

The inevitability of the ‘new normal’



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THE new normal is now normal! Four years back, seeing us sitting at the coffee table with our masks, disposable gloves and sanitiser bottles, people would have chuckled and called us abnormal. But today they won't. How the world has gone topsy-turvy with millions of deaths – and our sense of normalcy has taken a 360-degree turn!

Imagine being forced to fight a “not so normal” adversary, and after failing to win the war, forced to accept the enemy's terms of surrender—discard beautiful old habits like going out to dance and dinner or cooing and cuddling in the park, and so on. Instead, stay indoors, watch stale programmes on TV and die of mediocrity. If we are still alive, we have to wear masks, sanitise our hands, and order food online. Losers have no choice!

Life has been a continued process of adjustment. Since taking the first gasp after birth, humans have been engaged in the constant struggle to adjust to a new environment. From the safety of the mother's womb, the baby comes to live in the bacteria-infested world. The infant has to survive, so instinctively, it turns towards its mother for sustenance. It learns to cry out loud when hurt or when hungry.

In the prehistoric era, cave dwellers survived the attack of predators and escaped the crushing jaws of crocodiles by learning some survival tactics. Elders told them to stay close together and carry a sharp weapon. Here again, adjustment is the key word.

Throughout life's journey—from



childhood to adulthood and to old age—a person must learn to adjust and adapt to a new normal every day and every hour, or else life will not wait for them.

As history tells us, humans have had to adjust to the changed social and political circumstances after every war. Those who conquered wrote the history; the defeated had to read them. Great wars changed great kingdoms. A new pharaoh came after Ramses II perished in the Red Sea. From the Sumerian clay tablets, Gilgamesh appeared on the Amazon paperbacks.

As always, new rulers imposed new rules and conditions. Defiance would result in your insolent head not staying where it should be. Mary Antoinette had to pay with her head and Napoleon Bonaparte had to rot at St Helena. So, if you want to live, better accept the new normal.

Terrible epidemics throughout human history took the lives of millions of men, women and children. Since the pre-

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The ‘new normal’ requires reminding ourselves that there's more to life than going through the motions.

ILLUSTRATION: STOCK

Justinian era, people across Europe and the Middle East have been facing the dreaded disease called plague. Since there was no knowledge of germ or bacteria, the disease was defined as the wrath of God. The Bubonic Plague was named the Black Death in the mediaeval period in Europe, and after the pitiable deaths of millions, people eventually learned how to protect themselves: they killed the fleas, pests and rodents, and kept their premises clean. Plague became a thing of the past by the 19th century. This infamous scourge inspired poets and writers to write strange poems and stories spiced with the supernatural. One such epic story is *“The Pied Piper of Hamelin.”*

Since plague, the world has seen, in the last 200 years, the sporadic outbreak of killer diseases like smallpox, cholera, leprosy, tuberculosis, malaria, dengue, measles, pneumonia, diarrhoea, bird flu, and so on. Every incidence of such an outbreak taught people new lessons,

so they could adjust to the changed circumstances and adapt to the new normal.

We are facing at the moment the terrifying scourge caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to health experts, the virus that causes Covid-19 is mutating faster than expected, and healthcare systems across the world find themselves under-equipped in their fight against this invisible enemy.

It is during the present pandemic that we have come across the phrase “new normal,” and Google tells us that new normal has been the most searched phrase in the last two years. We know by now what it means and how to adapt to the new lifestyle, food habits, social isolation, health and hygiene practices, online education, interpersonal relations, and so on.

Many of us are trying to cope with loneliness over isolation, anxiety over our future, anger over the loss of a job, and deterioration in interpersonal relations. Mental health experts tell us to accept the reality and learn to adjust to the new circumstances to lower the stress level.

It is, however, true that adjusting to a new normal or a new lifestyle for an adult person is not as easy as it may sound. One cannot simply forget or forego old habits overnight, and accept new ones with wide open arms. It is also not possible to forget the memory of many of our near and dear ones who did not get a second chance at life. Those who have witnessed the suffering and deaths from close proximity shudder to think about them even today.

The potency and magnitude of the infection appeared like a Biblical curse to many, and they prayed to the Divinity for help. In our lifetime, it is the worst health cataclysm we have witnessed so far. Yes, in our frantic bid for survival, we are learning to adjust every day and accept the new normal.

How to fix the failures of climate finance



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POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

SALEEMUL HUQ

ONE of the positive outcomes of the COP26 held in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021 was a universal acknowledgement of the failure of developed countries to deliver climate finance to developing countries, and even of developing countries themselves to actually deliver to the most vulnerable communities within their own territories.

