


The political dimension of COP25

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE 25th Conference of Parties (COP25) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) being held in Madrid, Spain is now half way through with

the technical level negotiations having been completed and the ministers now arriving in to lock the final political agreements.

There are two major politically sensitive issues which will have to be addressed by the ministers. The first is about Article 6 of the Paris Agreement which focuses on the option of using market mechanisms to trade climate change actions across countries and companies.

In theory it makes much sense to incentivise the private sector companies to align their profit making business models with tackling climate change so that they can make money by doing good. Although this sounds nice in theory, the result of previous experience under the Kyoto Protocol where there was a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which allowed trading of Carbon Emission Reductions (CERs), was not so positive. The first problem with the CDM was that only a few developing countries benefited from it, with China and India generating and getting paid for the largest amount of CERs.

The second problem arose when the CDM market collapsed when the Kyoto Protocol was not adhered to by countries like the US, which resulted in the price of CERs to collapse to almost zero.

Hence many developing countries are suspicious that they may have to face



Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg delivers a speech after a massive climate march in Madrid on December 06, 2019. PHOTO: AFP

a similar situation again. Also a lack of clarity on how the new mechanism—which will be different from the Kyoto Protocol—would work is increasing concern.

The developed countries who like this market mechanism are pushing to reach an agreement in Madrid. We will see what happens during the political negotiations this week.

The second politically sensitive issue that the ministers have to address is the review of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) on Loss and Damage (LnD) which is an important decision to be made here during COP25 in Madrid.

The most vulnerable countries have formed a strong common stand at the

beginning of the COP demanding that the WIM be allowed to have both an implementation arm as well as a new financial arm going forward. The good news at the end of the first week of COP is that their demands have been strongly supported by the G77 and China group which is the coalition of all developing countries.

Gaining the support of countries like China and India as well as other developing countries is a big achievement for us as this is not always the case.

So the end of the first week has been positive for Bangladesh and the other vulnerable developing countries as we now have a united position. However, the real political push back from the US

has already started with a rejection of these demands. The European Union however, seems more open to discussing ways to reach an agreement. This will require the ministers (not just the negotiators) of the developing countries to remain steadfast and united until the end. If they compromise too early than we will lose the fight. We would only be able to win the argument by sticking to our guns until the very end and not accepting any agreement that does not address our demands.

This will certainly be a major political issue over the next few days.

In other news, Greta Thunberg has arrived in Madrid and joined a massive crowd of over half a million young people on the streets of Madrid to raise their voices for the leaders in the COP to raise their ambition to tackle Climate Change as a genuine emergency. However, it is unfortunate that government officials inside the COP premises seem to remain deaf to the youths' demands.

It remains to be seen who will win by next week. I will report on the outcomes in my next column.

Also the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) of leaders currently chaired by President Hilda Heine of Marshall Islands (who will hand over the position to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina next year) has launched a major public campaign called Madrid Ambition Drive (#MAD4Survival) which is being strongly supported by other developing countries and civil society. It is meant to put pressure on the big emitters to raise their ambition before COP26 to be held in Glasgow, United Kingdom in December 2020.

Saleemul Huq is Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) at the Independent University, Bangladesh. Email: saleem.icccad@iub.edu.bd

