

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Investing in the future



SALEEMUL HUQ

IN the first part of this two-part article (printed on July 13) I argued that Bangladesh has an opportunity to turn around our image from being a country that is most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change to becoming the most adaptive country to climate change.

I suggested a two-track strategy with the first track focusing on the climate change issue and developing both a domestic strategy of low carbon and climate resilient development as well as a foreign strategy of attracting significant funding to support our climate change strategy from global climate change funds that are likely to become available over the next decade.

In this article I will describe the second track of the strategy which can be described as "investing in the future" and not just in the present. This will require both a longer-term plan for the next twenty years (to 2030) as well as a nearer term plan for the next decade. It will also require building on the many positive developments that have been achieved by the people and governments over the last few decades and combating the negative forces (which still predominate).

**Building on the past:** I will start by describing just a few of the positive achievements which can be built upon.

These include the strong positive economic growth rates over the last decade through a combination of progressive government policies and the successful development of the private sector. Another significant achievement has been the reduction in overall poverty levels with a combination of government, donor and civil society efforts. A third achievement has been the gains in agricultural productivity achieved by a combination of government policy, farmers' efforts, agriculture research and private sector. A fourth achievement has been in population growth rate reduction through government policies, provision of family planning and health facilities and girls' education.

However, despite these significant achievements, there remain strong negative trends as well. These include the continued and pervasive presence of corruption and poor governance and also the continued destruction of our natural resources such as forests and wetlands and finally the non-inclusive and inequitable nature of our economic growth. These negative forces will need to be overcome by building on the positive achievements.

In order to achieve this goal, an essential step is to get people across the country into a positive frame of mind regarding their long-term future, which can overcome the often negative day-to-day experiences that they undergo. This, in turn will require both top-down direction from our leaders as well as bottom-up approach from citizens in all walks of life.

I will give below just a few examples of the kinds of strategies that can be adopted in some key sectors by the key stakeholders.

**Education sector:** This is perhaps the most important sector for investing in the future as we need to produce a population that are not just mouths to feed or even hands to do manual labour but educated minds to carry out innovative activities both at home and abroad.

One important development in the university sector has been the rapid expansion of private universities in the last decade. While the quality of their education may be varied, they represent an important part of

educating citizens of tomorrow and if their quality can be enhanced will add significant value to our economy over the next few years. The aspect of investing in the future should therefore include a greater emphasis not only on teaching but also on research.

At the primary level the two most important skills that will be needed in the twenty-first century will be English and IT, so these two should become the bedrock of our school teaching effort,

**Finance sector:** The banking and investment sector has already been playing a major part in the development of commerce and industry, not least by the enhancement in private banks. The strategy for this sector is for the government to provide policy incentives for the finance sector to invest profitably in the more environment friendly and socially equitable sectors of the economy.

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In this regard the "Green Banking" initiative of the Bangladesh Bank under the leadership of its current governor is a ground-breaking initiative which should be expanded.

**Industrial sector:** The private sector has been (and will continue to be) the engine of economic growth and employment generation in the last two decades with major investments in the garments, textile, pharmaceutical, food and agriculture and other sectors. However, there is still a prevailing emphasis on low-skill, polluting industries and we will need to invest in higher value-addition industries such as IT as well as more environment friendly agriculture sectors.

The more progressive elements in the private sector also need to move beyond corporate social responsibility towards making environment and people friendly business a core part of their business.

Promotion of social business is also a key part of this strategy as has been emphasised by Professor Yunus.

**Social sector:** Bangladesh has one of the most thriving civil society movements in the world with hundreds if not thousands of non-government organisations around the country and major investments in social protection schemes by government and donors.

Some of these efforts have also gained international reputations and become export models. These include micro-finance pioneered by Grameen Bank and also Brac, which has already become a major NGO operating in over a dozen countries in Asia and Africa. These efforts present an opportunity for the country to export both a development model as well as skilled manpower.

**Agriculture sector:** Agriculture will remain the mainstay of the Bangladesh economy for the next two decades but it will not be able to generate much more employment, so diversification and innovation leading to improved productivity need to be the key investment strategies for this sector.

