

US, China ratify Paris Climate Deal

Others should follow suit

THE world's two largest economies, also the world's two biggest polluters, ratified the Paris climate agreement on Saturday, cementing their partnership on climate change and offering a rare display of harmony, setting aside tensions on multiple fronts such as cyber spying and maritime security. The move comes as a boost for the 180-nation deal, which sets ambitious goals for putting a lid on global warming and channeling trillions of dollars to developing countries at the receiving end of global warming. The Paris Accord aims to limit global temperature increases to two degrees centigrade, and will be put to action after it is ratified by at least 55 countries, accounting for 55 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Together, China and the United States generate nearly 40 percent of the global emissions.

The Chinese Parliament has already ratified the agreement. The Obama administration, on the other side, is using the president's executive authority to enact the deal, bypassing a Congress controlled by the Republican Party, many of whose leaders publicly question if climate change is real. We, therefore, hope that President Obama's effort will not be derailed by whoever wins the next presidential election, something that was done by George W. Bush after the Bill Clinton administration had agreed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

Until now only 24 signatories of the Paris Agreement have ratified the agreement. All countries, especially the developed ones, should put their differences aside and come together on this issue to inspire further action around the world to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Bravo, the U-16 girl booters!

Inspiring feat

NEWS of victory in an international football competition is something very new to us. Thus the performance of the Bangladesh U-16 girls' football team must come as pleasant tidings and a commendable achievement. They have qualified as one of the top eight in the AFC U-16 competition having trounced all their opponents that they encountered so far. The accomplishment is even more heartening when seen in the backdrop of the dismal performance of our national men's football team. The heavy drubbing in the hands of Maldives by a huge margin in a recent friendly encounter between the two is an example of the nadir that our men's team has fallen.

Admittedly, our girls have had to face many hurdles in coming to the stage they have, but they have been performing very well in the age group competitions as we see from the performance of the U-14 team which won the AFC regional championship trophy in December 2015. We would hope that our girls will continue to perform in the same vein and not allow the wins to go to their head. We would hope too that the football federation will continue to provide everything necessary to ensure that not only is the performance level maintained, but that it also goes up steadily.

When, in spite of the efforts of the football federation, the state of men's football in Bangladesh has not come up to standard of the countries around us, then those that are in charge of the girls' football team must be doing something right to have achieved the admirable results. There is perhaps a cue in the girls' performance for the men.

John Kerry - important visitor, doubtful impact

AHRAR AHMAD

M R. KERRY came to town. He has a heroic past, and a stellar background. He had volunteered to fight for his country unlike many others who had used deferments and trickeries to avoid going to war in Vietnam. A previous president, who had launched the war on Iraq on false pretenses, had used Daddy's clout to remain stateside; several prominent politicians, many of whom aggressive "chicken hawks" such as Dick Cheney, Newt Gingrich and others, had felt the "hunger for higher studies" so strongly that they needed to go to graduate school rather than serve their country at that time; and some used bone spurs in their feet (even though the current Republican nominee cannot remember which foot), as an excuse to dodge the draft.

It goes without saying that young men without the same wherewithal or connections were forced to serve as cannon fodder in that weary, unfair, bloody conflict. The fact that wars are fought by the poor for the interests of the rich was never as vividly demonstrated as it was in Vietnam.

But John Kerry was different. He received bronze and silver medals and three Purple Hearts for his valiant and distinguished military service in Vietnam. He gained enormous moral authority when he threw away those medals in an act of protest against a war which he understood was wrong, both on those on whom this was being waged, and for those waging it.

He graduated from Yale, received a JD from the prestigious Boston College School of Law, is multi-lingual (which makes him impressive abroad, but dooms him in Trumpland), married into the rich Heinz family (of Ketch-Up fame), and was one of the longest serving Senators in US history (1985-2013).

He became Secretary of State in 2013 which gave his naturally substantial

"presence" even greater gravitas. The prospect of his visit to Bangladesh had, thus, left us duly excited and expectant.

Bangladeshis are peculiarly, at times embarrassingly, prone to defer to "foreigners" (particularly if they are Caucasian). We seek their approval, go to ridiculous lengths to prove our familiarity and friendship with them; fetishize "modernity" supposedly exemplified by them; embrace their concepts of beauty; incorporate their explanatory frameworks; appropriate their judgments; and bow to their expertise, regardless of the credentials of the said experts or the soundness of their proposals.

