

# Combating climate change needs a 'business-unusual' approach



**POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**  
**SALEEMUL HUQ**

As we approach the 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—which marks a quarter century of talks on how to tackle the greatest global crisis that humanity has ever faced—we have made some progress, but not nearly enough if we consider the speed of climate change. As the sixth assessment report (AR6) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has revealed, we have unequivocally entered the new era of adverse impacts of human-induced climate change as the global mean temperature has risen over one degree Celsius due to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions since the Industrial Revolution over a hundred years ago.

What this means—and this is new—is that we will now have to face increasing levels of loss and damage from rising global mean temperature every year for the next 10 or 20 years. If we are able to enhance our efforts in reducing GHG emissions very drastically to stay below the 1.5-degree-Celsius threshold of temperature rise, we may be able to prevent even more catastrophic loss and damage in the longer term. But the adverse impacts for the next decade are now baked in and inevitable.

It is thus clearly evident, as we are repeatedly reminded by the Friday for Future activists, that our house is already on fire and we are still merely talking about taking action. Our business-as-usual approach for the last two and a half decades has completely failed to prevent the crisis, and we are still far from rising to the urgency required.

I am, therefore, going to propose some ideas for a "business-unusual" approach at all levels to enable the world to tackle the climate crisis on a scale and with an urgency that are needed.

First, we need to rethink the purpose of the annual COP where all the governments of the signatories to the UNFCCC come together once a year, while many thousands of non-governmental actors also join in for side events in the same city, and also hold

demonstrations in the streets. This once-a-year talk fest is simply not effective anymore, as the actions that are agreed to by the governments require consensus of all 190-plus member states, which inevitably leads to so much compromise that the outcomes are never close to satisfactory.

The exception to this ineffectiveness was COP21 in Paris in 2015, where an agreement was reached by consensus. All the countries agreed to collectively keep the global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius,

ones to take actions to fulfil the agreement. From governors of provinces, mayors of cities, to heads of companies and NGOs, and ordinary citizens—everyone can take their own actions to implement the stipulations of the Paris Agreement. This was very well illustrated when US President Donald Trump officially withdrew the United States from the agreement: his decision drove a plethora of state governors and city mayors to continue their actions to implement the Paris Agreement.

can, with the urgency required to deal with the emergency we find ourselves in. Hence, an annual parley of governments to discuss next steps is no longer fit for purpose. What is needed are coalitions of the willing, which can include governments as well as other actors to move forward, rather than try to achieve consensus among all the countries.

Hence, I propose that we make COP26 an "inside-out COP," where the focus is less on the details of the negotiation between governments inside the Blue Zone, and share

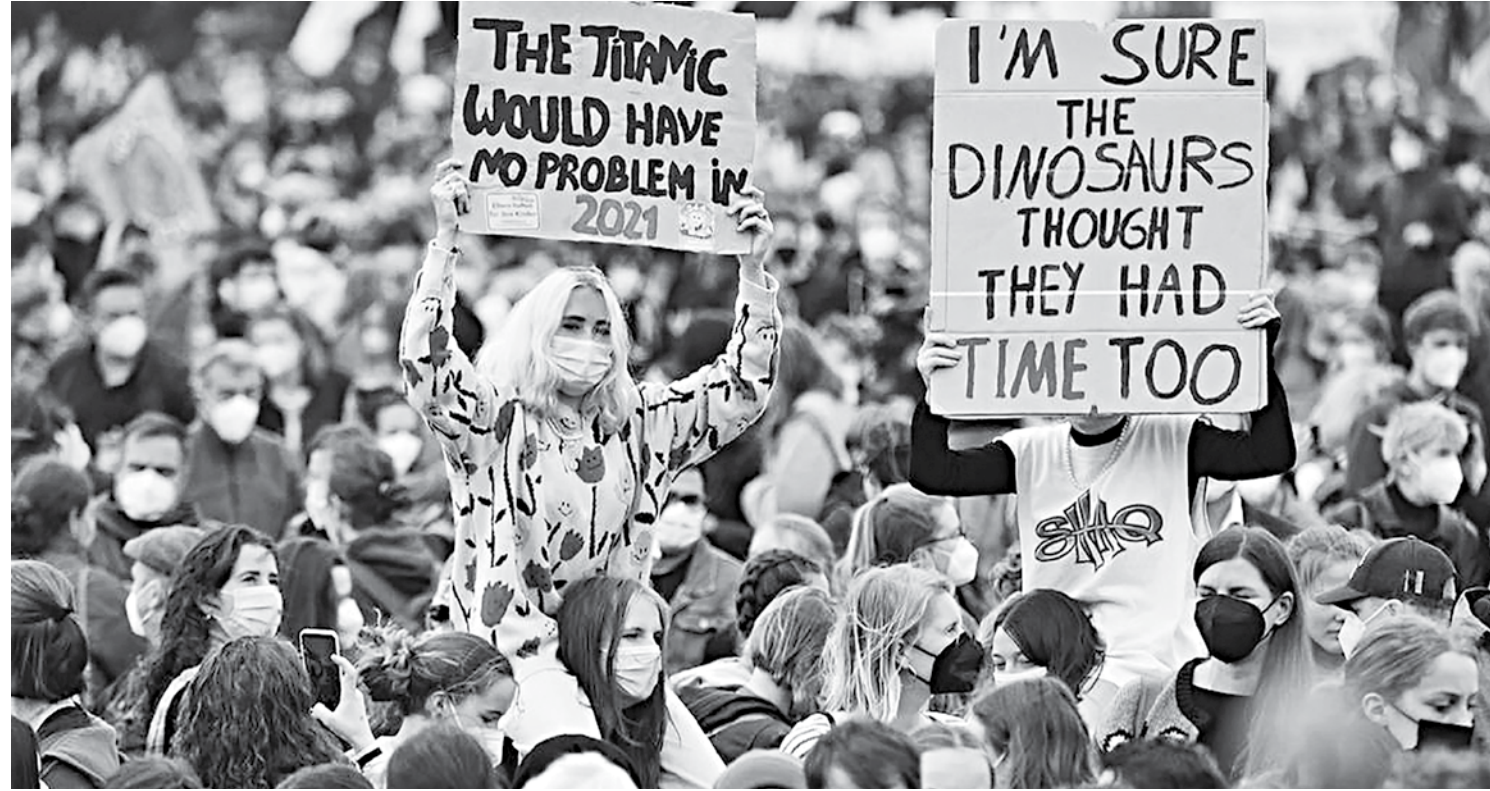
general to officially recognise the annual pre-COP youth meeting, which recently took place in Milan, Italy, to be mandated and empowered to actually review progress on the implementation of the Paris Agreement. On behalf of different think tanks around the world who study the performance of different actors, including governments as well as companies, we could prepare and share our findings with the pre-COP youth meeting every year.

