

## POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

# COP18 in Doha: Loss and damage

## De-congest Dhaka city

High time to act

**D**HAKA city's status as the most unliveable city in the world is in part reflected by the steady migration of people into the capital every day. It is the fastest growing city in South Asia, at a pace of almost 4% annually, with 15 lakh new residents in the last 10 years, totalling the population at 1.5 crore. Thousands of people flock to the city every day in search of better education, better employment, better lives. The result, naturally, is an overcrowded city, characterised by heavy traffic congestion, pollution, environmental degradation and shortage of basic resources and facilities such as electricity, water and gas. For, despite its rapid growth, the city is not under any urban development strategy, resulting in unplanned and chaotic growth.

One way to tackle the problem as suggested by experts is the decentralisation of business facilities and dispersal of opportunities. This is true of all basic and necessary facilities, however, including health and education. The establishment of quality primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions as well as medical facilities in other major cities and towns would prevent thousands of people migrating to the capital in search of better facilities.

The setting up of business opportunities away from the capital, too, would be a natural incentive for people to remain in their home towns or in nearby areas to make a living. This should go hand in hand with realisation of the several city plans that have been designed by experts over time, which includes mass transit system, seen as a solution to the capital's infamous traffic system.

Urbanisation comes with economic growth, but without the system and facilities to meet the needs of the fast-growing urban population -- a projected 10 crore by 2030 -- we will be continuing to grow in the restricted, capital-centric manner in which we are now, inhabiting one of the most unliveable cities in the world.

Traditionally, an overall plan for urbanisation has not received the focus it should have. It is high time to prioritise planned urban growth.

## Students manhandling teachers!

Mere condemnation is not enough

**S**OME students bearing the label of Bangladesh Chhatra League have had the temerity to assault teachers at the Islamic University, IU, of Kushtia. A large number of teachers were staging a sit-in demanding removal of IU VC, Pro-VC and Treasurer for alleged irregular recruitment of some 132 teachers, employees and staff of the university.

Not quite unlike what happened at Buet, general teachers were articulating grievances which should have normally been sorted out through discussion.

The Islamic University Teachers' Association, IUTA, has been boycotting classes since early September demanding that Chancellor should intervene to remove the three top men of IU administration. Monday's sit-in was part of that programme.

The most unfortunate part of the incident is the manner in which the so-called BCL students descended on the teachers when they were demonstrating peacefully. The hurled abuse and assaulted some of them.

What is more important than their being allegedly used by some quarters how could any one claiming to be student behave so rudely with their teachers? It is hard to believe that such shameful incident could take place in one of our highest institutions of learning!

Unfortunately, without trying to resolve the matter in a peaceful manner by assuring the teachers of looking into their allegations or talking with them directly, the IU administration allowed the problem to linger and thus come to a head.

The government from its highest level should look into the matter and take steps to bring an early end to the crisis.

At the same time, measures should be in place to mete



SALEEMUL HUQ

**T**HE eighteenth Conference of Parties (COP18) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

starts in Doha, Qatar, on November 26 and end on December 7. There are a number of important topics for negotiators to resolve at Doha, including the fate of the Kyoto Protocol, the level of ambition of mitigation targets, financing for mitigation and adaptation, actions on adaptation, reducing emissions from deforestation, land degradation (REDD), technology transfer and a new and emerging topic of Loss and Damage.

I will describe each of the main issues being discussed over the next few columns and then summarise the outcomes after it is over.

In my last column I wrote about adaptation and in this one I will deal with Loss and Damage.

This topic was first raised in the negotiations some years ago by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the political group of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) which is one of three groups of developing countries which are recognised to be "particularly vulnerable" (the other groups being the Least Developed Countries and Africa).

The main topic of concern for all three groups of vulnerable countries has been adaptation to climate change (and financing adaptation). However, for the small island states in particular, there is a limit to their ability to adapt. For example if the entire country of Kiribati goes under water there is no

more adaptation left for them.

