

Where the rich got their way

Katowice signals a global climate regime that leaves the fate of the world hanging in the balance



T. JAYARAMAN

The 24th Conference of the Parties (COP-24) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held at Katowice in Poland, brings little cheer on the climate front for developing countries. With the passage of the so-called "rulebook" for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the developed countries have largely succeeded in establishing a global climate regime that gives them the strategic advantage and assuages some of their core concerns. This signals the making of a new, contradictory situation where the scope and complexity of the regime are fundamentally at odds with the very purpose for which the regime has been constructed.

Rollback of differentiation

At the heart of this strategic success is the substantial rollback of differentiation between the global North and South in climate action. The first step of this process began with the Paris Agreement, when the developed nations were allowed to make voluntary commitments to climate mitigation, on par with the developing nations, without any benchmark to ensure the relative adequacy of their commitment. At Katowice this process went further, with uniform standards of reporting, monitoring and evaluation for all countries. These reporting requirements, while superficially impressive, appear in their true light when we realise that in their uniformity they are intended as much for Maldives as the U.S. The real targets of this uniformity are, of course, not the poorest nations, who have been provided exemptions, but the larger developing nations. While all developing nations are ostensibly allowed flexibility in these reporting requirements, the concession has been hedged in with a number of conditions, with the intention of forcing them to full compliance in short order.

The reporting requirements are also marked by a pseudo-scientific concern for stringency, which is far in excess of the accuracy of climate



"COP-24 brings little cheer on the climate front for developing countries." Protesters on the sidelines of the summit in Katowice, Poland. ■ AFP

science itself. Indeed, the recent Special Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on global warming at 1.5°C estimates substantial uncertainties in the quantum of cumulative global emissions that are still allowed before the global carbon budget of the world is exhausted. In the face of such uncertainty, the requirement of reporting as little as 500 kilo tonnes or 0.05% of national emissions per country has little scientific significance. More pernicious is the uniformity of the stringency in reporting being expressed in percentage terms. Elementary mathematics informs us that a smaller percentage of the emissions of a large emitter will be a larger quantity in absolute terms compared to the larger percentage of emissions of a small emitter.

But the crux of the problem is the contradiction between the onerous nature of these universal rules and the total lack of initiative by the developed countries in taking the lead in climate mitigation. All developed countries continue to invest in fossil fuels either through direct production or imports. Some do so because of the downgrading of nuclear energy due to domestic political pressures. Others are still trying to wean themselves off coal by shifting to gas. Overall, as the International Energy Agency reports, the use of fossil fuel-based electricity generation continues to rise for OECD countries.

In the event, the dispute that broke out at COP24 over whether the Special Report of the IPCC should be welcomed or merely noted must be

considered a red herring. Despite the vociferous pleas of the Least Developed Countries and the Small Island Developing States for the former choice, in the absence of adequate action, such symbolic gestures are clearly of little value. Indeed, the report itself appears to have been used to generate a sense of urgency in stampeding countries into approval of the "rulebook" rather than point the way to more substantial mitigation by the developed nations.

The Special Report, for instance, did little to inspire the developed countries to increase the quantum of climate finance as well as speeding up its delivery. It has been the longstanding argument of the developing world that the bulk of climate finance must be from public sources. In contrast, the developed countries have succeeded in putting other sources of finance, including FDI and equity flows, on par in the accounting of the flow of climate assistance that developing countries need. As the "rulebook" stands today, private sector flows or loans, which will increase the indebtedness of developing countries, are to be considered adequate fulfilment of developed country obligations under the UNFCCC.

Much of the pressure exerted by developed countries at COP24 had the active backing and instigation of the U.S. Despite the public posturing by other G-8 heads of state outside the climate summits, the marked synergy between the U.S. and its political and strategic allies in pushing through several critical elements of the "rulebook" was no secret.

India, despite its articulation of the need for equity in climate action and climate justice, failed to obtain the operationalisation of these notions in several aspects of the "rulebook". Even though it pushed for equity, particularly in the benchmarks for the periodic review of the Paris Agreement, it failed to press home its point. Successive dispensations in New Delhi have fallen short of doing the needful in this regard. In contrast, Brazil held its ground on matters relating to carbon trading that it was concerned about and postponed finalisation of the matter to next year's summit. Regrettably, while India has not been shy to hold out against the global nuclear order it has not extended this attitude to protecting its interests in the emerging global climate regime.

