
L'usage de tout système électronique ou informatique est interdit dans cette épreuve

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WATERWORLD

The Earth has always been unstable. Flooding and erosion, cyclones and tsunamis are the norm rather than the exception. But never have the planet's most environmentally frail areas been so crowded. The slowdown in the growth rate of the world's population has not changed the fact that the number of people living in the countries most vulnerable to natural disasters continues to increase. The Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 was merely a curtain-raiser. Over the coming decades, Mother Nature is likely to kill or make homeless a staggering number of people.

American journalists sometimes joke that, in terms of news, thousands of people displaced by floods in Bangladesh equals a handful of people killed or displaced closer to home. But that formula is now as unimaginative and out-of-date as it is cruel.

With 150 million people packed together at sea level, Bangladesh is vulnerable to the slightest climatic variation, never mind the changes caused by global warming. The partial melting of Greenland ice over the course of the 21st century could inundate a substantial amount of Bangladesh with salt water. A 20-centimeter rise in the Bay of Bengal by 2030 could be devastating to more than 10 million people, says Atiq Rahman, executive director of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies.

While scholars debate the odds of such scenarios, one thing is certain: Bangladesh is the most likely spot on the planet for one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes in history. The country's future, however, and the fate of its impoverished millions, will be determined not necessarily by rising sea levels, but by their interaction with, among other things, the growth of religious fundamentalism, the behavior of its neighbors and other outside powers, and the evolution of democracy. So, I came to Bangladesh.

Robert B. Kaplan, *The Atlantic*, January-February 2008