

Bangladesh moves up the climate change knowledge ladder

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE climate change research community in Bangladesh, which consists of several dozen organisations, including public and private universities, national and international research organisations, Government and NGOs as well as some private sector organisations, came together over two years ago to form a collective platform for climate change knowledge generation and use in Bangladesh called "Gobeshona" (the Bangla word for "research"). This self-organised consortium of well over two dozen organisations has three objectives, namely to enhance the quality of climate change research conducted in the country, to enhance sharing of research results amongst researchers themselves as well as with others, and finally to ensure that good quality research results are actually used by policymakers, planners and practitioners in Bangladesh as well as abroad.

In addition to these objectives, it also holds an annual science conference every January to initially benchmark and then assess the addition of new knowledge in annual increments. The second annual Gobeshona Conference on Climate Change Research in Bangladesh was held a few days ago in Dhaka and I will share some of the new findings and future directions of the conference in today's article.

Enhancing research quality
This part of the Gobeshona programme focuses on young researchers and provides them with training and mentoring, not so much on how to do the research itself, but rather on how to ensure that the outputs of their research can be published in international peer reviewed scientific journals. This is done through a Young Researchers Support Programme through which each year about a dozen young researchers are selected and provided with training and mentoring to produce papers that are published internationally. The first

batch of young researchers has successfully completed their programme and the second batch has also just started.

Sharing research amongst researchers
The sharing of published research is done through the Gobeshona web portal (www.Gobeshona.net) where we actively seek out nationally and internationally published research papers on climate change, and upload and archive them on the website. To date there are over a thousand research

Gobeshona conferences
The very first conference (Gobeshona-1) was held in January 2015 and brought together around 200 researchers from around Bangladesh, with a few international researchers as well, to present around 50 scientific papers on different aspects of climate change in different thematic sessions over three days. The proceedings have been published and are available on the website. In addition, a multi-chartered book on the state of knowledge is being published by an

review every progress. I will share below some of the key new findings from Gobeshona-2 compared to Gobeshona-1 last year.

Firstly, it is clear that climate change has already become a key national priority, in both planning and finance, and is no longer just an "environmental" issue that could be left to the Ministry of Environment to solve.

Secondly, the issue of migration and urbanisation under a climatically changing world are intimately linked and need to be

mainstreamed, into national, sectoral and local level planning.

Fourthly, Bangladeshi researchers are actually leading the world in a couple of areas of climate change research, namely in Community Based Adaptation (CBA). Bangladesh will host the 10th International Conference on CBA in April this year, where several international participants are expected to attend and also focus on the new and emerging issue of loss and damage from climate change, which will be a major part of the discussions at this year's Conference of Parties (COP22) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Morocco.

Finally, the idea of developing a transparent climate finance system as a public private partnership between the Economic Resources Division (ERD) and the research community in Bangladesh with national and international collaboration was identified as a priority for the future.

International research collaboration
One of the new characteristics of Gobeshona-2 was the participants of several dozen international researchers from the United States of America, Canada, Australia, Germany, UK, Tanzania, Uganda and Nepal, who learned what Bangladeshi researchers were doing and also shared their own experiences. This also resulted in a number of collaborative research projects being identified between Bangladeshi and international researchers.

Way forward
The annual Gobeshona conference is now becoming a means of assessing how Bangladesh moves up the climate change knowledge ladder, one rung at a time. The move from the first to the second rung of the ladder shows good progress so far.

Going forward, one significant outcome is the idea of developing a South-South Adaptation Technology Centre in Bangladesh, initiated by the research NGO communities, based on Bangladesh's experience on different adaptation technologies, which could potentially become a public-private partnership if the government wishes to make it so.

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PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

papers in the searchable archive. In order to share ongoing research, there is another section of the web portal where researchers can put up their ongoing research projects so that others can know who is doing what. There are several dozen such ongoing research projects listed there.

