

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

# Climate change: Paradigm shift needed?



**T**HE United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was signed and ratified almost two decades ago to tackle the threat of human induced interference in the global atmosphere, has gone through several paradigm shifts over the last two

decades. It is on the brink of making a new paradigm shift on the issue of "Loss and Damage" from climate change. The issues are described below.

The original framing of the problem (and hence the solution to it as well), was about "prevention" of "dangerous interference" in the global climate. Under this paradigm the problem was the continuing emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG), mainly from burning fossil fuels such as coal petrol and natural gas, and hence the solution was to reduce these emissions in future by global action through "mitigation." Thus the initial years of the UNFCCC process, including the Kyoto Protocol signed in 1997, focused entirely on mitigation. Since, at that time, most of the emissions were being made by the developed countries the mitigation actions were confined to those countries only.

A decade later, the third assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) came out in 2001, and highlighted the fact that GHG continue to rise (despite agreements to reduce them) and that a certain amount of climate change was now inevitable and unavoidable over the next two decades. Hence a new solution needed to be added to mitigation, namely "adaptation," to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The IPCC report made a further point that most of the adverse impacts would fall on the poorer developing countries, which were already unable to deal effectively with current climate impact, hence there was now a direct link between the climate change issue and development.

This led to greater awareness of the issue in developing countries and also the engagement of the global development community.

As we turn into the third decade of dealing with climate change there may be a need to add a new paradigm. This is because the first two paradigms, of mitigation and adaptation, both deal with the problem of prevention of loss and damage (in the case of mitigation by avoiding damages from emissions by not making those emissions and in the case of adaptation by minimising anticipated damages by taking pro-active measures before the impacts occur).

In neither case do we deal with the problem of how to deal with such damages after they occur.

The UNFCCC, as a treaty, is designed to deal with the two paradigms of preventing dangerous climate change and not with dealing with damages after they occur.

Nevertheless, some vulnerable developing countries, led by the small island states, have been pushing for a work programme to be undertaken under the UNFCCC on "Loss and Damage" for some years. It has been strongly resisted by the developed countries, as they fear it will open up the twin taboo subjects (from their perspective) of dealing with "liability" and "compensation."

However, at the sixteenth Conference of Parties (COP16) of the UNFCCC held in Cancun, Mexico in 2010, the small island states were strongly supported by the least developed countries (LDC) group (with the Bangladesh delegation playing a key role) and succeeded in getting some language into the Cancun Agreement on loss and damage.

This was further developed into a "work programme on loss and damage" at COP18 held in

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Durban in December 2011, again with strong support from the LDCs with the Bangladesh delegation playing a leading role.

The Durban Work Programme on loss and damage consists of the following three thematic areas:

**Thematic area 1:** Assessing the risk of loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change and the current knowledge on the same.

**Thematic area 2:** A range of approaches to address loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow onset events, taking into consideration experience at all levels.

**Thematic area 3:** The role of the convention in enhancing the implementation of approaches to address loss and damage associated with adverse effects of climate change.

There will be a series of workshops on each theme and submissions from parties in September, and then at COP19, to be held in Doha, Qatar in

December 2012, a decision will be agreed for further work.

The government of Bangladesh has asked the Climate Change Development Network (an international initiative to support developing countries on climate change issues) to initiate a global study on loss and damage on behalf of the LDCs, and this study has been awarded (following an international competition) to a consortium of institutions led by GermanWatch in Germany, with the United Nations University (UNU), the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCCD) at the Independent University, Bangladesh, Brac University and the Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies (BIDS) to carry out different components of the study.

Now that the UNFCCC has recognised that responsibility for implementing approaches to addressing loss and damage ultimately lies with national governments, there is a need to understand the national context and the range of implementation options available for loss and damage at the national level. That said, progress in one country in this case Bangladesh can inform other LDCs in potential pathways for understanding and implementing loss and damage. The Bangladesh-specific component of the initiative is being carried out with three objectives in mind. First, the understanding of the GoB, stakeholders and LDC negotiators of the international process, especially those relevant to national policies and activities, will be enhanced. Second, stakeholder-based activities to move loss and damage forward in Bangladesh will be identified. Third, the work in Bangladesh to develop both an understanding of and approaches to loss and damage will inform other LDCs in developing their own loss and damage strategies.

The study findings will be shared at a workshop in Bangladesh to be held in October 2012 prior to COP19.