Another issue that has become a stark reality in 2021 is the loss and damage from human-induced climate change, which has previously been covered under the Warsaw International Mechanism at COP19. While there has been some excellent work on research and knowledge-sharing, and some limited work on funding under pilot index-based insurance schemes, there has been no progress in funding beyond insurance. Given the huge loss and damage even in rich countries—like the floods in Germany and America and the wildfires in Europe and America—the need to raise funding support for the victims has become more urgent. One way forward could be for a number of sympathetic governments, along with philanthropic foundations and other potential financiers, to come together in Glasgow and launch a coalition to explore how to raise and disburse funds to help the victims of loss and damage from climate change from a humanitarian perspective.

Finally, I would like to advise all the countries, mayors, CEOs, and heads of other organisations who have signed up to either the Race to Zero or the Race to Resilience campaigns to provide regular reports on their actual performance on a weekly basis to the Friday for Future movement. After all, these young climate activists represent the generation to whom the rest of us are now answerable for taking actions to give them a safe future.

The time for making pledges, which are then ignored, are gone. Now is the time for monitoring and evaluating actual delivery of the pledges made by everyone, including the governments, to save our planet from the climate crisis. We must rethink the way we can tackle the global climate change emergency more effectively and move away from the business-as-usual approach at all levels.

Dr Saleemul Huq is director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).



The world is answerable for its climate actions to the young generation, whose lives are at stake the most due to the global crisis.

FILE PHOTO: AFP

and the rich countries collectively agreed to provide USD 100 billion every year from 2020 onwards to support the poorer countries to tackle climate change through both mitigation and adaptation.

An important feature of the Paris Agreement was that, although it was made by governments and global leaders, it no longer required those leaders to be the only

This has unleashed two major campaigns for non-state actors: one for mitigation called Race to Zero, and one for adaptation called Race to Resilience. Under these campaigns, hundreds of companies, mayors of cities, NGOs, and many other organisations have signed up and have already started taking appropriate actions.

So, the situation now calls for actions by everyone everywhere, in whatever way they

and instead celebrate the actions of all the other groups who will attend the summit. Indeed, my advice to all the media who will be at the summit would be to cover the "Action COP" (coalitions of practice) taking place in many different locations around Glasgow city, where COP26 is due to be held.

Another major business-unusual practice I would like to propose is for the UN secretary-

## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# The least bad option for Afghanistan



**RICHARD PONZIO**

only when certain political and humanitarian conditions are met, in line with recent official statements and the UN Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan.

The UN is well-placed to facilitate this process. During the past four decades of nearly continuous war in Afghanistan, the UN remained engaged. Thousands of dedicated UN staff assumed extraordinary risks to alleviate human suffering and, in the late 1990s, facilitate negotiations between the Taliban and their rivals. Today, given the West's almost non-existent political leverage with the group, the UN must resume its central role in promoting reconciliation, providing humanitarian aid, and encouraging development.

