

# Hot air at Katowice

Key issues of concern for the poorest and developing nations were diluted or postponed



SUJATHA BYRAVAN

"Until you start focussing on what needs to be done, rather than what is politically possible, there is no hope," said Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old activist from Sweden who shook the United Nations gathering at Katowice, Poland, with her plain speaking. But what she said should not happen is exactly what happened at the recently concluded 24th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP24) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. While there was some progress on the process by which the Paris Agreement of 2015 would be implemented, key issues of concern for the poorest and developing nations were diluted or postponed.

The 1.5 Degree Report, which was produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in October 2018, showed that the earth is close to a climate catastrophe. This report was not suitably acknowledged as an evidence-based cause for alarm by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Russia, however. These countries wanted the report "noted" but not "welcomed". Arguments on word choices stalled the meeting at various stages, especially with the U.S. present with its large team of lawyers. While the U.S. is getting out of the Paris Agreement, formally by late 2020, it still took part in deciding (or rewriting) the rules for many agreed items of the Paris Agreement.

The summit aimed to establish guidelines for implementing and reporting on the Paris Agreement. Countries were looking to establish an enhanced transparency framework to monitor, verify and report actions taken in a systematic, standardised manner. As reported in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), all countries would carry out mitigation. But adaptation is a significant portion of many developing countries' plans. Transparency – what would be done to reduce emissions, how countries would measure and report progress, and how much support industrialised



"As long as the environment is treated as marginal to development, climate change impacts will strain and tear every weak stitch of the world's economic and development fabric." Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, 15, speaks on the sidelines of COP24 in Katowice, Poland. ■ AFP

countries would provide – was an important aspect of the discussions. This will inform stocktaking of progress on the Paris Agreement and how much more is needed to cut emissions and raise ambition.

Funds were also required from rich countries for the losses and damages borne by poor nations. While this meeting was not about loss and damage per se, this item will take greater precedence as warming effects intensify. Technology transfer and capacity building support are also issues of importance to vulnerable countries and poor, developing countries that need help to transition from high to low carbon economies.

## Disregard of equity

There is little to no finance available for poor and developing nations. The details on funding and building capacity have been postponed. References to "equity" in the draft rule book were erased by the U.S. delegation, leaving one Indian negotiator to remark that they would have to go back to the original language of the Convention if differentiation bet-

ween the developed and industrialised countries is purged from the text. Article 9 (the provision of financial support to developing countries from industrialised nations) was ignored; instead, there was an emphasis on carbon markets and insurance mechanisms. Finance was not even considered until the Africa Group of Nations forced open the issue by boycotting the discussions. Still, with name-calling from Switzerland and backtracking from the U.S., there was a lot of tension at the negotiations.

In spite of these problems, a single rulebook for all countries has been produced and will serve as a foundation for more detailed rules and structures. Many international civil society groups expressed utter dismay over the disregard of equity. Poor and developing countries whose greenhouse gas emissions have been low or negligible will bear the brunt of warming effects. Whether or not funds will be replenished even for the implementation of the current NDCs is unclear. Funds for finance, better terms for new technol-

ogies to be transferred to developing and vulnerable countries, and economic and non-economic support for loss and damage and their equitable moorings in the text have been eliminated, minimised or footnoted. Yet, the need for 'ambition' was loudly proclaimed by many actors. How can there be ambition without support?

## Sowing confusion

One should remember that the European Union, Australia, Switzerland and Japan did not disagree with the U.S. when "equity" was wiped from the text; in fact, they consented. So, simply pointing to the U.S. as the ogre would be incorrect. And corporations have had a significant role to play in the drafting of the text in climate agreements. A Shell Corporation executive boasted recently about the role that the company had played in writing parts of the text of the Paris Agreement, especially Article 6, which is about market mechanisms and carbon credit. Text from the company's straw proposal is part of the Agreement, according to *The Intercept*. American historian of science Naomi Oreskes and others have shown the methods by which those with vested interests have funded scientists and politicians to challenge climate change, thereby sowing confusion.

Local and state-level action that keeps climate change at the centre and fully incorporated into "good development" is the most critical policy perspective nations can adopt. As long as people and governments treat climate and environment as marginal to development, and well-being as marginal to GDP growth, climate change impacts will strain and tear every weak stitch of the world's economic and development fabric.

There is hope in youth action in various parts of the globe, from Europe to Australia to the U.S. The farmers' protests in India are but a symptom of a development-as-usual crucible gone wrong. Ms. Thunberg is not alone, and perhaps our strongest prospect is to get behind this future generation. As she said: "If solutions within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself."

Sujatha Byravan is a scientist who studies science, technology and development policy

# Making every citizen an auditor

Various steps need to be taken to strengthen social audits



KARUNA M. & C. DHEERAJA

"A good auditor is a good listener" said President Ram Nath Kovind during his recent speech at the 29th Accountants General Conference. "You will not only see the accounts in their books, but also listen to their accounts," he said. It is only when this conception is accepted that audits will return to their democratic roots, and social audits in India will get the space and attention they deserve in becoming an integral and robust part of the formal audit process.

Social audits show how people's participation in the planning, execution and monitoring of public programmes leads to better outcomes. They have strengthened the role of the gram sabha. Social audits were first mandated by law in 2005 under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Subsequently, Parliament, the Supreme Court and many Central ministries mandated them in other areas as well. As efforts are being made to extend social audits to new areas, it is important to look at how well they are actually implemented based on parameters specified in the auditing standards jointly pioneered by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and the Ministry of Rural Development. The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj recently conducted a study comparing ground realities with the specified standards, and identified key issues that need to be addressed.

## Many shortcomings

There can be no effective audits if the auditing agency is not independent. Following a sustained push from the Rural Development Ministry, the CAG and civil society organisations, social audit units (SAUs) have been established in 26 States (Rajasthan, Haryana and Goa are yet to establish them). More than 5,000 full-time staff have been appointed. A 30-day rigorous training programme has been designed, and more than 4,200 people have been trained. However, the study identified certain shortcomings. The governing bodies of most SAUs are not independent. Some SAUs have to obtain sanction from the implementation agency before

spending funds. More than half the States have not followed the open process specified in the standards for the appointment of the SAU's director. Some States have conducted very few audits and a few have not conducted any. Several do not have adequate staff to cover all the panchayats even once a year.

For the period 2016-17 and 2017-18 (till November), only 13 SAUs registered grievances and/or detected irregularities. These have identified a significant misappropriation amount of ₹281 crore. However, the action taken by the State governments in response to the social audit findings has been extremely poor: only 7% of the money has been recovered and only 14% of the grievances have been redressed. Adequate disciplinary action against people responsible for the irregularities has also not been taken.

## The way forward

In 2017, the Supreme Court mandated social audits under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) to be conducted using the machinery that facilitates the social audits of MGNREGA. Social audits of the NFSA have failed to take off due to lack of funds. Like the Rural Development Ministry, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution should give funds to the SAUs and ask them to facilitate the social audits of the NFSA.

Social audit units should have an independent governing body and adequate staff. Rules must be framed so that implementation agencies are mandated to play a supportive role in the social audit process and take prompt action on the findings. Also, a real time management information system should track the calendar, the social audit findings and the action taken, and reports on these should be made publicly available.

Social audit processes need mentoring and support as they expand into newer programmes. As the President said in his speech: "The social audit to account whether the money was spent properly, and made the intended difference, is mostly conducted by the scheme beneficiaries. Here the CAG as an institution could partner with local citizens and state audit societies to train them, build capacities and issue advisories on framing of guidelines, developing criteria, methodology and reporting for audit."

Karuna M. and C. Dheeraja work at the Centre for Social Audit, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Hyderabad. Views are personal

## SINGLE FILE

# Questionable decisions

The Congress's choice of Chief Ministers in Rajasthan and M.P. shows that it is a party of the past

MOHAMMED AYOOB



Congress president Rahul Gandhi's decision to appoint Kamal Nath as Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and Ashok Gehlot as Chief Minister of Rajasthan sends the signal that the Congress is a party of the past, not of the future. He had a great opportunity to demonstrate that under his leadership the Congress could be a forward-looking party capable of responding to the aspirations of the youth, who form the bulk of the Indian population. More than 65% of India's population is below the age of 35. It is this cohort that will determine election outcomes in the future.

Unfortunately, Mr. Gandhi squandered this opportunity. His refusal to nominate Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot, both in their forties, as Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, respectively, has demonstrated that he is a prisoner of the worst aspects of Congress culture. Although both worked hard to rejuvenate the Congress in their States, they were overlooked for leadership positions because of their age and lack of seniority.