The issue of tackling potential loss and damage from climate change is a new, but extremely important, area of work, specially for vulnerable countries like Bangladesh who are almost certain to suffer severe loss and damage (despite efforts at adaptation) and the international community needs to develop mechanisms for dealing with such loss and damage after they occur. Thus the need for a new paradigm of dealing with the inevitable consequences of loss and damage from climate change that goes beyond mitigation and adaptation which have been the main paradigms so far.

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SHIFTING IMAGES

## Mind your language, please!



MILIA ALI

**C**AN someone tell me what's happening to the English language? I am not even a subject of the Queen, so why do I feel compelled to defend the Queen's English? How ridiculous is it that I, a by-product of British colonisation, should be writing a plea to save the language of the colonists from the onslaught of the new wave

which has made grammar and spelling virtually obsolete!

My frustrated attempt to defend the English language has been provoked by a text message from a young relative scheduled to visit me last month. She missed her flight and sent me the following abbreviated text: "mssd flt 2day .sry. lmk if 2moro ok. luvu." Took me quite a few reads and a consultation with an SMS savvy friend to decipher the message. (For those of you who are a little slow in the uptake like me, here is a translation: "Missed flight today. Sorry. Let me know if tomorrow is okay. Love you.")

Not being a native speaker, I have already been through several phases of learning and relearning English. First, we had to memorise grammar and practice diction in elementary school. Later, when I developed a true love for English literature, I read and tried to emulate the styles of many of the classic writers, mostly British. A rude awakening came when my work supervisor advised me that my language was a bit too formal and that I needed to let down my hairliterally. Hence, followed a period of learning business jargon: I mastered terms like scaling-up pilots, drilling down experience, benchmarking outcomes. I even accepted the use of nouns as verbs such as prioritising and incentivising.

By the time I moved to the US, I was pretty confident that language would not be a barrier to the transition process. My complacency lasted only a week, or until my first visit to McDonald's. Between my alien accent and my feeble attempt at ordering (in a complete sentence) a large hamburger, without cheese and fried potato chips, my order was "lost in translation." After a more determined second attempt and an uncomfortable pause (which seemed like eternity since there was a long line waiting behind me), the girl at the counter said at supersonic speed: "Oh? Big Mac, no cheese, small

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fries." Before I heaved a sigh of relief, I was faced with the next challenge! "For here, or to go?" asked the cashier. This may sound all easy now but in my early days in the US I didn't have a clue that she was asking whether I intended to eat at the restaurant or take the meal home!

The dizzy speed at which the younger generation and techies are creating words, spellings, and idiomatic expressions has made me "linguistically challenged." Try hard as I might, I am unable to embellish my sentences with expressions like "cool, awesome, rocks, nuts, like, and what's up." I admit that learning to speak this new lingo would make me an informed member of the global English-speaking club but should I say the hip global culture? But I just haven't graduated from the archaic use of full sentences, correct tenses and unabbreviated vocabulary! Hence, on a day-to-day, basis I am constantly faced with, believe it or not, a language problem. And, it's not a problem of simple incomprehension. My dilemma is how to answer back. Should I pretend I am hip and answer in slang? Or should I just be "me" a minority who speaks an outdated form of English?

I am fully aware that a language must evolve with time and reflect the changing reality of everyday life. I also appreciate that English has become the lingua franca of the world because of its adaptability and flexibility. Some changes will occur naturally due to social, economic and technological demands. What is difficult to accept, however, is the unimpeded butchering of the English language by those who are creating a "convenience version" by compressing, annotating and truncating words at will. Change is always a sign of progress but, can we, at least, work within prescribed standards and have some quality control mechanisms for the English used in the public domain?

Since, there are no officially appointed guardians for the English language, I guess we have to count on self-appointed authorities to resist the contamination. As for me, being somewhat old fashioned, I will continue to be peeved by the ad-hoc changes where spelling, grammar and style are sacrificed to brevity and convenience. I am especially aggravated by the OMGs, LOLs and CUs

If you haven't figured out what these abbreviations mean, look up the online dictionary for text messages or I will explain when I TTYL! (Talk to you later).

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of The World Bank.

# World Bank needs new leadership for social responsibility

ABDUL HANNAN

**I** read the article "Yunus and World Bank presidency" written by Sadiq Ahmed (*The Daily Star*, February 26), a former senior staff member of the World Bank, with great interest and appreciation. I fully endorse his views supporting Professor Yunus as the next World Bank (WB) president.

