

# Are we ready to heed Mother Nature's warning in time?



MIND THE GAP

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Well, well, well—Mother Nature is shaking things up again. Literally. Myanmar had an earthquake, and suddenly, everyone in Dhaka is pretending they always cared about tectonic plates and fault lines. WhatsApp aunts are forwarding voice notes about “cosmic alignment,” and your office uncle is now a self-declared seismologist because he once watched a National Geographic documentary.

As an environmental specialist, I've spent years trying to get people to care about things like wetlands, building codes, and the inconvenient truth that concrete doesn't grow on trees (but, ironically, trees do get murdered to make way for it). I've made presentations with graphs, citations, and colour-coded disaster maps. I've begged policymakers to look beyond the next election cycle. But it literally needed an earthquake to devastate Myanmar and Thailand for everyone to suddenly lose their collective minds and go, “Wait, are we safe?”

Let me answer that for you. No. We are not.

The recent earthquake in our neighbourhood could be only a knock on the door from Mother Nature—before she inevitably kicks the door in. You see, Mother Nature has been remarkably patient. She gave us gentle reminders in the form of rising sea levels, flash floods, droughts, dengue explosions, and air pollution so thick it

could be sold as soup. But did we listen? No. We paved wetlands, built 20-storey towers on marshland, and called it “Eco City.” We responded to climate reports with the same energy we give to traffic rules—mild concern followed by complete disregard.

So now, she's moving on to phase two of her rampage: earthquakes. And when—not if—it happens in Dhaka, we'll be collapsing faster than our broadband on a rainy day. Because let's be honest, Dhaka is one firm tectonic nudge away from becoming a very dusty pancake.

Most of our buildings were not built with earthquakes in mind. The Bangladeshi National Building Code exists in theory—somewhere between fairy tales and science fiction. If an earthquake similar to the recent one happened in Dhaka, it wouldn't just shake the ground. It would collapse our entire coping mechanism. We're not prepared. We know we're not prepared. Our buildings are held up by bribes, prayers, and leftover rickshaw parts. Half of Dhaka's high-rises were built during Mercury retrograde by someone's *chacha*, who once “helped with cement mixing” and now claims to be a structural engineer.

Earthquake-resistant design is a punchline here, not a practice.

Our city planners have treated Dhaka like a game of Tetris, stacking buildings wherever



Rescue workers walk past construction site debris after a building collapsed in Bangkok on March 28, 2025, following a 7.7-magnitude quake northwest of the central Myanmar city of Sagaing.

PHOTO: AFP

they can squeeze them in, with zero regard for soil stability, open spaces, or the basic concept of ventilation. Emergency exits are blocked by flowerpots or that one guy who refuses to move his chair. Stairwells double as storage units. Lifts operate on the power of sheer optimism. If a real quake hits, most people won't be able to leave the building, let alone survive it.

There are countries that hold nationwide earthquake drills, where children are taught how to duck, cover, and evacuate calmly. Bangladesh? Our version of disaster preparedness does not acknowledge the very

real geological threats beneath our feet.

The environmental consequences of our negligence are piling up. We've drained wetlands that could absorb seismic shockwaves. We've built on riverbeds, hill slopes, and anywhere else we thought we could squeeze in a duplex. We've chopped down every tree that ever stood in the way of a shopping mall. Dhaka's natural buffers are gone, replaced with concrete jungles that were not only poorly designed but proudly advertised with names like “Green View,” even when the only green thing within five kilometres is a dying pothos on someone's

balcony.

What's worse is that we could do something about it. We have brilliant engineers, passionate urban planners, and environmentalists who've been screaming into the void for decades. We have access to global research, regional data, and countless examples of cities that actually learned from natural disasters. But what do we do instead? Host a few workshops. Post a few press releases. Cut a cake for Earth Day and then go back to approving another glass-box monstrosity on reclaimed land.

The Myanmar-Thailand quake was a warning. But if we continue to treat environmental negligence as a lifestyle choice, Mother Nature won't send another tremor—she'll send a full-blown slap. And we won't be posting cheeky “Did you feel that?” stories on Instagram. We'll be standing in the rubble, wondering why we never took the warnings seriously.