Thus these countries have been arguing for an "international mechanism on loss and damage" to deal with the residual losses and damage after adaptation.

The reaction from the rich countries has been consistently negative to this proposal (to them it seemed to be really a proposal for an "international fund for compensation and liability").

However, in COP16 in Cancun, Mexico, in December 2010, as part of the Cancun Adaptation Framework,

Doha and the next steps negotiated there.

The main issue at the moment is the lack of clarity both about the terms "loss and damage" (they seem to mean different things to different people) and also about the "international mechanism." These will be the main negotiating issues, with AOSIS (backed by the LDCs and Africa) arguing for strong actions to be taken, while the rich countries try to agree to the weakest possible outcomes. It will certainly be an interesting topic for the negotia-

negotiators), the Institute for Environment and Human Security (EHS) of the United Nations University (UNU) based in Bonn, Germany (that supervised a series of eight country case studies from Asia, Africa and Latin America) and the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), that carried out a national level exercise involving a number of national experts from Brac University, North South University, Chittagong University, BIDS and others.

The Bangladeshi team of experts, working in close collaboration with the government, carried out a series of studies examining different aspects of loss and damage, including physical aspects, economic aspects, gender aspects, legal aspects and others, which have been shared at a series of national stakeholder workshops. Bangladeshi experts have also been invited to participate in several of the international expert workshops. Thus Bangladeshi experts and negotiators have developed considerable expertise on this topic, which should enable them to support a good outcome from Doha.

The topic of Loss and Damage is still a very new one, and also very important one, as it opens up a major new strategy to respond to climate change beyond mitigation and adaptation. The discussions around this topic are still in their infancy but will undoubtedly grow in importance over time. Bangladesh has an opportunity to be a leader on this topic.

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with the strong support of the LDC and Africa Groups, the topic of Loss and Damage was finally agreed to be included (without defining what was to be done about it).

Then in COP17 in Durban, South Africa, in December 2011 the countries agreed to have a one-year "Work Programme on Loss and Damage" and then decide what to do next in Doha at COP 18. This work programme consisted of a series of regional workshops in Tokyo, Addis Ababa, Mexico City, Bangkok, Barbados and Bonn along with an invitation for submissions from Parties and others. The results of all these workshops and submissions will now feed into the negotiations in

tions in Doha.

Bangladesh has consistently been playing a strong supporting role on this topic and was instrumental in getting the LDC Group to support AOSIS and achieve the breakthrough in Cancun. Since Durban, the government of Bangladesh has again played a proactive role in persuading a funder called Climate Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) to support a major research programme on behalf of all the vulnerable countries. CDKN then made a global call for proposals and awarded it to a consortium consisting of GermanWatch (a German NGO that carried out liaison with the main vulnerable country

## BETWEEN THE LINES

# Sooner the polls, the better it is



KULDEEP NAYAR

**T**HE government of India has a strange habit of mixing issues, sometimes economics with politics and sometimes

economics for its survival. The two issues which are before parliament are a motion for vote of no-confidence against the Manmohan Singh government and the other, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in multi-brand retail. The two are different in purpose and intent.

The motion for vote of no-confidence, sponsored by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, is meant to defeat the government on the floor of the House to force early elections. The motion is essentially a question of numbers. With the BJP and the CPI (M) coming out openly against the motion, the government looks like winning hands down.

There is a remote possibility of the BJP changing its stance if it sees that the government can be defeated. However, the ruling Congress is not sitting idle. It has already got smaller parties on its side, along with UP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav whose son runs the state government. Then there is Bahujan Samajwaji Party's Mayawati, who also looks like supporting the government. But even if the BJP and the CPI (M) were to support the vote of no-confidence, the Congress would still scrape through with two votes.

In fact, the motion can be counter-productive. Its defeat will give the Congress an opportunity to go to town saying the government has won because it has done good work for the people. All the scams and scandals will be sought to be whitewashed. Mercurial Mamata Banerjee is a one-track person. She took the decision without consulting any other party

because she was annoyed with the government at the centre, without caring about the fate of the motion. She expected the CPI (M) to oppose her but not the BJP.