Imperialism may have ended, but its control over colonised minds continues,

markets, no prospect of any ease in issuing visitor visas, processing F-1 student applications, or facilitating family sponsored immigration, no prospects for cultural contacts, and no decisions about extradition requests which have remained frozen since 2012. His speeches were "full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse" as Eliot would have put it, or in Shakespearean terms, were neither full of sound and fury, nor signified anything. His pronouncements about democracy were tired, and platitudinous, and his clichés on terrorism carefully balanced the "home-grown" narrative preferred by the Awami League, and the "foreign linked" causes suggested by many others.

But, he did have a magic touch. His praise of the Prime Minister's leadership,

improvised encounter after one of his civic engagements.

John Kerry's visit accomplished pitifully little. Popular wisdom suggests that it symbolised much. Lacking both popularity and wisdom, I am not entirely convinced of that judgment. It is possible that his only purpose was to respond to a ruling regime seeking some legitimacy and respect. But there was apparently no pro to that quid, unless there were aspects to that visit which we don't know about. That raises awkward questions about diplomacy, transparency, and US interests in this area of the world. It also makes the visit seem less benign than it was made out to be.

Otherwise, John Kerry came as a flimflam artist more to reassure than to dazzle, more to be pleasant than to be consequential, more to offer photo-ops



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in more insidious forms, and greater local complicity. Today we have succumbed to the seductions of globalisation, and measure our self-worth according to the standards and categories supplied by others. We live derivative, self-loathing lives, no more than "mimic men" (that Naipaul had decried).

John Kerry strode into this easy and inviting milieu as a welcome and eagerly awaited guest. In fairness to him and his innate decency, he did not appear patronising and defied the image of the "ugly American" typified by many such emissaries. But, as Gertrude Stein would have reminded us, "there was no there, there".

There were no policy initiatives, no promises for now or the future, no aid, no investments, no inauguration, support, or blessings to any on-going or future project, no GSP facility, no greater access of Bangladeshi products in American

his visit to the Bangabandhu museum and his warm words in the visitors' book, and his upbeat message about Bangladesh, all constituted a deft rhetorical pat on the back of our ruling regime that lifted its anxieties about the controversial elections, its spotty, perhaps questionable, record on human rights and civil liberties, and its initially confusing, if evolving, struggle against extremism and terrorism. We felt accepted. We are vindicated. The US is with us.

To spread his largesse around, he met with Ms Khaleda Zia (in a rather unusual setting for an ex-Prime Minister) and again bleated well-worn banalities about the importance of free and fair elections, and pursuing popular rule through democratic means. He even shook hands with Ms Rowshan Ershad (a partner in the Awami League coalition and, paradoxically, the leader of the Opposition) in a brief and clumsily

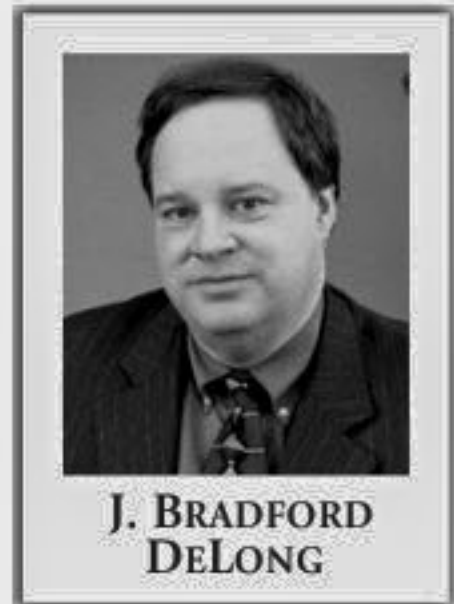
than to set tone or direction. If diplomacy is making someone happy without giving them anything, then John Kerry is a consummate diplomat. Some leaders, certainly in the ruling regime, and some in the opposition, were mightily pleased. The vast majority of us however, were left waiting for hours in the sweltering heat, wondering why traffic had stopped, and what this brouhaha was all about. We still have not figured it out yet. Our fear is that we never will.

As it now stands, this appeared to be no more than a "virtual" visit. A letter, an under-study (with a fulsome title), or even a computer-generated avatar could probably have achieved much the same results. It is only fitting that instead of a joint communiqué at the end of his visit, John Kerry issued a tweet.

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The economic trend is our friend



J. BRADFORD DELONG

thought had been largely left in the ruins of Berlin in 1945.

In addition, economic growth since 2008 has been profoundly disappointing. There is no reasoned case for optimistically expecting a turn for the better in the next five years or so. And the failure of global institutions to deliver ever-increasing prosperity has undermined the trust and confidence which in better times would serve to suppress the murderous demons of our age.