We need to retrofit our infrastructure, enforce our building codes, protect our wetlands, and actually read the reports that land on the desks of government officials. We need to prepare our emergency services and teach the public what to do when the earth starts to shake—because, spoiler alert: standing in the doorway holding your laptop isn't going to save you.

So, here's a humble suggestion: let's panic now. Let's panic while we still have time. Because the only thing worse than an earthquake is realising it could've been survivable if we'd done something when we were merely warned. Your move, Dhaka. Earthquake drills or earthquake thrills—pick one.

And to Mother Nature—if you're reading this—please give us a little more time. We're slow learners. But some of us are trying.

## Nation branding can bring out Bangladesh's global potential



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T.I.M. NURUL KABIR

In today's globalised world, country brands tell a powerful story, in a minimal gesture, to promote a unique positive image of a country to achieve certain beneficial goals. It is a comprehensive undertaking to represent an appropriate national identity that conveys distinct economic, cultural and social features of a country to the broader global community.

Nation branding is a multi-stakeholder undertaking across economic, social, cultural, academic, legal and political spheres. It is not an exercise of just coining a catchy phrase and a graphic image to tell a compelling story. Rather, country branding is an undertaking of elaborately scrutinising factual grounds in multiple arenas to express precisely what a country's national identity stands for, and what the attitudes and aspirations of its people are. Based on those, country branding requires appropriate regulatory framework and political steps that would convey those attributes to the broader global community.

In an interconnected and disruptive global economic landscape, Bangladesh needs to undertake a country branding master plan focused on national identity to promote collective self-esteem and a positive image to the outside world. A well-scrutinised country brand should carry the message of a prospective economy, resilient people ready to assimilate new ideas and skills, abundant workforce and a vast pool of talented youths. A strong country brand can give a positive signal to stimulate investor confidence. A successful country brand may become an express avenue of nation building efforts.

The economy of Bangladesh at its birth

as an independent nation in 1971 was in a shattered state. An estimated 15 lakh homes had been destroyed during the Liberation War. Hundreds of thousands of people had been displaced and many farm families were reportedly left without tools or animals to work their lands. Transportation and communication systems were miserably disrupted, with roads damaged and bridges destroyed.

The economy began to gain some ground as some readymade garments (RMG) factories were able to export apparels to certain developed countries from the mid-80s. The economic scenario changed in the mid-90s, boosted by the success of the export-oriented RMG industry. Inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) increased, mainly in RMG alongside the power and energy sector.

With increased availability of employment opportunities, domestic consumption increased, boosting growth of various industries targeting the domestic consumer market. Remittances from migrant workers helped to reduce household poverty and became a major source of foreign exchange earnings.

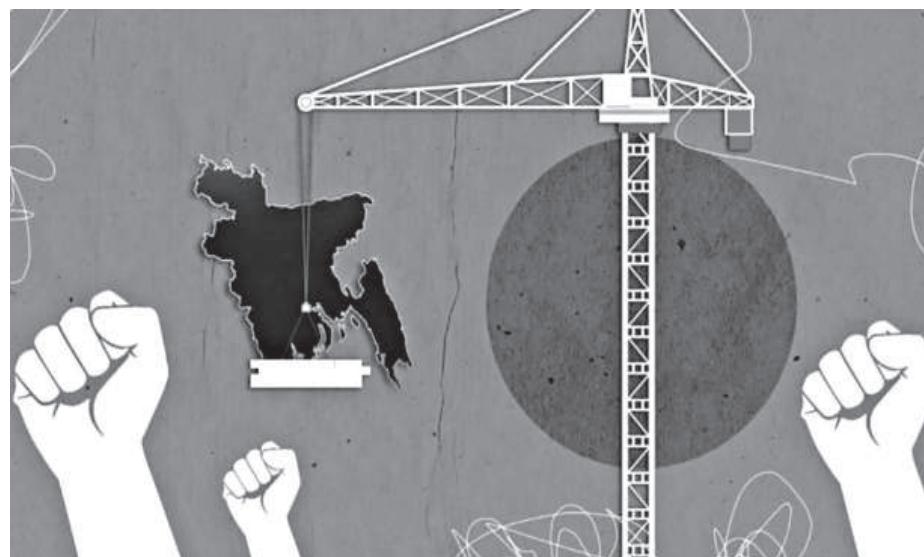
Bangladesh began to show outstanding economic performance in the 2000s, with a growing domestic market and favourable access to world markets. FDI further surged in telecommunication, banking and the RMG and textile sectors.