TRIBUTE

Professor Ajoy Roy

A profile in patriotism, human rights, and science

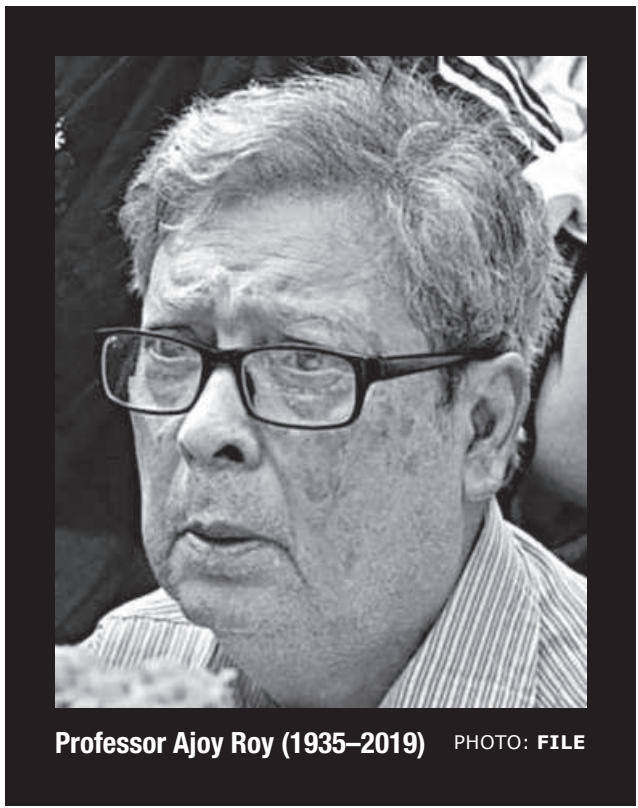
JAHED AHMED

AJOY Roy has worn many hats throughout his life—as a bright scientist; professor of physics; human rights and secular activist; author; and perhaps, most significant of all, as a valiant freedom fighter. It is indeed hard to come up with an example of a Bangladeshi as decorated as Prof Roy. To sum up, the life of Prof Roy epitomises the famous Kennedy dictum, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

I have been lucky enough to interact and work with this courageous man for a brief period during the 2000s while serving as a co-moderator at Mukto-Mona, the online forum for Bengali secularists and freethinkers, founded by slain secular activist, blogger and Prof Roy’s son, Avijit Roy. Prof Roy had been on the advisory board of Mukto-Mona. I have seen his passion and tireless energy to help and support the voiceless, poor and powerless.

Mukto-Mona activists dared to stand by human rights, freedom of expression and critical thinking. At times I paused, slowed down but not Avijit. A software engineer by training, Avijit’s unofficial, 24/7 job was to not let go of anything unchallenged when it came to fighting religious bigotry and fanaticism.

Beyond writing, promoting reason and science, Mukto-Mona occasionally undertook projects to help the poor and needy in remote areas, using funds made of small donations



Professor Ajoy Roy (1935–2019) PHOTO: FILE

from our members. One such project was to rebuild a primary school obliterated by the devastating flood of 2004 in Roumari, a remote village in Kurigram in northern Bangladesh. Often, from Dhaka, Prof Roy and his team (activists of *Shiksha Andolan Manch*) would travel several hundred miles by bus, boat to the project site to monitor the progress and would report back to us with meticulous details and pictures. I always marvelled at the man who was in his late 60s yet full of stamina and the spirit of a young man.

As if the call from his motherland to serve was far from over, Prof Ajoy Roy rose to the occasions whenever human rights, people’s freedom of expression were attacked. He protested, spoke and wrote about the plight of minorities and freethinkers in Bangladesh and beyond, including the vicious attacks on writers such as Humayun Azad.

In 2015 Avijit Roy was murdered in daylight by extremists at Ekushey book fair in Dhaka. His wife, Bonya Ahmed, was seriously wounded. Avijit was only 42 but has inspired—via his writing of many thought-provoking articles and books (even more so after his death)—hundreds of freethinkers in Bangladesh and around the world.

Yet for his family, Avijit’s premature death had left a void that won’t fill. Never. I can only imagine and would never quite feel the pain, shock, and disappointment Prof Ajoy Roy had to endure after the murder of his son. What could be more tragic for a freedom fighter than to live with the reality that his young, brilliant son was hacked to death only because he expressed his opinions freely?

I do not know what the fighting in the field felt like in 1971 for Ajoy Roy but I am sure in his wildest dreams he did not envision this tragic reality in the country that he fought for.


In 2012, the Bangladesh government bestowed upon Ajoy Roy the country’s highest civilian honour, the Ekushey Padak. Though ceremonial, it was long due and a praiseworthy step. However, the administration has failed a father who, at 84 with ailing health and in a wheelchair, had been, for four years, attending the court hearing of his son’s murder case without a visible headway. Tragically he had to leave this world on December 9 without getting any justice.

Jahed Ahmed lives and works in New York. Email: humanistnyc@hotmail.com

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

The AI frontier of economic theory

THOMAS J SARGENT



UNTIL recently, two big impediments limited what research economists could learn about the world with the powerful methods that mathematicians

and statisticians, starting in the early nineteenth century, developed to recognise and interpret patterns in noisy data: data sets were small and costly, and computers were slow and expensive. So it is natural that as gains in computing power have dramatically reduced these impediments, economists have rushed to use big data and artificial intelligence to help them spot patterns in all sorts of activities and outcomes.

Data summary and pattern recognition are big parts of the physical sciences as well. The physicist Richard Feynman once likened the natural world to a game played by the gods: “you don’t know the rules of the game, but you’re allowed to look at the board from time to time, in a little corner, perhaps. And from these observations, you try to figure out what the rules are.”