While it is good that countries acknowledged their failure and promised to do better going forward, the devil is in the details. I will take this opportunity to provide proposals on what needs to be done and who needs to do it to make sure that promises made at COP26 are actually delivered by COP27 this November in Sharm Al Shaikh, Egypt.

The first and biggest failure was the abysmal inability of the developed countries to deliver the USD 100 billion a year they had promised at the time of the Paris Agreement in 2015. One common misconception is in thinking that the environment ministers who attend the COP are responsible, when they are not the ones with the money. In fact, it is the finance ministers of the G7 countries who have to keep their promise. Back in June 2021, they met in Cornwall in the UK and decided to renege on their commitment. They then sent their environment ministers to the COP in November to apologise on their countries' behalf.

Now, we need to see what the G7 Finance Ministers meeting in June 2022 in

Germany will decide, rather than wait for November. The question is: Will they keep their promise this year, or renege as they did last year?

The second associated failure that developed countries' finance ministers must overcome is agreeing on which country should contribute how much to reach the iconic USD 100 billion amount each year. At the moment, it is left to each country to decide what their share should be and, not surprisingly, they could only agree on less than USD 80 billion so far. The finance ministers of developed countries have to agree on what the contribution of each country will be towards meeting the agreed goal of USD 500 billion over the next five years. They also need to agree on a neutral body, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat or the UN Statistics Bureau, to collect and collate the data, rather than self-certifying their own contributions, as has happened so far.

A third, more forgivable failure was that the proportion of global funds that were provided counted 80 percent towards loans to support mitigation measures while only 20 percent counted for grants to support adaptation in the most vulnerable developing countries, when the expectation was for a 50:50 split between support for mitigation and adaptation. To the credit of the developed countries, they acknowledged this failure and promised to double their grant funding to support adaptation in the most vulnerable developing countries, and several countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and the US actually announced more funds for adaptation while they were in Glasgow. However, it is not just the amount allocated that is the problem but also how it is delivered and who receives it.



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A person wears a mask depicting Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson during a protest at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland in November 2021.

PHOTO: REUTERS

This has also been a major collective failure of the contributing developed countries and agencies such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), UNDP, World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB), who acted as conduits to channel the funds to the developing countries to support adaptation. The two big failures were in making the funds far too difficult to access for the most vulnerable developing countries, so much so that it took years to get the first penny out of the funds. Only 10 percent of the adaptation funds actually reached the intended most vulnerable communities.

The fund-providing developed countries, the fund management agencies and the recipient developing countries' national governments all have to raise their game to make sure that the funds are allocated at scale and disbursed speedily so that the ultimate beneficiaries, who are

the front line adapters, actually get the help they so desperately need. This will require much better coordination, better accessibility to funds and monitoring of the actual delivery—all of which are sorely lacking at present. The good news is that this collective failure has been recognised and accepted, and reforms such as the eight principles of locally-led adaptation have been adopted. But making it happen at the requisite speed is now the challenge for all concerned.

The second annual Gobeshona Global Conference at the end of March 2022 on Locally-Led Adaptation and Resilience will be an opportunity for all the relevant players to take stock and report on their progress while correcting their failures of the past.

Acknowledging failure is a positive development only if it leads to reforms to avoid making the same mistakes again.

QUOTABLE Quote

ALDOUS HUXLEY

(1894 - 1963)
English writer

What is absurd and monstrous about war is that men who have no personal quarrel should be trained to murder one another in cold blood.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

home

38 City on the Mohawk River

41 Plant pest

11 Emanations

12 Man of many words

13 Road reversal

14 Without help

15 Involve

17 Lobbying org.

19 Suffering

20 Bit of paint

23 Not active

25 Niagara's source

26 Drink garnish

28 Scots' caps

29 Bronze beater

30 Hot blood

31 Not strict

32 Mag. workers

33 Trio doubled

35 Godzilla's

DOWN

1 Letter after sigma

2 Ump's call

3 "Ripped from the headlines" genre

4 Bring home

5 Crown repairer

6 Knight's quest

7 Dice turn

8 In the past

9 Buddhism branch

10 Season on the Seine

16 Art Pepper's

instrument

17 Singer LaBelle

18 Fighting

20 Rush hour, to radio programmers

21 Prepared to fire

22 Saloon orders

24 Snaky shape

25 Building wing

27 Permanent part

31 McEnroe rival

33 Enter the regatta

34 School near Windsor

35 Mouth part

36 Clumsy guy

37 Letter after upslon

39 Turning part

40 One or more

MONDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT