



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

The inside story of the Paris Agreement

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

On the night of December 12, in the French city of Paris, almost exactly a month after the horrific terrorist attacks there, the leaders of nearly two hundred countries of the world adopted the historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which will replace the Kyoto Protocol from now on. This was actually the second time such an agreement was attempted with the first time in Copenhagen six years ago ending in failure. While there are many reasons for the success of the Paris Agreement (as success has many fathers), having been involved intimately from the inside I will give my views of main elements of this success.

Achievements of the Paris Agreement

While it is not perfect and does not solve the climate change problem overnight, the Paris Agreement is nevertheless a major success, in my view for two overarching reasons. The first one is that, unlike in Kyoto, where only the developed countries undertook to reduce their emissions of their greenhouse gases that cause climate change, this time all countries are included in efforts to reduce emissions. This is important because while many years ago the United States was the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, now China has overtaken the US as the world's biggest emitter. Hence, it is essential that all countries also accept that they should try to reduce their emission wherever they can. The vehicles for doing this are called the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), which are really just Climate Change Plans. In Paris, nearly 200 countries submitted their plans, thus making the Paris Agreement a historic first for including all countries rather than just the developed countries as was the case with the Kyoto Protocol.

The second big achievement in Paris has to do with the long-term temperature goal, which was a major concern of the poorest and most vulnerable countries who wanted the goal to be changed from 2°C to 1.5°C. Although the difference of 0.5°C may not seem much, it actually means that millions of

people in the most vulnerable countries will be severely affected. Going in to the Paris talks, the vulnerable countries advocated for this change in the long term temperature goal, but were opposed by rich and powerful countries, like the US, the European Union and emerging powers like China and India. By the end of the Paris talks, we were able to persuade all countries to agree to change the goal to 1.5°C, despite their initial strong opposition.

The French Presidency

President of France Francois Hollande made an early, strategic decision to learn from the mistakes of the failure in Copenhagen and avoid those mistakes. Under the leadership of the Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, France set up a team of Climate Envoys, with Laurence Tubiana as the Chief Climate Envoy. These climate envoys visited almost all the countries in the world, in many cases, the president or the foreign minister also accompanied them. For example, a few weeks before the climate talks started, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius visited Bangladesh for talks with the Prime Minister and senior officials of Bangladesh. Thus the French, unlike the Danes six years ago, reached out to all countries to get their views in advance of the talks.

The second lesson was to invite the heads of governments to attend the Convention in the beginning, give their speeches and then leave. World leaders had attended the Convention in Copenhagen during the final days, when negotiations had not been completed, and thus ended up being more disruptive than constructive. This time around, 100 heads of government came to Paris, presented uplifting speeches that gave an excellent start to the negotiations, and then left the negotiators to finish the task.

The third and final lesson that the French adopted was a consultative style of working with the negotiators and ministers on the text of the agreement. Typically in these negotiations, which last for two weeks, the last few nights can go on all night, which leads to frayed tempers and lack of spirit of compromise, which is essential for any agreement. COP President Laurent Fabius would insist on everyone taking breaks and coming back in the morning fresh and ready to negotiate in a spirit of common endeavour rather than just sticking to, and endlessly repeating, their own individual "red lines".

All of this is not to say that the negotiations in Paris were easy by any means, as it is only natural that nearly 200 countries

will all have their own perspectives, and bringing consensus is never an easy task. Nevertheless, the COP President and his able team from France, along with Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, and her team were able to keep every delegation in the picture, consulting regularly and updating everyone on progress.

Hence the fact that we actually adopted an agreement in Paris was a significant achievement in its own right, and credit quite rightly belongs to both the French COP presidency as well as the UNFCCC secretariat.

Long-term Goal

The story of the long-term goal has a long history. It began before the Copenhagen climate summit six years ago, with three groups of vulnerable countries, namely the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to which Bangladesh belongs, the Small Island

Forum had continued, as President Tong of Kiribati took over leadership from the Maldives; then Prime Minister of Bangladesh took over from Kiribati and then handed it over to Costa Rica who passed it on to the current chair, President Benigno Aquino of the Philippines. The CVF is governed by a Troika system with the current chair along with two previous chairs being in charge. Thus, the current troika consists of Philippines, Costa Rica and Bangladesh. A few weeks before the Paris Climate Summit started, the Philippines, along with the troika members, called a meeting of high officials of the CVF countries to chart out a Manila-Paris Declaration with an emphasis on pushing for the long-term temperature goal to be changed from 2°C to 1.5°C.

the end because both the US and China wanted a 2 Degrees goal. However, he managed to insert a clause in the Copenhagen Agreement that there would be a review of the long-term goal between 2013 and 2015. This review has indeed taken place under what is known as the Structured Expert Dialogue (SED) on the long-term goal and has produced its report in June 2015. The report of the SED said that while a 2 Degrees long-term goal would indeed be able to protect most of the countries and people on the planet, it would not protect all of them. Also that those who would not be protected by a 2 Degrees goal are the poorest and most vulnerable people living in the poorest and most vulnerable developing countries. The SED report was the basis on which the vulnerable countries wanted the long-term goal to be reconsidered in Paris. In the meantime, the Climate Vulnerable

On the first day of the Paris Climate Summit, President Aquino presided over a meeting of the CVF countries, where ministers from Costa Rica and Bangladesh also urged for the 1.5°C goal. This was then supported by civil society groups and got a lot of media attention.

