odds that the only option is to leave. I wanted to be in denial.

I do not want to believe that Dhaka is the seventh least liveable city or fourth among the 20 most unsustainable cities in the world. But then I spend three hours on average every day just to travel to and from my home, watching (from the luxury of my car) my fellow citizens trying to dodge gusts of dust from unending development fly into their eyes, fill their lungs and threaten to choke them as they wait patiently for rickety, packed buses or sit in CNG auto-rickshaws, inhaling the black sooty emissions of unfit vehicles or, in a fit of resignation, deciding to brave walking on the broken, hazardous roads. The Air Quality Index regularly places Dhaka in the "unhealthy" category. Surprise, surprise.

But seriously, should we just give up because of the traffic and "a bit of dust"? The main reason why people think of leaving their homeland is because of the feeling of utter

helplessness, of things falling apart - literally and figuratively. Underneath the grandeur of shiny new bridges, flyovers and metro rails, the souls are as battered and broken as the roads that carry them.

A post by *The Daily Star* Opinion's Facebook page, asking how Bangladesh can prevent its brain drain, gives a glimpse of the reasons behind the despair. Lack of job opportunities, not enough income compared to the soaring cost of living - though these have always been catalysts for brain drain. But people commenting on the post

**It is not just our movement that has been curtailed by paralysing gridlocks. Laws have been passed to silence voices, lobotomise brains, and tell us we cannot say/write/post anything that may seem to challenge the authority or irk its underlings.**

cited the unprecedented levels of corruption and lack of accountability of the state and state organisations (especially the law enforcement agencies), the absence of rule of law, poor quality of education, and a general lack of social justice as reasons for wanting to leave.

Corruption has always been part of the system in Bangladesh. But in recent times, rent seeking is the name of the game in every sphere of life - whether it is to get a driver's licence, a teaching job or even a bed in a hospital ward. Corruption has eaten up our green space, wetlands and rivers, leaving behind ugly, concrete jungles. For the ordinary citizen, life is an endless, brutish struggle.

Add to this the tribal, territorial approach of the politically

connected, each claiming their little kingdoms, the ordinary citizen is left completely out of the equation. While thousands of crores of taka are laundered out of the country, the common taxpayers are asked about the source of every single taka they earn. While thousands of crores of taka have been gobbled up in delayed megaprojects, food inflation is causing people to forgo one, even two meals a day and their only sources of protein. And then thousands of crores of taka have gone to maintain private power plants for years on end, and now we can look forward to as many as six hours of load-shedding every day (in the less affluent areas, of course).

It is not just our movement that has been abnormally curtailed by paralysing gridlocks. Laws have been passed and enforced to silence voices, lobotomise brains, and tell us we cannot say/write/post anything that may seem to challenge the authority or irk its underlings. Thus, we live in crippling fear of sinister eavesdroppers listening to our private conversations, of plainclothes or uniformed men in minibuses whisking us away into darkness and oblivion.

And let's not forget the inconvenience of being a woman in a growingly misogynistic society where what I wear is the fodder for religious sermons, vitriolic YouTube discussions, and justification for hateful trolling and even physical assault. Meanwhile, the horrifying numbers keep piling up: 734 raped, 34 raped and killed, seven dying by suicide after rape, 152 murdered by husbands - all between January and September this year, according to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK). They keep piling up because the system has gone topsy-turvy, with all the power tilted on the side of the rapist, abuser or murderer, and nothing on the side of the victim. Everything has a price tag and can be bought, whether it is the refusal to take a case, manipulation of evidence or even filing a false case against the victim.

Over the last three years, friends, colleagues and relatives have either left the country or are planning to leave. All they want is a normal life for themselves and their children. But the idea of leaving everything I know and love is too heartbreaking to ponder on. What will happen to all those left behind?

I do not want to open the text my friend has sent me again. For now, I just want to stay with the delusion of things getting better, in blissful denial.

## Will Earth remain inhabitable after 2050?



Dr Quamrul Haider  
is a professor of Physics at  
Fordham University, New York.

**QUAMRUL HAIDER**

It is quite a dicey time for our planet. In the last 100 years or so, because of our unrestrained use of fossil fuels and systematic overexploitation of the natural resources, we have pushed the planet towards climatological catastrophe. Simply put, we dug ourselves into a deep hole, yet we have not stopped digging.

To pull us out of the hole, world leaders agreed in the 2015 Paris Accords to keep the "global temperature increase in this century to two degrees Celsius while pursuing efforts to limit the increase even further to 1.5 degrees." In order to achieve this goal, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) wants us to halve greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 and attain net zero emissions by 2050.

With that in mind, our leaders are going to meet for the 27th time, from November 6-18, in Sharm el Sheikh, a resort town in Egypt, to discuss an array of issues related to climate change and renew for the sixth time their commitment to deliver on the

countless people living nearby. In addition to dirtier air, warmer weather will act as a catalyst for chemical reactions, producing many toxic pollutants, including ground-level ozone which, when inhaled, will aggravate respiratory conditions like asthma and emphysema.

As the world warms, rainfalls in Bangladesh during monsoon will become more erratic, less predictable, frightfully dangerous, and immeasurably devastating. The recent cataclysmic floods in Bangladesh's Sylhet and Pakistan due to record monsoon rains and melting glaciers in the Himalayas indicate that by 2050, villages will become small islands in an inland sea. Besides floods, heavy and incessant rainfalls will trigger landslides that have already demolished many homes and claimed hundreds of lives in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and high mountain regions in Asia and elsewhere. In sum, the changing pattern of monsoon will put millions of people in peril.

