

Cleaning up our act

The role of government in the transition to a sustainable economy



2019 has been a landmark year for climate change issues. Around the world, we have seen people taking to the streets to protest, many of them children and young adults who fear for their future. Large areas of South Asia sizzled in the extreme heat. The protesters' message was simple: businesses are not doing enough to tackle climate change. And nor are governments. Rapid transformation is increasingly becoming crucial.

The past 12 months have brought yet more dire warnings about the future of the planet. The most recent report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that the earth's oceans and frozen regions are changing alarmingly quickly, while greenhouse gas emissions are altering the planet's seas and cryosphere. The pace of this change is faster than even the most conservative forecasters had anticipated.

The UN report stated that, since 1993, the rate of warming in the oceans has more than doubled. The melting of the two great ice sheets blanketing Greenland and West Antarctica is accelerating as well, leading to an increasing rise in sea level. West Antarctica's glaciers may already be so unstable that they are past the point of no return.

Citizens around the world are, rightly, wondering what the business and governments are going to do to address these issues. The problem we face is that our precious planet is trapped in an economic system which is based on the one-time use of natural and material resources. Most businesses entities operate along a linear model.

Then, there is the population challenge. Think about it: the population of our planet has grown from three billion in 1960 to over seven billion at present. Some forecasters believe that we will reach ten billion in the not-too-distant future. Too many people are placing a strain on too few resources. We need to start thinking differently.



"Business as usual" is no longer an option. The current economic orthodoxy is clearly not sustainable.

The only way to ensure that there is enough food and water to secure prosperity will be to move from the "linear" to a "circular" economy. We need to develop and deploy technologies to create a renewable resource-based economy. We simply cannot continue using up materials and dumping the waste by digging a hole in the ground. That way lies the environmental Armageddon.

However, while so many fingers point at the private sector, business and industry alone cannot make the transition from a waste-based economy to a renewable one.

We know this based on the experiences of the past decade where, despite many pious intentions from the business community, the linear, wasteful economic model remained the norm. And the pace of required change has been painfully slow compared to the ways we have harmed Nature.

But securing Nature in the business of Sustainable Development cannot be an "us and them" game. The only way forward to fulfil all of our long-term goals is through the public and private sectors working in tandem, hand-in-hand, side-by-side.

There is often suspicion by business when we talk of "government intervention". Some suggest that we should let the free market

prevail, that the laissez-faire economic philosophy should always prevail, that healthy competition will always lead to a perfect allocation of resources. But the market does not always know and respond best. History has already told us that, especially where the environment is concerned.

The contemporary economics narrative speaks volumes about market failures. A clear example is environmental pollution which is caused by a failure of the market. In short, in many industries around the world, it still makes better business sense to pollute the environment than to operate responsibly. This can no longer be right, however. There must be sizable sanctions for those who damage the environment—in the way of making those that do not comply, pay a huge price. The only people who can ensure this happen to be the range of regulatory bodies in our governments.

In a complex economy on a crowded planet, we need a set of rules that properly account for the planetary stress that our global economy has created. We need rules to ensure that the economic life of goods does not destroy the planet, so that it can continue to provide us with food, air, water and other basic necessities.

On a limited menu, the role of the government in building a sustainable economy should include a number of things, including (but not limited to) the following:

One, increasing funding for basic science education and research needed for developing resource-efficient technologies.

Two, using tax system, government purchasing power, and other financial tools to steer private capital toward investment in resource efficiency and other sustainable technologies and businesses.

Three, investment in sustainable infrastructure, for example, renewable energy, smart grids, electric vehicle-charging stations, mass transit systems, waste management facilities, water filtration systems and sewage treatment systems.

Four, regulating land use and other private activities to minimise the destruction of ecosystems.

Five, working with private organisations, civil society as well as local government bodies to ensure that the transition is well-managed.

Six, measuring our society's progress toward sustainability by developing and maintaining a system of generally accepted sustainability metrics. This, in turn, should facilitate the integration of sustainability into our overall management of the economy along with the setting of a national sustainable economic policy.

Seven, learning from use-adaptation of sustainable technologies in the countries of comparable economic condition who take care of their environment responsibly.