Poor articulation of needs

It is now evident that New Delhi underestimated what was at stake at Katowice and the outcome portends a serious narrowing of India's developmental options in the future. A number of environmental and climate think tanks, NGOs and movements have also done their share to disarm the government in the negotiations. Buying uncritically into the climate narrative of the developed nations, they have been continually urging unilateral domestic action on moral grounds, while ignoring the elementary fact that global warming is a global collective action problem. Despite the significant number of Indians at COP24, the broad articulation of India's needs was at the lowest ebb seen in the last several years.

At the final plenary of COP24, the Like-Minded Developing Countries grouping echoed India's reservations on the neglect of equity and climate justice in the final form of the "rulebook", while the broader G77 plus China combine expressed its regret at the unbalanced nature of the outcome, with its undue emphasis on mitigation by all. But with the "rulebook" nevertheless having been adopted, COP24 signals a global climate regime that benefits and protects the interests of the global rich, while leaving the climatic fate of the world, and the developmental future of a substantial section of its population, still hanging in the balance.

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Preventing student suicides

The rising number of cases must provoke a discussion on how outcomes of education are perceived in India



SHAHANA MUNAZIR

The end of 2018 brought with it some deeply unsettling cases of student suicides. The deaths of 49 students in Navodaya Vidyalaya schools in the last five years, and of three students preparing for the IIT entrance examinations in Kota in a span of four days, brings the issue of youth suicides to the fore again. More youths are taking their lives due to the fear of failing in examinations, constant flak from teachers, bullying from peers, family pressure and a loss of a sense of a decent future. These cases force us to recognise that youth suicides are ubiquitous, and the educational ecosystem must take the blame for this.

Current scenario

The Kota case is not an aberration. There have been frequent news reports of suicides taking place in coaching centres that train students for medical and engineering entrance examinations. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, between 2014 and 2016, 26,476 students committed suicide in India. Of them, 7,462 committed suicide due to failure in various examinations.

The rising number of these cases provokes a serious discussion on the way in which outcomes of education are perceived in India. The instrumental value of education in India is its potential in generating socio-economic and cultural capital through a promise of decent job opportunities in the future. But the education system has not been successful in generating enough job options. For instance, the International Labour Organisation's World Employment and Social Outlook Trends Report of 2018 says that in 2019, the job status of nearly 77% of Indian workers would be vulnerable and that 18.9 million people would be unemployed. With their job future being so bleak, students are put under constant pressure to perform. They have failed to learn to enjoy the process of education. Instead, the constant pressure and stress has generated social antipathy and detachment among them. Sociologist Emile Durkheim had famously hypothesised that suicides are a result of not just psychological or emotional factors but social factors as well. With a loss of community and other social bonds, students in schools, colleges and coaching centres end up taking their lives.

Following the reports of suicides in Navo-

daya Vidyalayas, the National Human Rights Commission sought information from the Ministry of Human Resource Development on whether trained counsellors were present on campus. In the recently concluded winter session of Parliament, the HRD Minister said that an expert committee has been set up to look into the matter. According to Navodaya Vidyalaya Samitis, merely one or two training sessions are included to sensitise the teachers and principals regarding safety and security of the children and to prevent suicidal tendencies. The framework for implementation of the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) recognises the role of guidance and counselling services to students. In 2018, the government approved an integrated school education scheme subsuming the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the RMSA, and Teacher Education from April 1, 2018 to March 31, 2020. However, without



any significant rise in budgetary allocations for education, it is likely that there would be cuts in "non-productive" areas of education such as guidance and counselling.

The way forward

First, stop-gap solutions to setting up expert committees and counsellors in schools have not been able to solve the problem. The deep-rooted causes must be addressed. The government must undertake a comprehensive study on the reasons behind these suicides. Second, the curriculum should be designed in ways that stress the importance of mental exercises and meditation. The Delhi government's initiative on the 'Happiness Curriculum' may be a step in the right direction. Third, with regards to higher education, 12 measures were suggested by the Justice Roopnawal Commission. One of them stressed on making Equal Opportunity Cells with an anti-discrimination officer functional in universities and colleges. Finally, it is high time we seek to reinvent our educational ecosystem in ways that impregnate new meanings, new ideas of living, and renewed possibilities that could transform a life of precarity into a life worth living.

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SINGLE FILE

America on autopilot

Despite an overwhelmingly corrosive political environment, curious strains of consensus are emerging

DHRUVA JAISHANKAR



The idea of a government shutting down conjures up images of anarchy on the streets. The U.S. government shutdown since December 22 has certainly been disruptive, particularly for government employees going without pay. But in many other respects life goes on as usual.

The situation arose from President Donald Trump holding approval for further government spending hostage to a pet project: a border wall with Mexico. Mr. Trump's insistence on the wall, which he believes will bolster his electoral base, came after he suffered several setbacks. These included the Democratic Party assuming a majority in the House of Representatives, further investigations into Mr. Trump's finances and his campaign's relations with Russia, and warning signs about a dip in the U.S. economy.

