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This is not what the people want

Let not the election be marred by violence

It is disheartening to see violent clashes break out no sooner than the election symbols were allotted to candidates, resulting in the death of two Jubo League and Awami League leaders, which we strongly condemn. On the other hand, BNP candidates' rallies and motorcades—including that of BNP secretary Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir—were also attacked in dozens of constituencies, which is also reprehensible. Rival factions of the ruling coalition also engaged in clashes.

Such a hostile atmosphere is not favourable to holding free and fair election. The voters will be discouraged, if not intimidated, to exercise their fundamental political right of voting. Most dangerous of all, those who possess muscle power will eventually prevail.

Obviously, the political parties bear most of the blame for failing to restrain their local cadres. Instead of trying to court public support, they chose to intimidate their opponents. They must seriously commit to non-violent campaigning for the election to be meaningful.

The Chief Election Commissioner has said the incidents embarrassed him. While we thank him for acknowledging the reality, the CEC should admit the commission's failure to create conditions conducive to polls. Regrettably, the level playing field still remains elusive, and the EC must take appropriate remedial measures.

The police, too, was caught unprepared to tackle such widespread violence. The administration and police should employ their strength to maintain peace and calm and make sure that campaigning isn't tainted by violence and voters can vote in a peaceful manner.

Child sexual abuse rampant

Existing measures ineffective

We are shocked by the report of a fourth-grade girl raped under bizarre circumstances in the Chakaria Upazila of Cox's Bazar on Monday night. The alleged offender is a local vaidya (indigenous medical practitioner) who, according to our report, manipulated the wife of a mental health patient to provide him with a girl of 8-9 years for his "treatment", only to rape her later. The irrationality of the whole incident notwithstanding, this is just another confirmation of the fact that child sexual abuse is still rampant in our country. And the numbing regularity with which it is taking place shows the futility of efforts meant to protect children from such abuses.

The continuation of a culture in which sexual predators are emboldened is as much a policy failure as a law enforcement one. An alarming number of child sexual abuse cases are recorded every year. Experts note that such cases often end without a conviction of the offenders which contributes to repeat offenses. Clearly, the existing measures are not working. We feel that while the criminal justice system has a vital role to play in punishing the rapists, what's equally important is to reduce the likelihood of such abuse in the first place—through a combination of law enforcement and social measures to create an environment in which children feel safe and potential offenders are deterred. The government has a big role to play in creating this environment, together with the local communities and social organisations, and the urgency to produce results in the fight against child abuse must be felt equally across all levels.

Moving from fossil fuels to renewables at a funereal pace



TARANNUM SAHAR

ALMOST half a century ago, on December 7, 1972, the crew of the Apollo 17 satellite took the very first image of the Earth in its entirety.

Famously known as "The Blue Marble," the extraordinary picture compelled humanity to question our place on this planet, the only home that we have ever known.

With the latest special report on global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius published by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it is once again time for us to seriously reevaluate our commitments to this planet, to ourselves and to future generations. The landmark report warns that going beyond global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, as opposed to the previously agreed upon long-term goal of 2 degrees Celsius, will lead to severe climate change catastrophes and we have only 12 years to limit that.

International negotiators are currently convening at the former coal mining hub of Katowice in southern Poland for the 24th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), also known as COP24. During December 3-14, diplomats from 197 countries are to decide on measures to make the Paris Agreement, the pledge to keep temperatures between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius, a reality. While the summit is crucial for strengthening efforts on urgent global actions, the pace at which talks are progressing is alarmingly slow.

The summit is at a shameful deadlock after a coalition of four oil-exporting nations—the United States, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Russia—launched an absurd effort to undermine the findings of the IPCC report. It is not uncommon in climate negotiation for a small group of players to disrupt possible global agreements, thanks to vested fossil fuel interests. Following a two-and-a-half-hour heated discussion on Saturday night, the oil allies rejected a motion to "welcome" the study. They instead proposed that it should merely be "noted" which would make it much easier for governments to disregard the report when needed.