There is also a monthly Gobeshona seminar, hosted each month in turn by a different member of the consortium, where researchers can present their findings to their peers. This typically attracts fifty to sixty participants each month.

Outputs of Gobeshona 2
The second conference (Gobeshona-2) was held a few days ago and in addition to the three-day science conference also included a one-day Science Policy Dialogue Day, where senior policymakers and planners attended to hear the latest research findings, and to provide feedback on research questions that they would like the researchers to address in the future. Thus the annual conference is designed to take stock of current knowledge and directions for new research and then

tackled together to a large extent. Also, while in the near term, climate induced displacement and migration is a p Blum, in the longer term we may be able to make assisted or facilitated migration into an adaptation option for millions from the coastal areas who may need to be relocated inland over the coming decades.

Thirdly, the outcome of the recently agreed Paris Agreement now needs to be implemented in Bangladesh both for mitigation as well as adaptation actions, which need to be well integrated, or

Rage against the machine



AMITAVA KAR

IMAGINE two people trying to solve a complex mathematical problem at the same time. One is using his skills in arithmetic and algebra, the other, a

computer. If you are interested in the future of that problem, who would you bet on? It's not just computers, technologies like ever-smarter phones (87 percent households in Bangladesh use mobile phones), interactive TVs, advanced robotics, smart cars, the ubiquitous web and, mobile technology that eliminates the distance between doctor and patient, teacher and student, are quickly defining what it means to be human.

The trouble with technological evolution is that it is driven by what we are led to think we want as opposed to what is adaptive.

Companies like Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Amazon and IBM have not only announced significant development in Artificial Intelligence but also open-sourced them. The idea is to help AI become less of a mad science research project and more of a building block available to the average programmer.

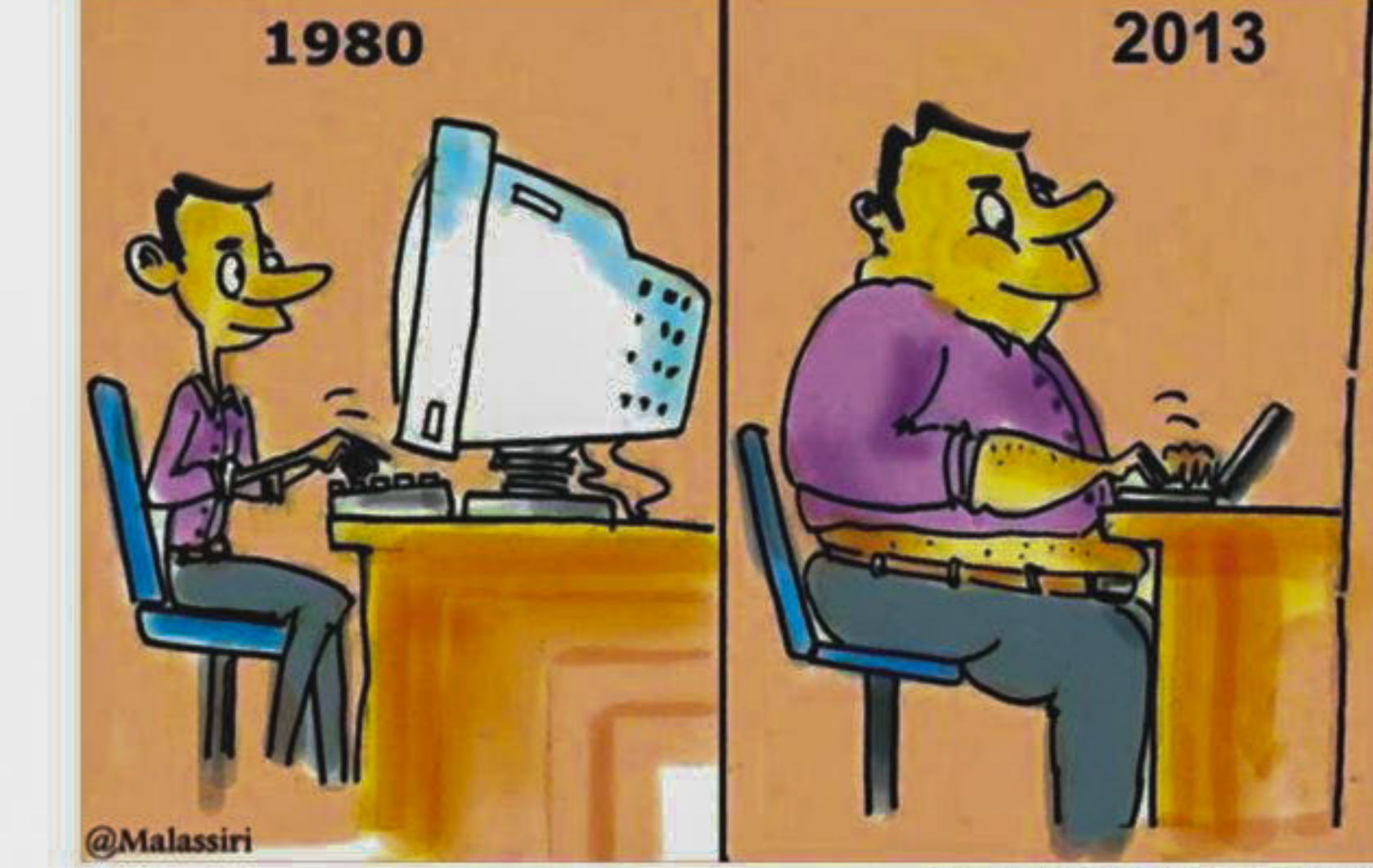
We are not quite living in the future, but we are getting there. We see applications learning and making decisions and behaving slightly less like software and more like people. Some good examples: Skype translator, Cortana (an intelligent personal assistant created by Microsoft),