Although the position of president of World Bank is open to nationals of all its 187 member states, it has been the practice that the head of the Bank would be an American citizen probably because America is the largest contributor to the fund.

The WB, originally conceived in 1944 as an international Bank of reconstruction and development to salvage war-ravaged Europe is, however, now engaged in offering loans and grants for economic development of developing countries. But ironically, all its past eleven presidents, with few exceptions, came from the defense establishment or from elite business and corporate establishments having little concern and care for the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised underlings in society.

The Bank foisted on the developing countries what it described as "structural adjustment" and "Washington consensus" as aid conditionality by prescribing privatisation and deregulation, free market economy, devaluation of currency against dollar, removal of subsidy in agriculture and lifting of import restrictions, etc. This adversely impacted on social sectors including education, health and other social care, leading to depressed prices of exported primary commodities, price rise of food and energy, pillage of land and environment, and displacement and dispossession of the huge poor population.

The prescription apparently stressed upon GDP growth with least regard for social equity, and created a yawning gap between the rich and poor. Its latest poverty reduction strategy has made little difference. The result is widespread frustration, despair and disenchantment with the performance of the WB in the developing countries.

What is urgently needed is a thorough review for a structural reform of the selection process of the WB president. The traditional practice of selection of an American is an anachronism. It is time it was aban-

doned in favour of a more democratic practice.

In October 2008, the World Bank Committee (ministerial executive board) endorsed a merit-based and transparent selection process with nomination open to all member countries and transparent consideration of all candidates.

China, the second largest economy of the world, said: "The next WB president should be selected on merit." President Obama has said that it would open the process to competition. The G 20 made the same commitment in June 2010, endorsing open, transparent, merit based selection of heads of international financial institutions. In December 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for reform of the governing structure of the WB with due regard for regional and geographical representa-

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tion, including representation from the developing countries.

The executive board of the WB recently reconfirmed the importance of merit based and transparent process in the selection of the next president. He should have proven track record of leadership, experience in managing large organisations with international exposure, ability to articulate a clear vision of the Bank's mission, and effective and diplomatic communication skills.

The ongoing financial crisis in America and the spiraling debt burden in Europe, particularly in Greece, Italy, Spain and Iceland, is raising the alarming specter of rising unemployment, collapse of banks, foreclosures of homes for default on loans, and folding of business and factories despite severe austerity measures. This shows that unfettered authoritarian capitalist economy based on Keynesian doctrine of laissez faire, liberalisation and free market as means of economic growth has become bankrupt, and that new economic vision and thinking are urgently needed.

This is what was precisely echoed recently by Klaus Schwab, the founder and organiser of world economic forum in Davos, when he said: "Capitalism in its present form has no place in the world. We have failed to learn the lessons of financial crisis of 2009. A global transformation needs to take place urgently and it must begin by restoring a form of social responsibility."

Who else can be better fitted to bring about this new economic architecture other than Nobel laureate Professor Yunus, universally known, loved and honoured as a banker of the poor who practices microcredit and promotes social business to end poverty and bring about an egalitarian just society? Only he holds the secret to the transformational economic model referred to. He is the ultimate and natural choice as the next president of World Bank, a panacea to overcome the debilitating economic malaise the world is faced with today

About the required "effective diplomatic and communication skills," Professor Yunus is an astute diplomat and skilled communicator. He is received warmly and honoured by monarchs, heads of states and governments and university faculties round the world.

Professor Yunus is a doer with a vision. His performance and achievements are unique and outstanding, legendary and iconic. He has impeccable credentials for the job in the WB. Trained in American universities in theories of capitalist economy and practicing microcredit for the poor, Professor Yunus provides a rare blend of macro and micro economy expertise and could be the perfect choice to lift the shadow of the overwhelming gloom and doom of a crushing global financial crisis.

Prime Minister Hasina has proposed the name of Professor Yunus as new WB president in course of her meeting with a visiting EU delegation recently. Now she may formally write in right earnest to the executive Board of World Bank requesting for his nomination by an executive director for consideration as new World Bank president. The last date of nomination is March 23. We expect that Hillary Clinton will vindicate her unwavering faith in Professor Yunus by extending her active support to select him by consensus for the top job at the WB.

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