The Bangladesh government has already committed to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are fully embedded into and aligned with our economy. Perhaps the most effective mechanism for coordinating progress towards the SDGs could be through wider national coordination and implementation via the departmental planning process. Business and industry, including the SMEs, merit to be involved much more robustly.

As stated before, our serious, complex sustainability challenges cannot be addressed by the private sector and free market alone. These require wider—deeper—innovative governmental actions and need collaborative thinking between regulators, businesses and industry and, where appropriate, civil society organisations.

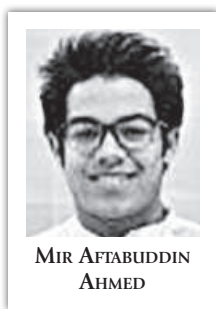
The future well-being of this country and the industries depend on the Bangladesh government playing a more strategic and future-oriented role to bring about the transformation needed for a sustainable economy.

People often comment that Bangladesh seems to do best when confronted with a crisis. Well, the crisis is here, now. However, one could use the analogy that we are "in the eye of the storm"—which is probably why many people cannot appreciate and feel the seriousness of the present situation.

All things considered, it is time for strong, proactive and decisive governmental actions to lead the way in tackling climate change, with the business community robustly involved and by its side.

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Reasons behind Trudeau's slim victory



A second term in office awaits the incumbent Canadian prime minister, as the centre-left Liberal Party managed to secure enough parliamentary seats to ensure that a minority government, headed by Justin Trudeau, would continue governing the country for a successive term in office. The 2019 Federal Elections in Canada went beyond the traditional debate over Conservatives versus Liberals—rather, it was an extraordinary litmus test for a prime minister whose credibility and popularity simultaneously diminished due to gaping political holes created and aggravated by him, and him only.

The question now remains: can Trudeau reinstate a sense of trust amongst the totality of his electorate? Or will his re-election open the doors to further divisions within the Canadian society, as was seen in the recently concluded elections? Two aspects are crucial when understanding the Canadian elections. First, the weakening of Trudeau's status as the West's torchbearer of progressive politics. Second, how immigrant communities are shaping political decisions in the country.

Prior to the 2015 Federal Elections, Justin Trudeau's team had developed a campaign based on the Liberal leader's individual personality of being the singular progressive alternative to an unpopular Stephen Harper of the Conservative Party. The Liberal slogan of "Ready for Change" resonated with young Canadians and minority groups in particular, as Trudeau's charm brought a fresh sense of vibrancy to politics in the country. What made Trudeau stand out was his image as a magnetic leader providing an alternative to right-wing populist movements around the world.

And he succeeded—he won the elections handsomely, and instituted Canada's first gender-neutral cabinet in office. In his four years in office, Trudeau did well on various fronts especially in investing in innovative jobs and assisting Canada's stable economic growth, resettling refugee claimants to his country and legislating pay equity in the federal sector, amongst others. As such, in the first three years of the Liberal term in office, the prime minister's popularity hovered around 60 percent. Therefore, it is only normal to ask how Trudeau's individual popularity fell to around 30 percent during the 2019 elections. The answer lies in decisions which, unlike his electoral promises, failed to resonate with his electorate.

To put it simply, Trudeau failed to live up to his own standards. At the United Nations and other global conferences, he spoke of the need

to tackle climate change collectively. However, his own country is far from pacing itself appropriately in reaching the targets set forth by the Paris Agreement. Additionally, being a so-called climate leader, he announced in 2018 his government's intention to buy the controversial Trans Mountain pipeline from the private company Kinder Morgan, a decision which severely harmed his image as a progressive leader. Trudeau owned this decision politically by suggesting it will guarantee jobs to Albertans, whilst allowing for a practical path to focus on renewable energy in the long run; the proposed development of the pipeline will continue Canada's investment in the oil sector, and as such, the decision severely reduced his voting base amongst younger citizens in 2019.

The expansion of the proposed pipeline in the province of Alberta, and its subsequent operations are slated

Trudeau appearing in "Blackface" and "Brownface" in his younger years went viral on social media, and Trudeau's image as a towering progressive thinker was further dented. From being the leader that the Canadians wanted, campaigned and sought to vote for, he became one for whom people would still vote, but with the mindset of voting for the lesser of two evils. This change in perception has harmed Trudeau and his party immensely and it remains to be seen how he deals with that in the coming days.