Clutter—a feature in Outlook that cleans up our email inbox based on past behaviour, and HoloLens, a wearable display that overlays the real world with digitally generated three-dimensional imagery that looks and behaves like it's part of reality, something Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella calls AR or Augmented Reality. And the director of engineering at Google, Ray Kurzweil, predicts that by 2045 we will arrive at "singularity"—a term he popularised for the point at which humans and computers will merge as one where human intelligence will be enhanced a billion-fold. In his latest book *How to Create a Mind* (2012), Kurzweil, described by *Forbes* as "the ultimate thinking machine", advocates building a synthetic extension of the brain connecting it to the cloud.

These are powerful ideas. But here's the big question: Is technology making us more efficient and intelligent? Let's take a look at the Oji-Cree, a people numbering about thirty thousand, who live in extremely cold and desolate areas in Ontario and Manitoba in Canada. For much of the 20th century, they lived a rugged, rigorous life with plenty of exercise, untouched by what we call the technological revolution. Life was simple—mental illness or substance abuse was unheard of.

just a few decades. Life became a lot more comfortable. The hard labour of canoeing or snowshoeing was replaced by the comfort of outboards and snowmobiles. They no longer starve during the winter thanks to refrigerators and even enjoy pleasures like sweets, alcohol, and television.

But since the advent of new technologies, there has been a massive



increase in obesity, heart disease, and Type 2 diabetes. Alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide rate have reached some of the highest levels on earth as revealed in a study titled *Genetics, Environment and Type 2 Diabetes in the Oji-Cree Population of Northern Ontario*. "The Oji-Cree are literally being killed by technological advances," Columbia Law

professor Tim Wu writes in his article *As Technology Gets Better, Will Society Get Worse?* in *The New Yorker* (February 6, 2014).