Augmented by rising sea levels,

25 percent of the Earth into desert. The Sahara Desert will extend to parts of southern Europe. A warmer Earth will exacerbate droughts, mainly outside of the tropics, with far-reaching consequences. They will be drawn out, leading to acute shortages of water and mass starvation in many parts of the world. Droughts will also drastically raise the number of climate refugees.

The UN's International Office of Migration (IOM) speculates that by 2050, over a billion people will be displaced globally due to climate change. The number of people living in cities will likely triple. People in Dhaka, currently 22.5 million, can expect to rub their shoulders with an additional 13-15 million climate refugees.

Food insecurity, dearth of water and energy, together with depleted resources, will provide the spark that will push otherwise peaceful nations into war. Moreover, famine, poverty, unstable governments, vast inequalities within societies, and control for life-sustaining resources will incite riots and civil wars.

This is just a small glimpse into what our planet may look like in 2050. To keep our planet inhabitable beyond 2050, we need courageous, visionary leaders with new ideas. Arguably, most of the leaders of the major GHG-emitting nations lack these traits.

So, what is the endgame?



At the current pace of GHG emissions that is even faster than what was predicted in the early 21st century, the blueprint for net zero emissions seems like a pipe dream.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Paris Agreement.

Realistically speaking, at the current pace of GHG emissions that is even faster than what was predicted in the early 21st century, and, more importantly, our leaders back-peddalling on the pledges made at the Paris conference, the blueprint for net zero emissions seems like a pipe dream. Under these circumstances, the state of our planet in 2050 seems frightening.

In Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, as well as Europe and North America, summer will arrive months earlier, and with vengeance, as it did in 2021 and 2022. Persistent heat waves will afflict much of the population, resulting in hundreds of thousands of heat-related deaths. Furthermore, it is highly likely that the wet-bulb temperature will oftentimes surpass 35 degrees Celsius, which is the upper limit of human adaptability to heat and humidity. Extremely hot summers will mean more frequent, intense and wide-ranging forest fires burning more trees that will release more carbon dioxide, driving global temperatures even higher. The smog-filled filthy air will kill

cyclonic storms will cause the coastal cliffs in Bangladesh, that act as natural barriers against high tides, to collapse. As a consequence, people living in low-lying coastal areas will experience incursions of seawater more often during storm surges, where freshwater supplies will be contaminated and undrinkable, agricultural land will be damaged because of increased salinity, and waterborne diseases will become increasingly common. Additionally, along with many coastal cities and island nations, a large portion of Bangladesh will be underwater.

Massive build-up of heat will turn the high latitude regions of the northern hemisphere - within and outside the Arctic Circle - into wastelands. Inland glaciers, a major source of freshwater, will become a thing of the past. A hotter climate in the Arctic belt will impact the global climate system as a whole through the enhanced release of greenhouse gases, especially the highly potent methane, from thawed permafrost.

According to a study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, global warming will turn more than

In January 2016, British-born American astronaut and climate scientist Piers Sellers wrote in *The New York Times* on his perspectives on climate change, "There is no convincing, demonstrated reason to believe that our evolving future will be worse than our present, assuming careful management of the challenges and risks. History is replete with examples of us humans getting out of tight spots. The winners tended to be realistic, pragmatic, and flexible; the losers were often in denial of the threat."

Sellers' optimistic take on confronting climate change gives us hope for the future. Hence, the doom and gloom picture painted here is not the endgame, nor is it an inevitable future. However, because climate change cannot be curbed through established political systems controlled by the "losers," concerned citizens have to shape the agenda through grassroots work. Otherwise, our planet will be thrown off its axis, plunging into an irreversible feedback loop of ever-hotter, ever-deadlier conditions. And by 2050, uninhabitability of the Earth may become a harsh reality.

**/Opinion**

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### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 In the lead
  - 6 Viking of the comics
  - 11 Sheriff's group
  - 12 Dancer Castle
  - 13 Parts of some phones
  - 15 Part of Mao's name
  - 16 One, for Juan
  - 17 Tire track
  - 18 Remits
  - 20 Like
  - 21 Queue after Q
  - 22 Jack's friend
  - 23 Spread out
  - 26 Tenant's form
  - 27 Beach crawler
  - 28 Big snake
  - 29 Hold up
  - 30 Limo service
- vehicle**
- 34 Rink material
  - 35 Hoppy brew
  - 36 Musician
  - Yoko
  - 37 Wield
  - 38 Influence
  - 40 Pick up the tab
  - 41 Make blank
  - 42 Grassy plant
  - 43 Cars' scars
- DOWN**
- 1 Scheduled mtgs.
  - 2 Congress hall
  - 3 German steel city
  - 4 Fire result
  - 5 "La Mer" composer
  - 6 Think up
  - 7 Trickery
  - 8 Nation on the Black Sea
  - 9 Some flowers
  - 10 Give a new look to
  - 14 Mile or meter
  - 19 Lackluster
  - 22 Stapleton of "All in the Family"
  - 23 Agents read them
  - 24 Get
  - 25 Placed a tag on
  - 26 Brought down
  - 28 Nut's partner
  - 30 Critical asset
  - 31 Jay's follower
  - 32 Uneasy feeling
  - 33 Valentine's gift
  - 38 Fall behind
  - 39 Rage



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	A	T	U	P	C	A	L	F	
C	L	O	N	E	A	T	E	I	T
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S	T	A	T		S	E	E	D	S

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