The numbers centring the elections are crucial to understand. The Liberals won a total of 157 seats, dropping their share by 27 from 2015. The Conservatives attained 121 seats, moving up by 22 seats. Immigrant-based communities across the country, amongst which many of the 55,000 to 60,000 Bangladeshi expatriates voted for the first time, leaned strongly towards supporting Trudeau's mandate.



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks during an election campaign stop in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, on September 19, 2019.

to forcibly displace many indigenous groups as well—groups which stood by Trudeau in 2015. With the Liberal leader promising reconciliation between the Federal Government and indigenous groups to be a top priority, this decision was seen as a slap on the face of the very people who he owed his rise to in politics. Furthermore, Trudeau was charged by Canada's Ethics Commissioner for pressuring his former Attorney General to not press wholesale charges against SNC Lavalin, a Quebec-based company well known in Bangladesh for its supposed involvement in the Padma Bridge scandal. And of course, in the days leading up to the elections, the bombshell picture of

This is another important characteristic of the Canadian elections—how Canadians voted across provinces, especially in those with high-density migrant populations such as Ontario as opposed to those with low-density migrant populations such as Alberta. This indicates the increasing divide in the country on the basis of racial and ethnic beliefs. The Bloc Quebecois, a separatist organisation which has traditionally demanded the independence of the province of Quebec from Canada, progressed to official party status this year, by winning 32 out of the 78 seats in Quebec. These numbers show how provinces like Alberta, Saskatchewan and to some extent Quebec have said no to Justin Trudeau. His new government, therefore, has a gigantic task to respond

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Issues like Trudeau's carbon tax to support green development, or his interest to resettle more migrants in Canada, are controversial across provinces where he earned little to no seats. And addressing their concerns remains his biggest challenge. Yet at the same time, he is in a tough spot—reaching out to them means making concessions on those very values, which he has preached throughout his career. Suffice it to say, pandering to his traditional base of migrants and younger voters may not work in upcoming elections. The rise of the New Democratic Party under Jagmeet Singh, although not visible in the new parliament, is concerning for Trudeau. Therefore, it is safe to say that Justin Trudeau has narrowly survived a calamitous storm during the 2019 elections. He now has the opportunity to take Canada forward in his quest to be a progressive democracy, but the question remains: will we witness Trudeau making a strong comeback politically? Or will he go down in history as the prime minister who could have brought credible change, rather than the prime minister who succeeded in doing so.

For minority groups, his re-election should be seen as a blessing, however. He has been a strong and unflinching ally for immigrants by being a proud promoter of diversity. Like his father Pierre Trudeau, he too sees multiculturalism as the living embodiment of what Canada represents—and this in itself is an achievement for the country. Nevertheless, the support of immigrants cannot and will not be the sole catalyst for a prime minister who needs to reflect and re-engage with the totality of his population in the coming years. And how he does that may well define his destiny and legacy.

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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	39 Crazy	19 Mysterious loch
1 Quiche start	40 Refuge	20 Guinness of film
5 Center	41 Looks over	21 Rural sight
10 Lively folk dance	42 Mating game	22 Go to sea
11 Nursery rhyme start	43 Young ones	25 Rotisserie
12 Concerning	DOWN	26 Shoulder decoration
13 Freeway entrance	1 Rocker Clapton	28 Garfield's middle name
14 African nation	2 Rowlands of film	30 Milky gems
16 Asian nation	3 Disease cause	31 — operandi
20 Useful skills	4 Surprise hit	33 "The Naked Maja" painter
23 Cut drastically	5 Vietnam's capital	34 Served well
24 Tale tellers	6 Brings in	35 Red-ink amount
25 Hawks	7 Lawyers' org.	36 Ocean off Cal.
27 Yale rooster	8 Zodiac animal	37 Furniture wood
28 Orchard crop	9 Phone bug	38 TV's "Science Guy" Bill
29 South American nation	11 Library contents	
32 European nation	15 "Doggone!"	
36 Soaked bread dish	17 Statuesque	
	18 Car bar	

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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