An important element of this strategy needs to be an emphasis on environment friendly agricultural prac-

tices. Another important element to build upon is by investing in improving the agriculture research capabilities of the country.

**Energy sector:** The energy sector is a classic example of short-term investments prevailing over long-term plans. This needs to be rectified by making investments in clean energy like solar, biogas and wind. These need to be done both for large scale electricity provision through the grid as well as for small scale or even household level energy provision.

Bangladesh already leads the world in the expansion of household solar energy provision through the combined efforts of government policies, private sector and NGOs. One organisation has already supported the installation of over a millions solar home systems in just a few years.

**Environment sector:** The environment sector of Bangladesh has also made significant progress in terms of policies, legislation and some pilot level activities, but still represents largely a failure to implement these progressive policies and laws, as the country's forests and wetlands continue to be decimated.

The success to overcoming these barriers will have to combine better governance from the government authorities with better people-centred bottom-up efforts at community management of natural resources.

Again, there are many excellent examples of pilot efforts by both government, development partners and NGOs, but they still need to be scaled up beyond pilots.

**Linking to the global:** In all these efforts Bangladesh needs to remain plugged in to global debates and discourse, of which I will mention two.

The first is based on the outcome of the recent Rio+20 declaration, where an emphasis was made on promoting "Green Development." This notion was not defined but left for each country to define for itself. Hence, Bangladesh can combine elements of its long-term strategy as outlined above into its own Green Development Pathway and share that with the rest of the world.

The second is to use the Bangladeshi diaspora as an asset to bring back investments, technology and innovations. The growth of the IT sector in India can largely be attributed to the Indian diaspora and Bangladesh can also make use of its Non-Resident Bangladeshis (NRB) for positive investments in the longer-term future strategy.

**Conclusions:** In conclusion let me reiterate the components of the short-term, near term and longer-term elements of the strategy that could be adopted to take the country on to a positive and sustainable development pathway. These are to use the climate change issue to leverage Bangladesh's domestic actions on low carbon climate resilient development and international reputation as a leader on adaptation to climate change, then to transform these efforts to the wider economy to set it on a green development pathway and finally to invest in the future generations to enable them to take the country to the next level through investments in quality education.

This could be a pathway to turn adversity into opportunity if we first believe that it is possible and then everyone does their part to make it happen.

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Our beloved Humayun Ahmed



JAHED AHMED

"I do it with pleasure," responded Humayun Ahmed when a journalist asked him how he managed to write day after day for nearly four decades. "You do not feel exhausted when you do your work with pleasure," he continued. "And I enjoy what I do." For sure, he did. What's more significant, Humayun Ahmed knew how to spread that pleasure among his readers. No other author in Bangladesh ever has enjoyed popularity, fame and admiration to such as an unprecedented extent as Humayun Ahmed did. A man of multi-faceted talent, Humayun Ahmed, has worked in more than one genre -- writing fiction, making dramas and films. In some ways, he redefined Bangla stories, novels, and TV dramas. A novel or TV drama by Humayun Ahmed was unique.

Humayun Ahmed's greatest achievements, however, lie elsewhere.

We largely owe it to Humayun Ahmed that the business of publishing and selling books in Bangladesh has now evolved into a solid industry. Humayun's success as an author has inspired many aspiring, young writers; they learned that it was no longer a daydream for a writer in Bangladesh to become a professional author and earn a decent livelihood.

Although his readership was diverse, school and college going youths constituted a large part of it. Until Humayun Ahmed's appearance as a fiction writer, to many Bangladeshi youths reading literature was boring. Humayun Ahmed's unique style of storytelling especially lured young readers. The characters in his fiction, such as Himu, Misir Ali, mesmerised the youth. They would line up at book stalls during *Ekushe* book fair to buy the latest releases. Reading Humayun Ahmed became fun and a favourite pastime for many. Buying and giving others Humayun Ahmed's books as birthday, wedding gifts became a norm. Humayun Ahmed also gave birth to a new genre in Bangla literature -- science-fiction. Although it was popularised largely by Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, to his credit, Humayun Ahmed wrote the first Bangla science-fiction.