Feynman’s metaphor is a literal description of what many economists do. Like astrophysicists, we typically acquire non-experimental data generated by processes we want to understand.

The mathematician John von Neumann defined a game as (1) a list of players; (2) a list of actions available to each player; (3) a list of how payoffs accruing to each player depend on the actions of all players; and (4) a timing protocol that tells who chooses what when. This elegant definition includes what we mean by a “constitution” or an “economic system”: a social understanding about who chooses what when.

Like Feynman’s metaphorical physicist, our task is to infer a “game”—which for economists is the structure of

historically unprecedented) situations in which a government or regulator follows a new set of rules. The government has strategies, and the people have counterstrategies, according to a Chinese proverb. “Structural models” seek such invariant parameters in order to help regulators and market designers understand and predict data patterns under historically unprecedented situations.

The challenging task of building structural models will benefit from rapidly developing branches of AI that don’t involve more than pattern



A growing number of human jobs are being taken over by machines. PHOTO: REUTERS

a market or system of markets—from observed data. But then we want to do something that physicists don’t: think about how different “games” might produce improved outcomes. That is, we want to conduct experiments to study how a hypothetical change in the rules of the game or in a pattern of observed behaviour by some “players” (say, government regulators or a central bank) might affect patterns of behaviour by the remaining players.

Thus, “structural model builders” in economics seek to infer from historical patterns of behaviour a set of invariant parameters for hypothetical (often

recognition. A great example is AlphaGo. The team of computer scientists that created the algorithm to play the Chinese game Go cleverly combined a suite of tools that had been developed by specialists in statistics, simulation, decision theory, and game theory communities. Many of the tools used in just the right proportions to make an outstanding artificial Go player are also economists’ bread-and-butter tools for building structural models to study macroeconomics and industrial organisation.

Of course, economics differs from physics in a crucial respect. Whereas

Pierre-Simon Laplace regarded “the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future,” the reverse is true in economics: what we expect other people to do later causes what we do now. We typically use personal theories about what other people want to forecast what they will do. When we have good theories of other people, what they are likely to do determines what we expect them to do. This line of reasoning, sometimes called “rational expectations,” reflects a sense in which “the future causes the present” in economic systems. Taking this into account is at the core of building “structural” economic models.

For example, I will join a run on a bank if I expect that other people will. Without deposit insurance, customers have incentives to avoid banks vulnerable to runs. With deposit insurance, customers don’t care and won’t run. On the other hand, if governments insure deposits, bank owners will want their assets to become as big and as risky as possible, while depositors won’t care. There are similar tradeoffs with unemployment and disability insurance—insuring people against bad luck may weaken their incentive to provide for themselves—and for official bailouts of governments and firms.

More broadly, my reputation is what others expect me to do. I face choices about whether to confirm or disappoint those expectations. Those choices will affect how others behave in the future. Central bankers think about that a lot.

Like physicists, we economists use models and data to learn. We don’t learn new things until we appreciate that our old models cannot explain new data. We then construct new models in light of how their predecessors failed. This explains how we have learned from past depressions and financial crises. And with big data, faster computers, and better algorithms, we might see patterns where once we heard only noise.

Thomas J Sargent is Professor of Economics at New York University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2019. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)

We typically use personal theories about what other people want to forecast what they will do. When we have good theories of other people, what they are likely to do determines what we expect them to do.

QUOTABLE Quote



MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE (1533-1592) French writer and philosopher

He who fears he shall suffer, already suffers what he fears.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Ship poles
6 Wallops
10 Perfect
11 Be of use
13 T-shirt size
14 Captain Nemo's creator
15 Nest item
16 Sense of self
18 Possesses
19 Gardener's buys
22 Agent, for short
23 Notorious emperor
24 Truman's home-town
27 Italian city
28 Steel ingredient
29 Tic-toe link
30 Sites for author

DOWN
1 Odometer units
2 Wise saying
3 Suit material
4 Playground game
5 Surprise hit
6 Widespread damage
7 — had it!

photos
35 Use the track
36 LAPD alert
37 Tell tales
38 Narnia lion
40 Hirsch of "Into the Wild"
42 Paris river
43 Tribe symbol
44 RBI or ERA
45 Listens to


8 North Carolina native
9 "My Way" singer
12 Teacher's unit
17 Opening
20 Guzzled
21 New York cager
24 Some October babies
25 Wakes
26 Like a bright night
27 Banquo's killer
29 Spigot
31 Singer Jackson
32 Select group
33 Like some floors
34 Appears
39 Santa — winds
41 "The Simpsons" bartender


WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker





BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