The resilient people of Bangladesh have the determination to stand up for national aspirations and keep on struggling for material betterment. Despite political disruption from time to time, and major

setbacks from natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, Bangladesh has made significant strides in economic development over the years. Significant achievements have been made in several of the human development indices. Over the decades, the country has emerged as one of the largest apparel producing countries in the world, second only to China. Plus, it has promising prospects in several sectors, including IT,

and unique, which strongly draws attention to the premium but affordable hospitality it offers.

“Incredible India” is an international tourism campaign launched by the country's government to promote tourism. By drawing attention to the unique history and culture, such as yoga and spirituality, the “Incredible India” campaign has successfully positioned India as the fastest-growing market in the



FILE VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

semiconductor, light engineering and others.

A good country branding strategy results in an unshakeable association with a certain identity, features and prospects. A country brand draws attention of its own citizens, foreign stakeholders and the global customers to some stimulating feature or some distinctive quality.

“Malaysia Truly Asia” is a powerful destination brand, designed primarily to attract more tourist interest. A multicultural country, Malaysia is home to people from major civilisations of Asia. “Malaysia Truly Asia” from that context is factual, convincing

Asia Pacific region, in terms of international tourist spending.

However, it is to be noted that the scope of nation branding goes beyond the tourist campaign. The example of Singapore demonstrates the success of a long term and clear plan in nation branding. “Passion Made Possible” is the destination brand of Singapore, launched in 2017. The brand draws attention to a shift from an investment-driven economy to an economy led by innovation. Singapore has established itself as a leading regional hub in high growth areas such as financial services, technology and

sustainability through targeted investments and its brand campaign.

Investors usually assess an investment destination in terms of consistency in policy framework, political stability, productivity and sustainability. Bangladesh has exhibited economic resilience and dynamism amid global crises such as Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine. On the cultural stage, the country has strong heritage of resistance and resilience. The International Mother Language Day, celebrated worldwide, is a testimony of resistance and uprightness to stand up for people's rights. People in Bangladesh have stood up time and again to protest against oppression and injustice.

Although Bangladesh has established proficiency in high quality industrial production other than apparel, such as pharmaceuticals, footwear etc, it is still primarily perceived as a destination for cheap labour. This narrow perception has been a limiting factor for Bangladesh in terms of availing high-end production opportunities.

Rising geopolitical tension, protectionism and policy emphasis on economic resilience are realigning global supply chains. At the same time social and environmental concerns are redefining consumer preference. A growing majority of young consumers are seriously concerned with social and environmental causes. They progressively back their beliefs with their consumption habits, and only favour brands that are aligned with their values.

Nation branding is a powerful strategy for harnessing untapped potentials in an interconnected disruptive economic landscape. A well-focused nation branding strategy has to take into consideration the size of the country, geographic location, economic resources, domestic history and culture as well as historic global role.

A strong country brand also has to reflect the identity of its people, history, heritage, culture, values, actions and behaviours that influence the perception of international stakeholders, and thus the way they engage with the country.

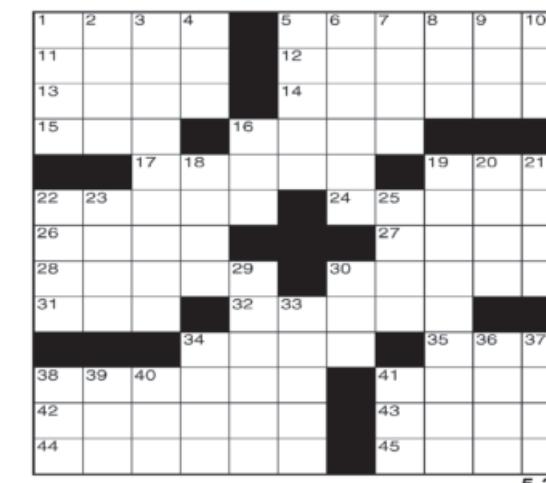
### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

#### ACROSS

- 1 Long skirt
- 26 Steel ingredient
- 27 Way to go
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- 31 Suffering
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