In TV, Humayun Ahmed attracted crowds of viewers at a time when watching the state-controlled TV was torture for the soul. For many viewers, watching Humayun's special dramas on TV became the biggest occasions during the two Eids. Only because of Humayun Ahmed's drama viewers took to the streets to demand revocation of the death sentence of a fictional character.

With the release of *Aguner Poroshmoni*, Humayun Ahmed made his debut as a film-maker. That was a time when the middle-class had long turned their backs on Bangla cinemas. Unconventional lyrics, lively characters, humorous dialogues and unique story lines -- these were the landmarks of Humayun Ahmed's movies. His movies -- *Shraban Megher Din*, *Dui Duyari*, *Shamal Chaya*, *Chandrakarighar* -- are evidence that the prospect of Bangla movies is not as bleak as we may think.

Not surprisingly, Humayun Ahmed had many critics as well. Even those who initially were impressed by Humayun's capacity and potential as a writer, at one point, thought that he had turned into a mediocre and commercial author. This included many genuine Humayun well wishers, such as eminent author late Ahmed Sofa. Popular author, educationist Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, who is incidentally Humayun Ahmed's younger brother, once described him as "a skilled photographer equipped with a camera with a very powerful lens who captures mainly photographs of ordinary birthday parties." Such allegations are not without any merit, and on occasions Humayun Ahmed himself acknowledged it.

Nevertheless, Humayun Ahmed loved what he did, and he was a beloved artist. The manifestation of people's love of Humayun Ahmed, more than ever before, has been evident after his death. Bangladeshis from all walks of life -- children, youths, adults, intellectuals, artists, even politicians -- are grieving his rather premature death both at home and abroad. In New York, where Humayun Ahmed passed away, the crowd at his funeral prayer is thought to be the second largest gathering of community people, next only to gatherings during *Eid* prayers.

"I love reading Humayun Ahmed," a young kid, probably 7 or 8 years, carrying a flower in his hand, said to a journalist. He was one of the several thousand people who had gathered at Dhaka Shaheed Minar to pay respect and catch a last glimpse of Humayun Ahmed. Such was the influence of Humayun Ahmed. An erudite person such as late Prof. Abdur Razzaque had enjoyed reading Humayun Ahmed as much as a young kid does. What else could be more rewarding and honourable to a writer?

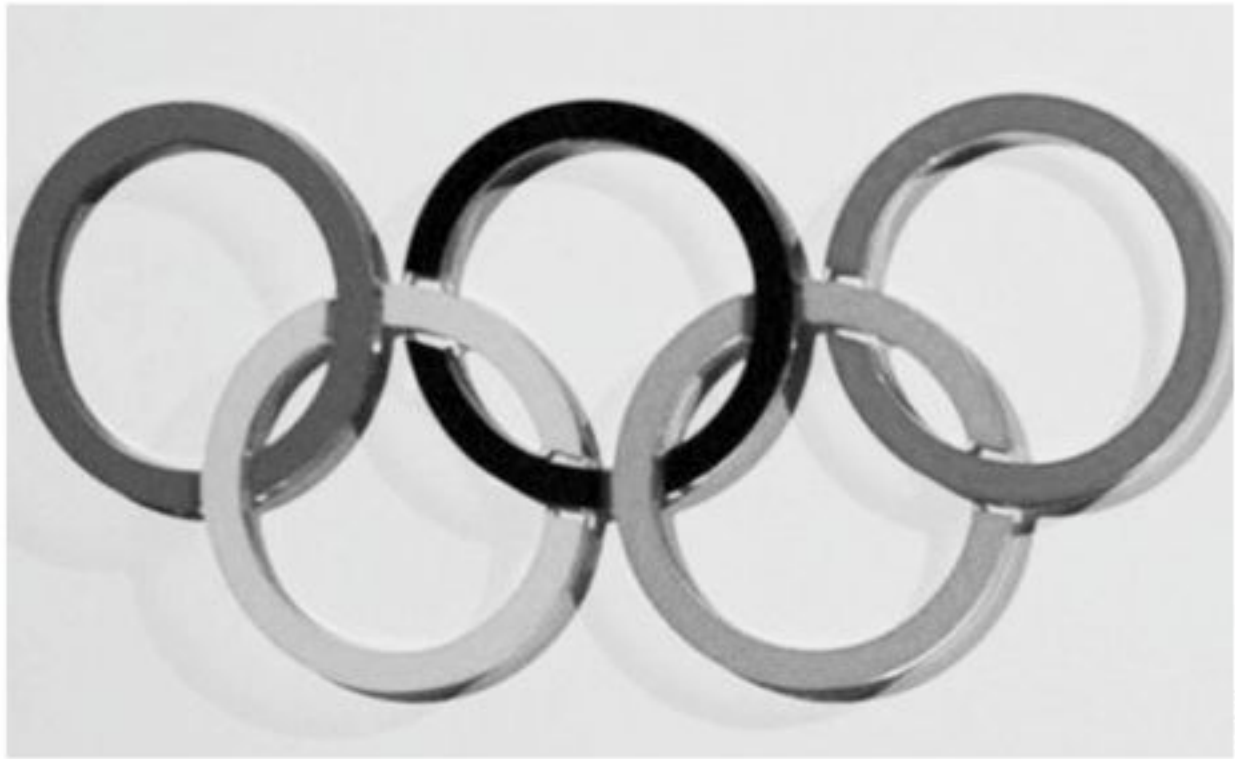
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Opening ceremony of London 2012 Olympics