However, while 105 countries were by then supporting the 1.5 Degrees goal, the rich countries and powerful developing countries still opposed it and pushed back by refusing to adopt the SED report which recommended the change in the goal. The anti-1.5 Degrees goal faced the most opposition from Saudi Arabia, who openly opposed it. In the end, thanks to a combination of skilled diplomacy behind closed doors with negotiators and ministers of other countries and mobilising public pressure, one by one, the countries opposing the 1.5 Degrees goal were persuaded to change their minds and support the goal. In the end even Saudi Arabia was persuaded to agree. Thus, the Paris Agreement now includes the long-term temperature goal of 1.5 Degrees – a historic achievement for poor and vulnerable countries in securing the support of the rich and large developing countries.

The Role of Bangladesh

The Bangladesh delegation to Paris was headed by the Minister for Environment and Forest at the political level and the Secretary of the same ministry at the negotiators level. The delegation also had a set of experienced experts led by Dr Q.K. Ahmed, who followed specific tracks of the negotiations. The Bangladesh negotiating team was an important part of the LDC Group to which it belongs.

In addition to the negotiating team, there were also a number of members of Parliament as well as senior officials who were in Paris to assist the negotiators. There were also quite a number of civil society and members of media from Bangladesh at the talks.

Although I have dubbed the Paris Agreement a success, it is by no means perfect nor can it solve the climate change problem on its own. For that to happen, every country needs to implement the pledges they have made and in fact, enhance their pledges over time, as we are still headed towards a temperature rise of between 2 to 3°C. The challenge ahead is to ensure that the 1.5°C goal is not just symbolic but becomes a reality.

The writer is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh. Saleemul.huq@iied.org

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Developing States (SIDS) and the Africa Group agreeing amongst themselves, at the level of the negotiators, that they would ask for a long term temperature goal of 1.5° Celcius . Then, just before the Copenhagen Climate Summit, the then President of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed, convened a meeting of selected leaders from these three groups in his country to form a leadership group of vulnerable countries called the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) .

At the Climate Summit in Copenhagen in 2009, President Nasheed was the only head of government from the vulnerable countries who was in the huddle with other leaders in the last hours of the Summit and tried very hard to defend the 1.5°C goal. But he lost in

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Leave out
- 5 Angry
- 10 Pago Pago setting
- 12 Not rented out
- 13 Pep rally participant
- 15 Everything
- 16 Angry
- 17 Letter before omega
- 18 Sketch again
- 20 Snare
- 21 Forays
- 22 Uses oars
- 23 Prickly plants
- 25 Stare stupidly
- 28 Center
- 31 Line of symmetry
- 32 Like some museum paintings
- 34 Shark feature
- 35 Peas' place
- 36 In the style of
- 37 Legislative VIP
- 40 Steer clear of
- 41 Beverage
- 42 Fills completely
- 43 Citi Field team

- DOWN**
- 1 Film award
- 2 "Das Lied von der Erde" Composer
- 3 Staunton of "Vera Drake"
- 4 Foot feature
- 5 Signaled on stage
- 6 Gene messenger
- 7 Master
- 8 Playground sight
- 9 Disrobes
- 11 Spanish fleet
- 14 Spot for would-be attorneys
- 19 "Casablanca" nightclub
- 20 Court event
- 24 Cared for
- 25 Blunders
- 26 Armpit
- 27 Eventually succeed
- 29 Concert worker
- 30 Natural gift
- 33 Informers
- 35 Veep's superior
- 38 Shelley work
- 39 Sleeve filler

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

T	A	M	P	S	T	I	F	F
O	L	I	O	P	E	D	A	L
T	I	L	L	I	N	A	R	O
A	V	A	I	L	E	D	M	O
L	E	N	T	I	L	S	O	R
I	N	S	Q	U	I	T		
T	R	A	C	K	P	U	T	T
R	E	N	O	S	E	A		
A	D	D	B	E	A	N	B	A
C	H	O	R	E	S	T	A	T
T	O	R	I	D	I	R	O	N
S	T	R	O	D	E	C	E	N
S	A	T	E	D	O	D	E	S

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

QUOTABLE Quote

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe.