

Biden's Star Trek on climate change



ANDREW SHENG

ON April 29, the US will celebrate the first 100 days of 46th President Joseph Biden. After four years of chaotic Trump governance, the world is relieved how quickly

Biden was able to deliver calm and competent professionalism in tackling the pandemic, economy and setting the tone on foreign affairs.

President Biden used April 22, Earth Day, to call a Global Summit on climate change. The theme this year is to restore the Earth, as 2020 was both a year marked by the pandemic, unprecedented natural disasters and one of the hottest years on record. Ironically, it witnessed simultaneously record stock market prices as well as growing poverty.

The 40 global leaders invited included not only G20 leaders but also small countries like Bhutan, Gabon, Antigua and Barbuda and Marshall Islands. Within the Asian region, non-G20 members like Vietnam, Singapore and Bangladesh joined heavyweights like Chinese President Xi, Indian Prime Minister Modi, Indonesian President Jokowi, Japanese Prime Minister Suga and South Korean President Moon. Significantly, this was German Chancellor Merkel's last global summit appearance, whilst Pope Francis was also invited to add a moral tone.

President Biden's opening remarks showed clearly that he was speaking not just about climate change as an existential threat but more about jobs and getting the economy going through clean investments. He urged global

leaders to take concrete action to keep the Earth's temperature to an increase of not more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. To demonstrate American leadership, he committed the US to two significant steps. The first is a formal commitment to cut US emissions at least in half (from 2005 levels) by 2030. The second is to double annual public climate financing development to developing countries by 2024.

How significant is this Global Climate Summit? Optically, this could be the Green New Deal of the Century. Practically, it's all about delivery—whether the US can lead the world out of the climate warming collective trap in action and not just words. If America is not able to put its own house in order in terms of social inequality, economy and climate change, she will cede leadership elsewhere.

So far, Biden has gotten most of his nominated officials approved so that tested professionals are now busy cleaning up Trump's legacies. This is a calmer and more effective White House, in sharp contrast to the constant barrage of angry and wild tweets coming out of the Trump White House.

Under Biden, the US has been leading the vaccination rollout, allowing the economy to re-open, and committing USD 5.1 trillion (USD 0.9 trillion under Trump, USD 1.9 trillion in February and USD 2.3 trillion infrastructure) in stimulus and infrastructure spending plans, equivalent to nearly a quarter of GDP. Economically, in the medium term, the US is set to have the fastest recovery ahead of Europe and Japan, with the exception of China.

Given the bipartisan support on US foreign and national security policies, Biden has retained many of Trump's hardline actions on China. If anything,



US President Biden at the virtual Leaders Summit on Climate on April 22.

PHOTO: EVAN VUCCI/AP

the tone has sharpened in maintaining China tariffs and sanctions, and the decoupling of technology and reshoring of manufacturing.

The second leg of Biden's foreign policy is the decision to pull out of Afghanistan and make overtures to Iran. The Afghanistan war is the longest in American history and has ended exactly as the Korean and Vietnam wars, a defeat disguised as a withdrawal. History was right. Afghanistan is a graveyard for all invaders, from Alexander the Great's army, the British Empire and the Russians to the present day and the American military might.

What the Afghanistan war proved is that intervening with good intentions to deal with human rights may end up creating worse human rights abuses by destroying families, communities and even nations. This tragedy has been repeated time and again in Iraq, Libya,

Yemen and Syria, with neighbours tottering on the brink of failure due to refugees, overwhelmed infrastructure and today, the pandemic catastrophe.

Simply put, the strategy behind the Global Climate Summit is clearly to regain the moral high ground that Trump ceded by signalling a global race to the top on climate action, rather than a race to the bottom through another arms race. However, it is likely that both will be pursued.

For me, three points stand out from Biden's maiden 100 days. First, the funding commitment to help the rest of the world on climate change is minimal. Doubling US current climate finance aid of USD 2.5 billion to USD 5.7 billion by 2024 is a mere 0.03 percent of its 2020 GDP, hardly generous compared with the 1948 Marshall Plan of USD 12 billion or 4.3 percent of the 1948 GDP. Furthermore, this aid amounts to

0.3 percent of USD 175 billion in US weapons exports in fiscal year 2020, or 0.19 percent of the USD three trillion of QE funding created by the Fed last year.

Second, on what moral or rule of law grounds can the US justify condoning Japan promising to dump millions of gallons of Fukushima nuclear waste water into the Pacific Ocean, and without getting approval from all those affected? Does transparency in doing bad things make them right?

Third, fixing the domestic economy relying mainly on foreign funding with a US net liability to the rest of the world of USD 14 trillion or 67 percent of GDP is highly risky. As former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers has warned, the large stimulus package will in the short-run lift the economy, but at the cost of growing inflation risks. Any interest rate hikes will kill the asset bubbles and may trigger the next financial crisis.

In essence, Biden is trying to steer what American futurologist Buckminster Fuller called in 1978 the Critical Path of Spaceship Earth between two existential threats of nuclear destruction or climate burning. In the TV series *Star Trek*, the USS Enterprise ventured into deep space where no man has gone before, fully armed to the teeth, but with the Prime Directive of Non-Interference in alien society's development.

President Biden has boldly and rightly staked his reputation on saving the planet through climate action. As planetary citizens, we salute him. We will watch the next episode with great anticipation.

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Rethinking education under Covid-19: The LLMSC approach



RUBAIYA MURSHED

AS I write this, I am overrun with a rush of helplessness. I remember feeling the same way when I was preparing for a keynote presentation on the "Recovery of

short-term goals would be immediate plans of action, while the long-term goals would be about reforming our education system at the core. By combining the two goals, I propose the LLMSC approach in rethinking education in the light of Covid-19. The LL refers to learning levels, M stands for (learning) materials, the S is for software and C stands for community. Each part of the approach stems from

we need standardised tests. Most importantly, we need to change the narrative of tests. Tests or exams in our education system are more to do with competition than with identifying an individual's learning level, and this needs to change. The purpose of exams should be to identify students' learning levels so that the student can be catered to accordingly. The purpose should not be to identify students' ranks amongst

as children who were out of formal schooling even before the pandemic. For instance, self-instructional learning materials have proven to be helpful in the case of children who do not have access to teachers or online learning.

The S part of the approach represents the need to invest smartly in software and not just hardware. Instead of bulk buying laptops for students, a better approach would be to invest in software too, such as Computer Assisted Learning (CAL) software. In interventions conducted in India and China, the use of CAL software obtained promising results in improving the learning of academically weaker students especially.

Lastly, the C in the LLMSC approach is a call for a community approach in tackling the problems in our education system. While the responsibility of students' learning may fall more upon teachers and parents, everyone in the community needs to be convinced of the importance of quality education. Especially in a country like ours, where many families may be inclined to make their children drop out of school and become involved in income earning in these hard times, it is crucial that we campaign to establish the importance of children's schooling, as well as provide financial help to incentivise children's return to education. Bangladesh has a bold past in terms of campaigns. I remember, from our childhood days, the campaigns towards treating diarrhoea in children. Before that, there was the even more widespread campaign for population control. Just think about how many of us have a significantly fewer number of siblings than our parents and grandparents' generations. We need such powerful campaigns now, more than ever, to motivate and convince people of the power of education.

While the LLMSC approach is for the education of school and college-

going children, we cannot forget the university students, especially those whose education is most under jeopardy—public university students. Private university students are fortunately proceeding with their studies and exams online. The transition has not been as smooth in the case of public universities. There are two matters to address here. First, the learning loss due to the disruption of regular studies and second, the session jam. Our solutions to these need to be separate because we have simply lost too much time to devise effective strategies that may address both.

In mitigating learning loss, we can develop and share learning materials and engage students, using creative pedagogies, to truly learn. In the case of session jam, we need to urgently opt for alternative assessment methods, especially for batches on the verge of graduating. One option is to pursue portfolio-based assessment, which allows sufficient scope to be innovative. In truth, any assessment method we undertake will have pros and cons. The most important thing right now is that we facilitate students to graduate. Especially for the University of Dhaka, which is set to step into its hundredth year in July, we do not want to make that step with our students' futures hanging in the balance.

There are always solutions to any problem, and we need to be innovative and remember that one size cannot fit all. Sometimes, the best solutions are the simplest ones. Like, in reopening schools in villages, something we must prioritise, teaching outside in the shade of trees instead of inside in classrooms may just be the current (with all its disadvantages) best solution.

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ILLUSTRATION: BIPOB CHAKROBORTY

research-based evidence. First, research indicates that education should be tailored according to learning level and not age. Often, children may not be at the learning level that they are supposed to be at despite being at the age of that learning level. Targeting lessons according to learning levels helps in strengthening learning. To identify learning levels,

their peers. Second, the M part of the approach leads on from learning levels and entails that learning materials should be created targeting different learning levels. We should be prepared for the fact that these learning materials may need to be distributed either offline or online. Moreover, we should keep in mind marginalised groups, such

QUOTABLE Quote

SUN TZU
(544 BC–496 BC)
Chinese military strategist and philosopher

In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Winter airs
- 7 Homecoming guest
- 11 Broad way
- 12 Llama's land
- 13 Party target
- 14 Antlered animal
- 15 Cheer up
- 16 Entity
- 17 Secluded spot
- 18 Meat pie
- 19 Shortly, in poems
- 21 Chum
- 22 Temple Mount city
- 25 Sedan or SUV
- 26 Sub spot
- 27 Ticked
- 29 Campus part

DOWN

- 1 Like Superman
- 2 Walled Spanish city
- 3 Of the kidneys
- 4 Carousing
- 5 Mandolin's cousin
- 6 Yacht spot
- 7 Church areas
- 8 Beatles classic
- 9 Reactor fuel
- 10 Held up, in a way
- 16 Trite
- 18 Did some modeling
- 20 Some sculptures
- 22 Reggae's birthplace
- 23 Blew one's top
- 24 Water and wine, e.g.
- 25 Treat for Tabby
- 28 Canary chow
- 30 Longings
- 31 Stood
- 32 Forbidden acts
- 34 Hay unit
- 36 Tofu base

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R	A	P	I	D	C	O	P	E	S
A	Z	U	R	E	L	O	R	R	E
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SURE! IT'S NICE TO KNOW SOMEONE APPRECIATES MY WORK
I GOT PLENTY OF PAPER TO START THE BONFIRE

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HAMMIE, NO HELMETS AT THE DINNER TABLE.
THE HEMDALORIAN NEVER REMOVES HIS HELMET.
CAN SOMEBODY SHOVE A DRUMSTICK UP UNDER HERE?
HOW HARD?