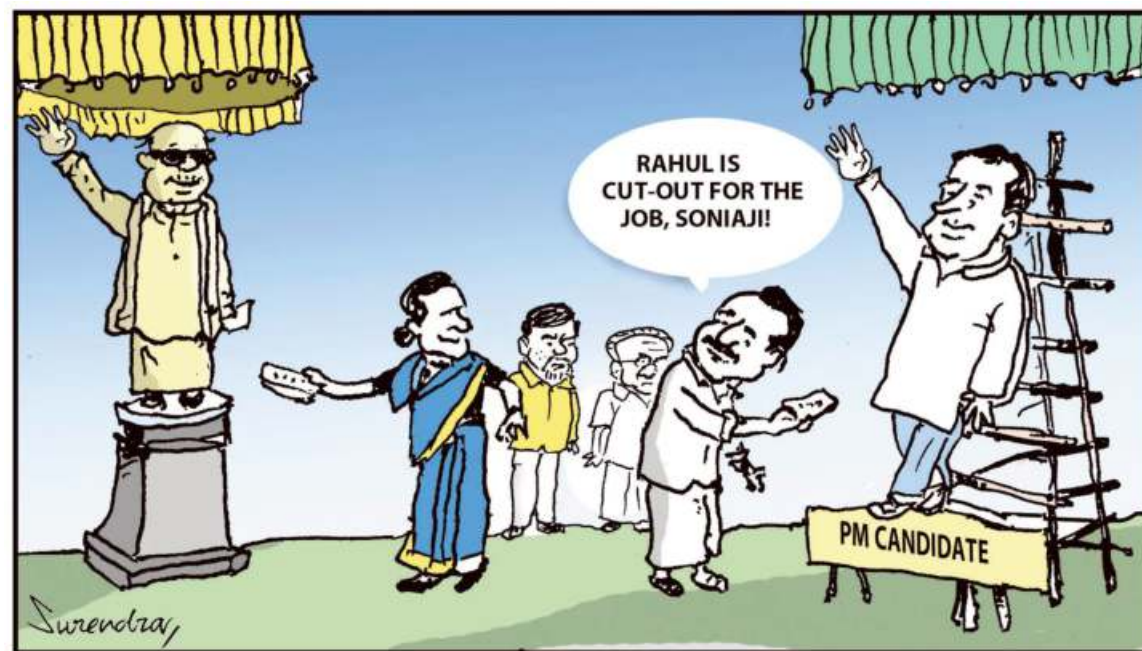
It is even more galling that Mr. Nath and Mr. Gehlot carry some negative baggage. Mr. Nath was implicated in the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 following Indira Gandhi's assassination. He was let off for lack of enough evidence. Sajjan Kumar's conviction could lead to the reopening of the case against him as well. Mr. Gehlot carries with him the stigma of being a two-time loser in State elections, in 2003 and 2013.

In contrast, Mr. Scindia and Mr. Pilot have the charisma and ability to mobilise support for their party, especially among the youth. This is particularly true of Mr. Pilot, who worked assiduously for over four years as president of the State Congress to rebuild the party in Rajasthan after it had been almost wiped out in 2013. The Congress owes its victory in Rajasthan in large measure to Mr. Pilot's efforts.

Mr. Gandhi has conveyed a disheartening message to party cadres and supporters by ignoring Mr. Pilot's claim. He has clearly signalled that hard work and dedication do not count for much when confronted by seniority and caste calculations. It is especially surprising that the Congress president, who belongs to the same generation as Mr. Pilot and Mr. Scindia, was appointed to head the party and is projected as its prime ministerial candidate despite his youth, should give short shrift to the two young leaders' legitimate claims. He should have realised that if the same logic of youth and lack of experience had been applied in his case he would never have made it to the top of the party.

The appointment of "have-beens" to the top positions in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in disregard of more deserving youthful candidates does not augur well for the Congress as the country heads towards the national elections.

The writer is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University



## NOTEBOOK

# The brilliance Down Under

Watching and reporting on cricket in Australia is a different game altogether

K.C. VIJAYA KUMAR

Memories of tracking cricket in the Australian summer inevitably have the alarm clock's shrill ring during nippy December dawns. It was an annual ritual: wake up groggy, gulp your morning brew and catch live action beamed in from Channel Nine.

The telecast quality was top-drawer; the commentary was a mix of baritone, gravelly voice, insights and excitement, think Bill Lawry, Richie Benaud, Ian Chappell and Tony Greig; the sea gulls were swell and when a big shot was struck, they flew in chaos and then rose away in symmetry. There was wicked humour too: a batsman departing on zero had a sad duck accompanying him on our television screens.

To partially borrow T.S. Eliot's turn of phrase, nostalgia mixes memory

with desire. The reality was a beguiling blend when this writer touched down at Adelaide a fortnight ago. The welcome chorus across immigration counters, the corner store and in cabs, was: "Here for the cricket? Good on you mate!"

And then the knife was twisted into their own team: "Australia, no good, especially after what they did in South Africa. No Steve Smith, no David Warner." The words were uttered with a sigh, the undertone was simmering anger.

Ever since Cameron Bancroft used a sandpaper to scuff the ball in the Cape Town Test this March, which led to the instant ban on the opener and primary instigators, Smith and Warner, Australia is holding a mirror to itself and the reflection isn't good. This is a country that plays its sport competitively hard. Once,

when Kapil Dev's shot killed a bird, the distraught Indian captain requested some water but his counterpart, Allan Border, refused permission. But now, the overwhelming feeling is that the line of acceptable behaviour has been irreparably breached by Bancroft and company.

The Australian media has been caustic and a recent article had these words: "Ball-tampering villain Bancroft." The loathing that is directed towards the home squad has forced Cricket Australia to telecast saccharine videos featuring the national team and tagged with the catchline: "It's your game." Asked about his objectives, Australian captain Tim Paine lucidly said: "Winning matches and importantly, winning back the trust of our fans."

And in a strange inversion of team loyalties, the Aussies are in thrall to Virat Kohli. Barring one

booming session at the Adelaide Oval during the first Test which India won, the visiting captain has been treated like royalty. His arrival at the crease lends an extra timbre to the announcer's voice and old-timers with considerable air-miles across Australia chasing cricket mention that the warm reception that Kohli gets is akin to what was reserved for Sachin Tendulkar in the old days.

When Kohli scored his sixth hundred in Australia (he has seven overall against the mighty team), during the second Test at Perth's Optus Stadium, there was a standing ovation liberally infused with respect and awe.

The cricket surely is intense, more slow-burn than disco lights but that's how it is played in Australia. And does it match the action seen on television years ago? Absolutely.

## FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 18, 1968

# Govt. to take over spot in Birla House

The Government of India "will take over" the grounds of the Birla House, where Gandhiji met his martyrdom, improve it and maintain it with due care, dignity and solemnity, Mr. Jagannath Rao, Minister of Works and Housing announced in the Lok Sabha to-day [December 17, New Delhi]. Mr. Rao did not concede there was need to take over the entire Birla House and convert it into a monument, a "Temple of Peace" as desired by Mr. A. Sreedharan (Kerala S.S.P.). The Government's decision was announced by Mr. Rao while replying to a calling attention notice tabled by Mr. Sreedharan and others to-day, the third day of the fast undertaken by the Congress member, Mr. Shashi Bhushan, to press the Government to acquire the Birla House and convert it into a national monument. Mr. Sreedharan and later, Mr. S. M. Bannerjee, urged the Prime Minister to reply to the calling attention notice.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 18, 1918.

# India's War Services. A most splendid Record.

The "Times" Trade Supplement [from London] draws attention to India's enormous material assistance in securing the Allies' victory. The value of the Indian export exceeded one hundred million sterling yearly. The State controlled prices at considerably less than the prevailing price and the rates secured considerable savings in the war bill of the Allies. As India's material resources were organised to supply the equipment of Indian troops and provide the Allies essential requisites for prosecuting the war, the extra equipment supplied reached the value of eighty million pounds. Of essential munition exports, wolfram, one-third of the world's supply, manganese ores, mica, jute, shellac, saltpetre and hides were purchased by Government at controlled prices, considerably less, three to five times less than those prevailing in neutral countries.

## CONCEPTUAL

# Selfish brain theory

BIOLOGY

This refers to a scientific hypothesis which states that the brain prioritises its own relatively high energy needs over those of the rest of the body. This hypothesis overturned the earlier belief among scientists that the energy needs of various organs of the body are met equally without any kind of internal discrimination within the body. The selfish brain theory was developed by German brain researcher Achim Peters to explain the prevalence of obesity as the result of an imbalance in the energy supplied to the brain and the metabolic system. Some believe that the selfish brain may be the consequence of evolutionary forces favouring an alert brain over an agile body.

## MORE ON THE WEB

Blog: The book and its reader – which possesses which

<http://bit.ly/ReadingthREAD>