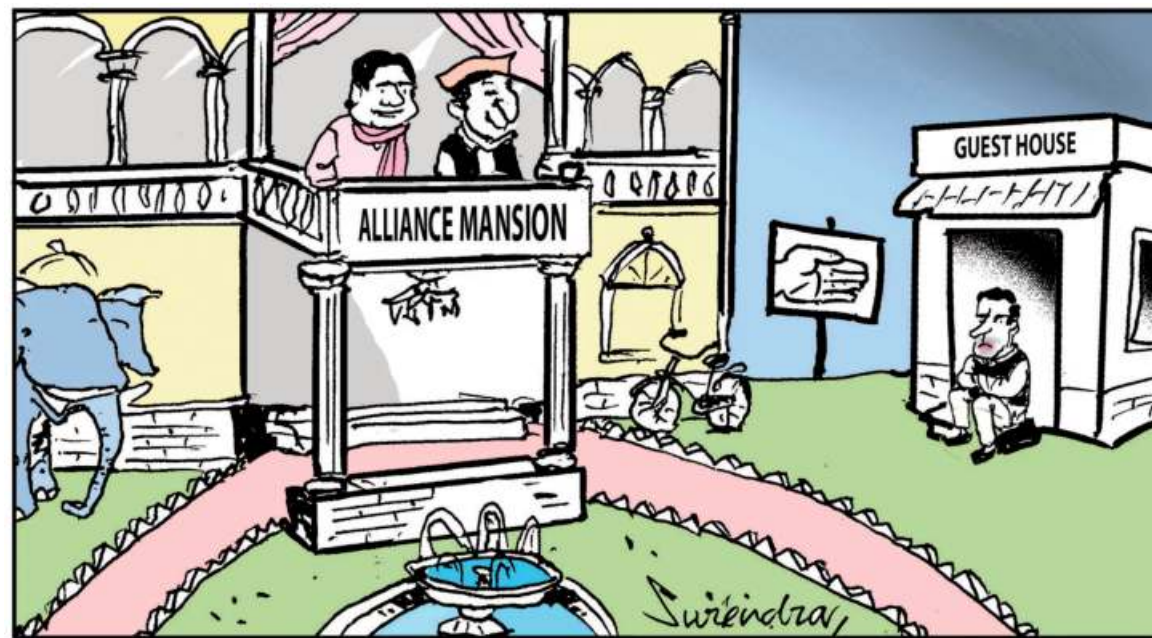
But the fact that many critical government functions continue in the U.S. says a lot about the checks and balances inherent in its system of governance. This extends, for better and for worse, to its foreign relations. While Mr. Trump has been disruptive on many foreign policy matters, such as on trade issues and climate change, in a number of other areas he has made only minor changes. And on some issues, including competition with China and alliance burden-sharing, Mr. Trump is channelling views that are far more widespread and shared even by some Democrats.

The biggest short-term point of contention on U.S. foreign policy concerns continued military involvement in Syria and Afghanistan. Mr. Trump's desire to win over voters by ending the U.S.'s unpopular involvement in these conflicts has confronted arguments for a continued American role, advanced by technocrats and military advisers. Secretary of Defence James Mattis resigned recently over the issue of U.S. withdrawal from Syria, but indications are that the U.S. may retain some form of involvement in both countries for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, newly elected Senator Mitt Romney has given voice to the Republican foreign policy establishment by writing an op-ed critical of not just Mr. Trump's personal character, but also his handling of alliances, including in Europe.

Despite an overwhelmingly corrosive political environment, curious strains of consensus are emerging. For example, a figure like Elizabeth Warren, a likely candidate for President representing the left wing of the Democratic Party, has become vocally critical of Chinese lobbying efforts. This is indicative of the growing bipartisan concern about the emerging U.S. competition with China.

The U.S. thus presents a paradox. Partisan and intra-party fissures are likely to intensify in both Republican and Democratic circles. The federal government is in complete disarray. And yet, the new year begins with the U.S., in many ways, running on autopilot.

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NOTEBOOK

The tea-seller in Parliament

The man around whom people gather to discuss political issues

SOBHANA K. NAIR

The chaiwallah, or tea-seller, on the first floor of the famous colonnaded verandah of Parliament, just outside the press and the visitor's gallery, must be more tuned into Indian politics and the happenings of Parliament than reporters. For, this is where, everyday, politicians of myriad ideologies and journalists from various publications and TV channels gather to discuss political news or simply gossip.