Pessimism understandably comes easy these days – perhaps too easy. In fact, enthusiastic and positive contrarianism is in order: if we look at global economic growth not just five years out, but over the next 30-60 years, the picture looks much brighter.

The reason is simple: the large-scale trends that have fueled global growth since World War II have not stopped. More people are gaining access to new, productivity enhancing technologies, more people are engaging in mutually beneficial trade, and fewer people are being born, thus allaying any continued fears of a so-called population bomb.

Moreover, innovation, especially in the global north, has not ceased, even if it has possibly slowed since the 1880s. And while war and terror continue to horrify us, we are not witnessing anything on the scale of the genocides that were a hallmark of the twentieth century.

Fortunately, these major trends are likely to continue, according to data from the Penn World Table research project, the best source for summary information on global economic growth. The PWT data on average real (inflation-adjusted) per capita GDP show that the world in 1980 was 80 percent better off than it was in 1950, and

another 80 percent better off in 2010 than it was in 1980. In other words, our average material wellbeing is three times what it was in 1950.

Tripling global material wellbeing may sound like a lot, but if anything it's a low estimate. The way we measure real GDP accounts for all the goods and services being produced, but it doesn't properly account for value that exists but cannot be measured – such as the immense benefits that accrue to social-media users from services that cost them nothing.

More than ever before, we are producing commodities that contribute to social welfare

The world economy is a more equal place for the average individual today than it was in 1980. This is partly thanks to a series of strong leaders, such as those in China since Deng Xiaoping, and in India since Rajiv Gandhi.

through use value rather than market value. Some would argue that this is nothing new, but that argument is unpersuasive, given the sheer bulk of time we now spend interacting with information-technology systems where the revenue flow is, at most, a tiny trickle tied to ancillary advertising.

The PWT data also allow us to sort by country, so let's consider the cases of China and India, which comprise 30 percent of humanity. China's real per capita GDP in 1980 was 60 percent lower than the world average, but today it is 25 percent above it. India's real per capita GDP in 1980 was more than 70 percent below the world average, but India has since

closed that gap by half.

This is indisputable progress of one kind; but, to avoid painting too rosy a picture, we should also consider global inequality. The world's countries have shown no sign since 1950 of converging at a shared level of prosperity. According to the PWT data, two-thirds of all countries in 1950 had real per capita GDP veering above or below the global average by at least 45 percent, and by as much as 225 percent. By 1980, that spread had widened to at least 33 percent and as much as 300 percent; and today it is 28 percent and 360 percent, respectively.

Still, all told, the world economy is a more equal place for the average individual today than it was in 1980. This is partly thanks to a series of strong leaders, such as those in China since Deng Xiaoping, and in India since Rajiv Gandhi. But there are no more countries as big as China and India to stand up and make significant leaps in development, and few observers are confident that Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will match their predecessors' growth legacies.

Indeed, such episodes of prolonged, rapid growth may become a thing of the past if the world economy has no more opportunities to accelerate technology transfer, and if more countries continue to mature from high-growth developing economies to more steady-state developed economies.

It may well be true that the engine of innovation itself will run more slowly. But it will still run, and people will still adopt new technologies, and the world economy will still grow. Short of a nightmare scenario like terror-driven nuclear war, you can expect my successors in 2075 to look back and relish that, once again, their world is three times better off than ours is today.

Beyond that, things are harder to predict. If we fail to act now to slow and reverse global temperature trends, climate change will be the spectre stalking the post-2080 world. In that case, our great-grandchildren will have little to thank us for.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Power generation vs. environment

We understand that the decline in natural gas reserve and the growing demand for electricity have impelled the government to go for coal-based power production; but it should not come at the cost of the Sundarbans. We wonder how the government assumed that the coal transportation through the Sundarbans waterways would not cause any serious damage to the local environment and ecosystem.

Mangrove mud can easily accumulate the tanker-spilled fuel oil and this spilled oil can gradually re-suspend and circulate throughout the river networks during tides. Therefore, point-source spills (Point Source Pollution is when sources of pollution come to the river at one point. Oil spills and dumping also play a major role in point source pollution) can become a source of chronic oiling. The noise caused by coal tankers can also hamper the biodiversity. Furthermore, the plant site is located at a zone vulnerable to cyclone and tidal surge. But the project planning and EIA report seriously lack emergency situation management strategies. Thus, an intense cyclone can damage the plant and induce catastrophic disaster in the regional environment.

Considering these factors, the plant site needs to be relocated immediately. The government should seek for harmony between economy and environment, not a trade-off.

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