These functions will require additional structures, staffing, and resources. On September 17, the Security Council approved a six-month extension of the current mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and asked UN Secretary-General António Guterres to provide "strategic and operational recommendations" for the mission's future

by January 31, 2022. Looking ahead, the UN's role in Afghanistan should be expanded in at least five key areas.

First, in support of the Security Council's recent call for "an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned process of national reconciliation," the UN must provide its good offices to all of the conflicting parties. The UN can serve as an impartial and experienced adviser in the effort to form a more diverse, broad-based government, owing to its long track record of working with governments and non-governmental peacemaking organisations in the region. The UN's role in implementing the Bonn Agreement to form a new government in Afghanistan in 2001-05 offers a framework that can guide this process. Guterres's personal envoy on Afghanistan and regional issues, Jean Arnault, was a deputy to renowned UN troubleshooter Lakhdar Brahimi, who played a central role in the Bonn Agreement negotiations.

Second, to head off a humanitarian crisis, the UN should facilitate consensus and constructive engagement between the Taliban, global leaders, regional powers, and donors. The recent wars in Afghanistan all have had a prominent international component, and basic security and stability—not to mention something resembling a durable peace—are unlikely without the cooperation of the country's neighbours and the permanent members of the Security Council.

Third, the UN mandate should include regular monitoring and reporting to the Security Council on critical human rights issues. To receive the international recognition and aid for Afghanistan that they



An Afghan family walks between fences to cross into Pakistan at the Friendship Gate crossing point, in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border town of Chaman, Pakistan, on September 6, 2021.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

reportedly desire, the Taliban will need to comply with a set of internationally agreed political and humanitarian conditions. These conditions could include progress towards an inclusive and representative government, measures to prevent the return of international terrorist organisations, and steps to protect civilians.

Fourth, the UN can help coordinate medical relief, food aid, and other donations. In her briefing to the Security Council

in August, UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons noted that 18.5 million Afghans—nearly half of the country's population—required humanitarian assistance. Recognising this alarming trend, which is compounded by drought and the Covid-19 pandemic, the UN convened a high-level ministerial meeting on Afghanistan's humanitarian situation in Geneva on September 13, at which governments pledged more than USD 1.2

billion in aid.

Finally, the UN has a critical role in organising the international development assistance that will be key for building Afghanistan's future. The goal of this assistance should be maintaining the delivery of basic public services, including healthcare, education, and power generation. With bilateral aid likely to decline, the UN could serve as a chief oversight body and conduit of international assistance through emergency trust funds.

In reflecting on his UN leadership role in overseeing the Bonn Agreement, Brahimi remarked: "One of my own biggest mistakes was not to speak to the Taliban in 2002 and 2003... we should have spoken to those who were willing to speak to us." The international community must not make this mistake again. Even the Taliban know that the country they now control is far different from the one they ruled until 2001.

With some encouragement from the UN, perhaps the Taliban can be persuaded to work with a new, educated generation of Afghans to embark on a development path that leads away from brutal violence, exploitative corruption, and widespread deprivation. In the near term, such an approach represents the least bad option for the international community and, above all, for the Afghan people.

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**QUOTABLE Quote**

**Edward Snowden**  
 (born June 21, 1983)  
 Journalist

*There can be no faith in government if our highest offices are excused from scrutiny—they should be setting the example of transparency.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Enjoy the taste of
- 6 Luggage
- 10 Kagan of the Supreme Court
- 11 Size site
- 12 Snowy wader
- 13 Contest setting
- 14 Pills, in slang
- 15 Music's Marsalis
- 16 Stretch of years
- 17 Cry of insight
- 18 Decline
- 19 Doorbell sound
- 22 Lab particle
- 23 Move slowly
- 26 Table game
- 29 Clan, slangily
- 32 Cloth scrap
- 33 Disfigure
- 34 Sort of
- 36 Rum-soaked cake
- 37 Concluding
- 38 Surveys
- 39 Gives off
- 40 Zodiac sign
- 41 Pants part
- 42 All set

**DOWN**

- 1 Appeared
- 2 Libya neighbor
- 3 Green
- 4 Some bills
- 5 Mob pariah
- 6 Rural structure
- 7 Assists illegally
- 8 Italian seaport
- 9 Informal talk
- 11 Fail completely
- 15 Question of identity
- 17 Navy bigwigs
- 20 Rep.'s org.
- 21 Mountain pass
- 24 Kenya neighbor
- 25 Made possible
- 27 Veto vote
- 28 Like a lawn
- 29 Flutes' cousins
- 30 Cartoon genre
- 31 Fad
- 35 Power unit
- 36 Tedious sort
- 38 Golf goal

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