The spot is cosy, especially during the harsh winter months in Delhi. There are 144 pillars in the circular building of Parliament and each of them is 27 feet high. The makeshift tea point falls under the shadow of these pillars.

The tea, though, is nothing to boast about; don't believe the stories about the Parliament canteen being a part of some culinary wonderland. The weak tea

powder and watered down milk barely mix, both adamant in maintaining their individual identities like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana do. Whenever he is asked, the tea-seller throws in some sugar and slams down the white cup with its golden rim on the table with a smile that doesn't quite reflect the seriousness of the affairs in Parliament. He sells two kinds of tea: liquor cha, or luke-warm black tea without sugar, and salted lemon tea, in case you are a fan of that odd taste.

The tea-seller is a mystery to me. So busy is he in doing his job that he has never participated in these weighty conversations around him. I don't know his name; I have never asked him his political views. But I'm sure he knows our faces, recognises the regulars, and has formed opinions about us.

The tea is but an excuse to have a conversation, of

course. The tea station is a must-stop for every Parliament reporter. But editors will also tell you not to linger there for too long. Before you can sit with your cup of tea, you have to look up. No, not in gratitude for some hot liquid, but to ensure that you aren't a receiver of generous pigeon droppings.

The conversations expectedly have a sense of urgency. Will Mr. X get re-nominated to the Rajya Sabha? Will Ms. Y not get a ticket to the Lok Sabha? The news of the day is systematically dissected and election results are minutely analysed. It is a great place to be seated at, if you are a general observer.

Recently, hours after two women entered the Sabarimala shrine in Kerala, a Left MP gave a short tutorial to the Delhi scribes on the temple controversy and its impact on the Left government. All, of course, over a cup of chai. He can-

dly answered uncomfortable questions on whether the Pinarayi Vijayan government's move to facilitate the entry of the two women was the right thing to do electorally. He hesitatingly admitted that the gamble might not work in favour of the Left Democratic Front in this general election year.

Yet another day, a reporter joked to a Samajwadi Party MP that it is time his party merged with the Bahujan Samaj Party since the two parties are planning to fight the general election together. Pat came the reply: "We will surely merge without any hesitation after the CPI(M) and the CPI merge."

Whether the merger happens or not and irrespective of the electoral fortunes of any party or changes in the GDP figures, the tea-seller of Parliament will make steady sales as long as the reporters' adda goes on.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FROM THE ISSUE OF JANUARY 16, 1969
(THERE WAS NO ISSUE ON JANUARY 15)

Two Soviet spaceships with 4 men in orbit

Two Soviet manned spaceships to-day [January 15] began joint experiments of an unspecified nature in outer space. Twenty-four hours after Soyuz-4 went into orbit around the earth with Cosmonaut Vladimir Shatalov on board, Soyuz-5 was launched to-day with Lt.-Col. Boris Volynov as Commander and Flight Engineer Alexei Eliseyev and Research Engineer Lt.-Col. Yevgeny Khronov as crew members. Soon after the launching, Tass reported that Volynov had established radio contact with Shatalov in Soyuz-4. Later, both the Commanders informed Ground Control that they had "begun carrying out the programme of joint experiments in outer space." Tass said the three cosmonauts aboard Soyuz-5 "felt fine".

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 15, 1919.

Cloth Market Strike.

The strike of the employees of cloth market [in Bombay] still continues. It appears that these men draw a maximum pay of Rs. 30 and in addition to this employers set aside a small percentage in their name as commission which they call supdi at the time of Diwali when accounts are made. The Mehtas are paid off their supdi which amounts to over a thousand rupees or so. This year it is alleged the employers credited supdi in their own account and men who were in hopes of getting it later on were disappointed and they resolved to go on strike. Besides the commission they now demand increase of 35 per cent in their pay and it is stated that if their demands are not met they will hold on for some time. An urgent meeting of the members of Indian Cloth Merchants' Association has been convened for this evening [Jan. 14] when the matter will be considered.

CONCEPTUAL Negativity bias

PSYCHOLOGY

This refers to the tendency among human beings to be impacted more by negative events than by positive events of the same magnitude. In other words, there is a disproportionately high sensitivity that the human brain exhibits towards unpleasant events when compared to equally pleasant ones. Scientists believe that the negativity bias could be in-built in the human brain as natural selection may have particularly favoured the passing of genes that give higher weight to negative events from one generation to the other. Such genes, for instance, may be better at avoiding dangers that may be fatal to the survival chances of a species.

MORE ON THE WEB

Hot air balloon festival begins in Tamil Nadu

<http://bit.ly/AirBalloonFestival>