[**The age of climate fury**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1669004/the-age-of-climate-fury)

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LAST month, when Lahore was once again declared the [most polluted city](https://www.dawn.com/news/1662926) in the world, no one batted an eyelid. Overseas Pakistanis, eager to flaunt their wealth at family weddings, arrived en masse and the weddings continued apace. It did not seem to matter that children could not go to school or that airplanes could not land at the city’s international airport. It did not matter that the weather seemed to say something, demand a little respect, a change in habits, in outlook. Last week, when snowfall was forecasted for Murree, many from the city decided to set off from their own smog-dimmed lives. Thousands and thousands were on the single road that leads to Murree when heavy snowfall trapped them in their cars. Over twenty people [died](https://www.dawn.com/news/1668397/tragedy-befalls-murree-as-22-die-trapped-in-snowfall), including women and children.

These two phenomena are not causally linked but they are part of the larger impact of climate change. The warming oceans that now bring disastrous rains and floods to Karachi nearly every year, the accumulation of CO2 in the atmosphere, have all set about disastrous tumult in the weather patterns of various regions. According to the World Bank, 800 million people living in South Asia are especially vulnerable to the disastrous effects of climate change as their delicate ecosystems are ravaged by pollutants and changing weather patterns. By 2030, economic losses from climate change in the region will average $160 billion per year. Even worse, by 2050, over 40 million people from South Asia could become climate migrants, roaming the earth in search of whichever country would take them. A recent article profiling migrants crossing the Darien Gap, a treacherous jungle on the Panama-Colombia border in Central America, found groups of Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Afghans. With their traditional subsistence farming lost forever, their families had scrounged cash to pay someone who promised them passage to somewhere. Who knows where that was, but they were trying to get to the United States through Central America. They did not make it.

When tragedies like Murree take place, the immediacy of the event provokes a lot of outrage. People argue and argue over who is responsible for a complex debacle that involved system failures of the local and national emergency framework. At the same time, it is important to recognise that this framework was never created with the idea of ‘climate resilience’ in mind. Climate resilience requires that emergency mechanisms and plans be created with the knowledge that extreme weather events are not going to be the rare occurrences that they used to be but more and more common. The flood that occurred every ten years will happen every year, the record snowfall several times a season, and so on. In order to survive these kinds of events, poor countries will likely have to borrow more from international institutions like the World Bank and IMF. Hopefully, this will mean that the children of various former and current government officials will not spend the proceeds skimmed from these loans to fund their education at Harvard and their garish weddings when they return.

**Read more:** [*Pakistan, World Bank sign MoU to tackle climate change*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1667614/pakistan-world-bank-sign-mou-to-tackle-climate-change)

It seems unlikely, however. This is because even as the frequency of these climate disasters increases, so too does the wealth gap between the richest and poorest in South Asia. This presents a problem because investment in emergency services, natural disaster management and prevention, public education around climate change, are all public goods that do not directly benefit any one person. This means that governments are by and large unwilling to invest in them because the prevention of a disaster does not allow political leaders to claim any particular kind of victory. Short sighted political leaders in India, for example, refuse to sign on to reduce their emissions even though hundreds of millions of Indians are now beset with breathing problems. The reason, as I mentioned, is simple: what politician can claim a victory if a car is able to tackle a snowy road or if a child is saved from developing asthma?

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It is not just weather-related events that will doom the populations of South Asia. Food systems and landscapes are expected to be in particular danger as riverbeds dry up and desertification increases. This would be a particular problem in Pakistan, which depends on the agricultural sector to feed its population and for its exports. By the time that the government — any government from any party — wakes up to the hell that is in store for Pakistanis, it will simply be too late.

Respecting the innocent lives lost in Murree as a result of being stranded in a snowstorm requires recognising how our system of governance is not geared for handling such events. It may even be that the snowstorm in the area of the hill station was not out of the ordinary, but the fact is that, cumulatively speaking, the pressure of fast-changing environmental conditions requires much greater measures than Pakistan is currently considering. Climate change, it must be remembered, is not a single or two or even ten catastrophic events: it’s the cumulative pressure of all these events that is straining existing systems. When this is combined with the endemic mismanagement and failures that plague city management systems, the consequences are lethal and disastrous.

Most people in Pakistan do not believe in climate change. Concerns about environmental depletion and the connections between individual events and climate change need to seep into the collective consciousness. While Pakistan’s coastal cities have been experiencing the sad combination of local government’s failures and changing climate and weather patterns, it appears that others closer to Islamabad have not. The way out of catastrophic consequences of individual weather events is to understand how the two fit into each other to create the age of climate fury.

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