The story offers an important lesson. A society needs time to adjust to new technologies without destroying its cultural continuity. But the trouble with technological evolution is that it is driven by what we are led to think we


The tech industry which seems to be aiming at minimising pain and maximising pleasure has failed us on its own terms. It has an obligation to do greater good by catering to our more complete selves rather than just our narrow interests that eliminate spaces for things like, thought, reflection and leisure. Take, for example, the sweet promise of liberation from overwork which was one of the central premises of automation. But we have become plagued by a tyranny of small tasks, individually simple but collectively oppressive. And, when every task has been made easy by technology, there remains just one profession left: multitasking. We have evolved into creatures whose lives are more productive but less satisfying.

Technology is supposed to help us focus on what matters. We all know that it's easier to drive to the top of a mountain than to hike. The view may be the same but the feeling never is. By no means do I insist that everything need be done the hard way, or that we need to suffer like our forefathers to achieve redemption. There is nothing wrong with using Facebook to communicate with someone as long as we do not sacrifice real conversation for mere connection. Social fragmentation leads to social breakdown. Close communities have less crime, fewer problems.

It is not technology but our collective demands that drive our destiny and define the human condition.

The writer is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

QUOTABLE Quote



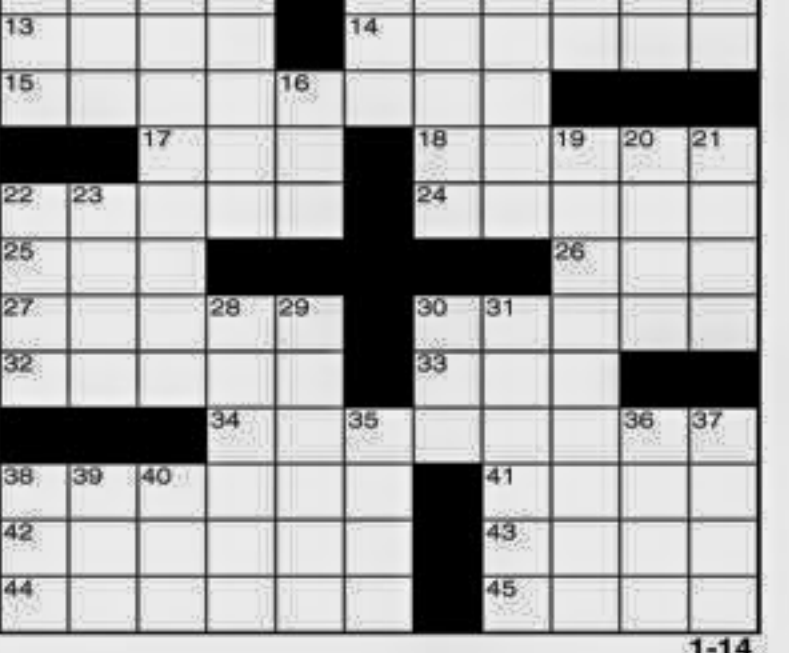
GROUCHO MARX
American comedian, film and television star

Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies.


CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Group of players	1 Tube tops
5 Grapevine talk	2 In -- (aligned)
11 Geometry calculation	3 Choosy
12 Individually	4 More statuesque
13 Gallup concern	5 Fence feature
14 Vacillate	6 Met shows
15 Suffers from the heat	7 Afternoon break
17 Corp. VIP	8 Ready to go
18 Worried	9 Road hazard
22 Texas player	10 Individually
24 Hayek of "Frida"	16 Not to mention
25 Letter after upsilon	19 Nonessential courses
26 Neareternity	20 In a frenzy
27 Roof overhangs	21 Salon offerings
30 Bulletin board items	22 Big galoots
32 Refine ore	23 Counterfeit
33 Ump's cry	28 Writer Leonard
34 Crescent's ascent	29 Taken the wrong way
38 Playwright Pinter	30 Great weight
41 Kitchen sight	31 Dawn goddess
42 Dotted on	35 Bookie's concern
43 Woodwind part	36 Hunt for
44 Egg buys	37 Goals
35 Invites	38 Owned
	39 Hubbub
	40 Cartoonist Chast

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

A	R	M	S	P	A	C	E	R	S
H	E	A	T	A	R	A	B	B	I
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