The IPCC report defends calls to rapidly reduce the use of fossil fuels and to completely phase out coal by mid-century. Simultaneously, it insists on increasing the availability of efficient, low-cost renewable energy technologies. The global energy sector is heavily dependent on fossil fuels which contribute to the vast majority of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Global economic growth led to an estimated 2.1 percent increase in energy demand in 2017 without a significant contribution from the renewable energy supply-side. As a result, the unremitting increase in emissions of GHG is further deteriorating the climate of our planet.

While countries continue to heavily invest in fossil-based power plants, an upward trend is evident in the share of modern renewables in the total global energy supply owing to policy support and advances in technology. Because of rapid improvement in efficiency and dramatic reductions in cost of solar photovoltaics (PV) and wind turbines, renewable electricity is now less expensive than newly installed fossil energy in many regions of the world. In some places, it is even less expensive

downplay renewables as "infeasible" and "too expensive" to support the global transformation of this sector. But interestingly enough, fossil fuels continue to receive the lion's share of subsidies, tax relief and other kinds of support due to the sector's adverse, far-reaching sphere of influence in the global economy. The total global subsidies allocated for fossil fuel production and consumption in 2016 have been estimated to be USD 370 billion, which is nearly double the estimated subsidies for renewable power generation. Fossil fuel subsidies essentially aid in distorting the market and slowing down the adoption of renewables.

The current pace at which we are transitioning into renewables will not in

energy access is possible but decision-makers need to think outside the "grid versus off-grid" dichotomy allowing for the integration of new technologies, business models and implementation strategies into the existing market. Far greater political ambition than what we are seeing now is needed for energy transition and governments need to step up their game in accelerating the momentum.

The IPCC's Special Report has outlined pathways to stabilise global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius. Unprecedented changes are vital for reaching the target, which is considerably difficult to achieve but certainly possible and lies at the ambitious end of the Paris Agreement pledge. James Hansen, the former NASA scientist who helped raise



SOURCE: JOURNALISTSRESOURCE.ORG

than using traditional power plants. However, all this gives an incomplete picture of the essentially inadequate progress made in the development of clean energy.

The energy transition in sectors other than the power sector has barely begun. The heating and cooling and transport sectors, which together account for about 80 percent of the global energy demand, are still largely lagging behind. While there are 57 countries with policies to achieve complete dependence on renewables in the power sector, Denmark is the sole nation in the world with a 100 percent renewable energy target for all three sectors: power, heating and cooling, and transport.

Incumbent leaders in many quarters of the energy industry regularly

any way allow us to keep global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, let alone the safer limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius. The slow shift is also hindering our progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 that has an objective of "ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy." About a billion people, or 13 percent of the global population, mostly concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, still lack access to electricity.

Over the past decades, progress has been made particularly in Bangladesh, Kenya, India and the Philippines through distributed renewables for energy access (DREA) like off-grid solar home systems. Moving towards a clean energy future while achieving universal

the alarm about climate change, warns that while both 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius would direct humanity into uncharted and perilous territory, the former will, at the very least, give "young people and the next generation a fighting chance of getting back" to the Holocene-era range in which human civilisation developed.

Negotiators at COP24 need to take the IPCC report into serious consideration, act urgently and constructively, and find ways to take multilateral actions in collaboration with parties that are willing to bolster efforts towards climate solutions instead of deliberately delaying them.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

The political roots of falling wage growth



JAYATI GHOSH

IT'S now official: workers around the world are falling behind. The International Labor Organization's (ILO) latest Global Wage Report finds that,

excluding China, real (inflation-adjusted) wages grew at an annual rate of just 1.1 percent in 2017, down from 1.8 percent in 2016. That is the slowest pace since 2008.

In the advanced G20 economies, average real wages grew by a mere 0.4 percent in 2017, compared to 1.7 percent growth in 2015. While real wages were up by 0.7 percent in the United States (versus 2.2 percent in 2015), they stagnated in Europe, where small increases in some countries were offset by declines in France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. The slowdown in "success stories" like Germany and the US is particularly surprising, given the former's expanding current-account surpluses and the latter's falling unemployment and tight labour markets.

In emerging markets, average wage growth in 2017, at 4.3 percent, was faster than in the advanced G20 economies, but still slower than the previous year (4.9 percent). Asia enjoyed the fastest real wage growth, owing largely to China and a few smaller countries such as Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. But, overall, wage growth in Asian economies mostly decelerated in 2017. And in Latin America and Africa, several countries experienced real-wage declines.

Moreover, the ILO report finds that the gap between wage growth and labour productivity remained wide in 2017. In many countries, labour's share of

national income is still below the levels of the early 1990s.

That raises an obvious question: Given the global output recovery of recent years, why have conditions for workers in most parts of the world not improved commensurately?

Neither of the usual suspects, trade and technology, is entirely to blame. To be sure, large labour-surplus economies' deepening integration into the global market, together with increased reliance on automation and artificial intelligence, has weakened workers' bargaining power and shifted labour demand into very

with fiscal consolidation and austerity has prevented the kind of social spending that could expand public employment and improve workers' conditions. And the current regulatory environment increasingly allows for large corporations to wield power without accountability, resulting in higher monopoly rents and greater bargaining power.

In short, neoliberalism's intellectual capture of economic policymaking across a wide range of countries, is resulting in the exclusion of most wage earners from the gains of economic



specific and limited sectors. But these factors alone do not explain the lack of material progress for most workers.

The real reason workers are getting a raw deal is not so much economic as institutional and political. From country to country, legislation and court judgments are increasingly trampling on long-recognised labour rights.

For example, governments focused solely on improving "labour-market flexibility" have pursued policies that privilege employers' interests over those of workers, not least by undercutting workers' ability to organise. An obsession

growth. But this was not inevitable. China, after all, has achieved rapid wage growth, and the share of national income accruing to labour is rising, despite the country's pursuit of trade and rapid labour-displacing technologies.

China's success may vindicate a model advanced by the late Nobel laureate economist W Arthur Lewis, which explains how employment in new, more productive sectors can absorb surplus labour and push up wages over all. But, more to the point, China has augmented this effect through systematic state policies designed to improve labour conditions.

As a result, the average nominal minimum wage in China nearly doubled between 2011 and 2018, and wages for workers in state-owned enterprises rose even faster. At the same time, the government has expanded other forms of social protections for workers, all while pursuing industrial policies geared toward boosting innovation and productivity growth, thus moving the country up the global value chain.

True, China's political economy is unusual. The government's concern for workers' wellbeing could simply reflect the Communist Party of China's need to secure its domestic political position. In that case, it has forged a Faustian social bargain that is typical of East Asian autocracies.

Still, if China can buck the trend of declining wage growth, other countries can, too. First, though, economic policymakers around the world will have to shake off the neoliberal paradigm, which has left them incapable of imagining alternative policy approaches. As a political project, neoliberalism has run its course. If workers are going to partake in the gains of growth once again, governments will need to start adopting more progressive policy alternatives.

Fortunately, the ILO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development have begun to put more sensible policies back on the agenda, as have some politicians in the US, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. But ensuring that the economy serves the bulk of society will require a much bigger push across the board.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The relevance of a December election

This year the election is scheduled to be held towards the end of December. Since it was in December that we managed to secure victory against the oppressive Pakistani regime in 1971, it is usually a month of celebration for us. However, this year, December may turn out to be a difficult and frightening month, especially given what happened during the last general elections.

As the major political parties are yet to reach any consensus as to the holding of the elections, there is every possibility of violence breaking out before and during the elections. Already there have been reports of various violent incidents. The fact that we are living in such conditions is extremely disappointing.

We should all remember that many valiant sons and daughters of this country had sacrificed their lives in 1971 to liberate us from oppression, and to give us the opportunity to choose our own destiny. At the core of our independence struggle were the ideas of freedom and democracy. And I hope that our next election will reflect these ideas, instead of making a mockery of them.

Nur Jahan, Chattogram



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