NICK LOW

AT 2am tonight, a newly cast bell that is larger than Big Ben will ring out from London's Olympic Stadium and the eyes of one billion people across the globe will be upon us. But what will they see? What does modern Britain look like? Well, it's a mix of things, many of them characteristics that we share with other countries. But together we like to think they make up a pretty extraordinary whole. The challenge for Danny Boyle, Artistic Director of tonight's Opening Ceremony, was to capture all this, with just three hours to portray the British people and our society to the world. Whether he has achieved this or not, you will judge for yourselves. But I hope that every one of you watching, whether live or recorded highlights, will be able to take something away from it and think of Britain in a new light.

Danny's vision for the Ceremony came from thinking about the people of Britain: who we were, where we have come from, what our history and heritage is; and then who we are now and where we are going. The United Kingdom has always been an open society. It's in our blood. Sitting on one of the world's crossroads the British have always thrived on the exchange of goods, ideas and people. Our openness has always influenced the way we connect with the world. We have a long history of looking outwards and taking the global perspective, and we help other people connect too. Our language, the product of centuries of influence, is used all over the world, and our greatest writers, poets and playwrights have left behind them a global birthright. It is no secret that Danny's concept was inspired by a speech in William Shakespeare's *The*



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*Tempest*, nor that the first scenes you will see celebrate William Blake's rural idyll of "England's green and pleasant land."

It is this rich and vibrant history that so many of you associate with Britain: from the pomp and ceremony on display at our great Royal occasions to the Sunday afternoon games of cricket on village greens across the land. Indeed, many of our customs and values, laws and ideals seem to have changed little over the years. But in reality we are constantly inventing our-

selves. Our deep roots give us enormous energy, and our lively origins as a nation of migrants express themselves in a continuing tradition of exploration, discovery and creativity.

So tonight's ceremony will also be unpredictable and inventive. It will reflect the rising urban population and life in Britain's cities, as well as our traditional landscapes. While one side of the stadium will evoke the classical music celebration of the Last Night of the Proms, the other will recreate the spirit of the Glastonbury music festival. Because both of these are exuberant occasions where the British people love to let their hair down; both show different sides of a society which is dynamic and passionate and full of energy. Nothing demonstrates this better than the astonishing dedication of the 10,000 volunteers who have given up hours of their free time to rehearse for this momentous occasion. They truly represent the best of who we are as a nation.

When you watch the spectacle tonight, I hope you will take away a snapshot of the heritage, diversity, energy and creativity that defines the modern United Kingdom and celebrates who we are as a people. And when you listen to the sounds of the show, I hope you will take away a musical memory too, from the ringing of Europe's largest bell to the soundtrack created by electronic music duo Underworld. But above all, I hope you will see that the British people are incredibly proud to welcome the world, both this summer and in the future. As Caliban says in *The Tempest*: "Be not afeared. The isle is full of noises."

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