The question of FDI in retail is not related to numbers in parliament. It concerns the entire country. Fearing a defeat on this question, the government has already begun saying that it is an executive decision which does not require the support of parliament. The measure has already been

should be followed by a vote. On the motion of no-confidence, the government cannot avoid voting but in FDI it can.

After the debate in parliament, the bigger question on the government's viability till the general elections in May 2014 will become tougher. The government can, at the most, postpone another vote of no-confidence by six months. That is a long period for working out the permutations and combinations. And what happens until

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gazetted through a notification. New Delhi is emphasising that the FDI does not apply to states which will have to decide individually whether they want it or not.

Maybe, opening the retail in trade to foreigners will help people to confront the capricious shopkeepers, especially those dealing in food products, raising the price as and when the demand increases. True, all the 500 million retailers, their estimated number, do not behave the same way. Many are conscious of their responsibility. Still the FDI is not in the interest of the country.

Against this backdrop, the government is conscious that parliament's rejection would be a slap on its face, a rejection which the opposition would exploit. Therefore, it is possible that the government would try to evade voting. After all, it is for the Speaker to decide whether the debate on FDI in retail

then to governance, which is already stricken with sloth and corruption?

There is no go from mid-term polls if the ruling combination wants the country to move forward. The economy is not dependent on reforms but on the people's shoulder to the wheel of development. At present, there is no such mood in the country. The growth rate which has come down to 5.8% may go down still further because of the people's and investors' lack of trust in the rulers.

What one can see is that the ventures dependent on individual initiative have fared well. The entrepreneurs have, on their own, propelled the economy upwards despite the government meddling. In fact, most cases of failure carry the stamp of government's bungling. The Manmohan Singh rule did not take remedial measures when the faltering economy required correction. However loud the denial, policy paral-

ysis and slow decision-making are palpable.

Political parties, including the Congress allies, are not enthusiastic about what the government's future plans would be. Even the Congress sometimes looks like going over the exercise. The harm to the country is beyond calculation. The only explanation which I heard in favour of continuing with the present Lok Sabha, the lower house, is that most of its members will not either get their party tickets or will not get returned. This argument may be saleable to political parties but not to the people who want parivartan (change).

Probably, there is something in the point that both the main parties, the Congress and the BJP, feel that they will not be able to retain the number of seats they have in the present Lok Sabha. The general impression is that both parties together may not cross the figure of 250 in the 545-member house. But what the two do not realise is that their stock is going down rapidly as the days go by. The Congress may be a bigger loser, but the BJP will not be a gainer. Regional parties may benefit. Both the Congress and the BJP will find themselves dented further when Gandhian Anna Hazare tours the country from early next year. He had once caught the imagination of the intelligentsia. There is no reason why he would not do so again. He may not be in politics but what he says or does will have a great impact on the next parliamentary elections.

This is all the more reason why both the parties should opt for an early election. They may retrieve some ground when the wind for change has not turned into a storm. But then the past experience is that the political parties have preferred the status quo to new challenges. This is the tragedy of political parties and that of the country, too, because it gets the worst of both worlds.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

November 22

1943

World War II: War in the Pacific U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Chinese leader Chiang Kai-Shek meet in Cairo, Egypt, to discuss ways to defeat Japan (see Cairo Conference)

1963

In Dallas, Texas, US President John F. Kennedy is assassinated and Texas Governor John B. Connally is seriously wounded. Suspect Lee Harvey Oswald is later captured and charged with the murder of both the President and police officer J. D. Tippit.

1967

UN Security Council Resolution 242 is adopted by the UN Security Council, establishing a set of the principles aimed at guiding negotiations for an Arab-Israeli peace settlement.

1974

The United Nations General Assembly grants the Palestine Liberation Organization observer status.

1990

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher withdraws from the Conservative Party leadership election, confirming the end of her premiership.

2004

The Orange Revolution begins in Ukraine, resulting from the presidential elections.