

Baalu's mouse in an apartheid world

As we lead up to the Ministerial segment of COP-8, the President of COP-8 Mr.T.R.Baalu's labours has not surprisingly produced the proverbial mouse. A draft of the 'Delhi Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change and Sustainable Development' that has been produced is such a shameful compromise to powerful interests that it would embarrass even the 'proverbial mouse'. The declaration has already attracted the criticism of the EU delgation for backtracking even on meager achievements of the previous UNFCCC.

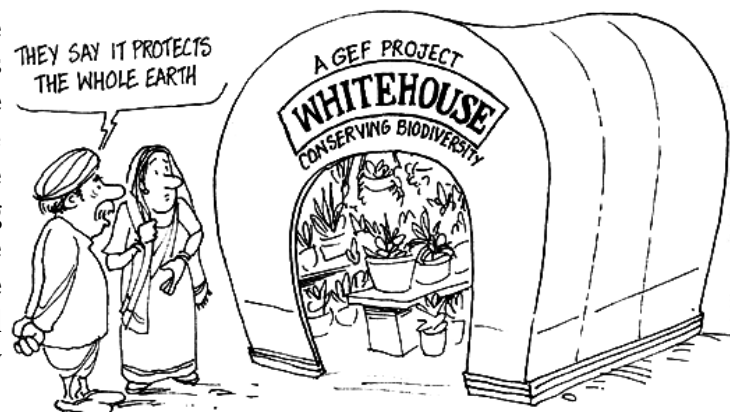
One should not be at all surprised at Baalu's draft declaration because COP-8 New Delhi is the convergence of several processes both national and international as regards the States involved in the negotiations are concerned, and in terms of other processes and behind the scenes manipulation as far as the 'poltics of the science' is concerned, and the strategies of the powerful corporations and their foot soldier President Bush is concerned.

First is the convergence regarding the States involved in the negotiations. Let us begin with the national dimension and take up the case of the Indian State on whose behalf Mr.Baalu is speaking for the environment. The Indian state has long given up any claims to represent the interests of its people. Consequently, at the international level it is reluctant and increasingly incapable of taking any meaningful leadership as in the past.

The two aspects, of having no concern for the poor of one's own country and the inability and impotence to lead at the international level are connected. With the dawn of the globalisation and liberalisation era, the Indian state functions almost like a de facto apartheid state: in making any policy decision, the interests of the vast numbers of the poor and marginalised do not come up; it is the interests of the powerful and the wealthy that are safeguarded.

The Indian state in general has been for a long time a captive state of the rich and powerful. But the present government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in whose government Mr.Baalu is the Environment Minister, is the worst. The present Government of India has simply outdone itself as to how far any government can go to please powerful private interests.

It is true that in the present world context in both North and South, the fig leaf of the state acting as the defender of the public interest and as a neutral arbiter between the interests of all social classes has long been cast aside. Although in a global context at least some lip service is paid to the poor and those living on the margins, President Bush finds even such lip service irritating and the Government of India is trying to match Bush in terms of its own extraordinary amnesia about the poor and consideration of their interests in formulating



national policy in general and environmental and natural resource policies in particular. From this point of view, Mr.Baalu could not have come up with anything better than the Draft Declaration that he has produced.

Second is the manipulation of behind the scenes by powerful global interests to which the Indian government is only too happy and willing to comply with. So you have an Indian government that on the
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Self-deception about property rights

The more obvious the realities of atmospheric conflict become, the more strenuous become the efforts of some Northern negotiators to deny them. Take, for example, the question of who has rights to the atmosphere - and what kind of rights they are.

Last November, Dutch Environment Minister Jan Pronk, president of the negotiations at The Hague and in Bonn, was presented with a Friends of the Earth mandate signed by over 85 organisations calling for governments to study the possibility of allocating rights to the atmosphere on a democratic, per capita basis. Pronk retorted emotionally that it was "inappropriate and unhelpful" even to bring up the subject of atmospheric rights. Attempting to float the delusion that the Kyoto Protocol was not creating "any right, title or entitlement to emissions of any kind", Pronk gave the appearance of being unaware that, for want of a better alternative, he had been talking about atmospheric rights himself in the most provocative and regressive way throughout the meeting.

Economist Peter Read, an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) author, meanwhile notes that climate negotiators "did not sign up to right the inequities that exist in the world". Read goes on to draw the conclusion that:

"To premise policy on the idea that existing inequalities are abnormal is to lead straight to confrontation, resulting in no action and risking climate catastrophe". The assumption is that the existing inequalities reinforced by the Kyoto Protocol are normal and will therefore be uncontroversial both in future climate negotiations and the implementation of carbon forestry projects.

Such self-deception is not confined to diplomats and their advisers. Many businesspeople, journalists, American senators, scientists, even environmentalists have struggled fruitlessly to wish away the issue of atmospheric and land rights.

The Economist magazine, for instance, feigns not to understand that criticism of current "market" approaches to climate change is rooted in concerns about the way that they allocate property unequally. Instead, the magazine attributes this criticism to a notion that "pollution is sin, which implies that polluters must be punished" rather than allowed to buy "cheap" means of global warming mitigation like carbon sinks or emissions permits. This misreading

of resistance to property grabs as a craving for moral, retribution - however appealing it may be in the short term to middle class audiences - can in the end only provoke more profound conflicts.

Jayant Sathaye of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in the United States (US) meanwhile glibly claims that anxieties about the rich cleansing their emissions by taking over ordinary people's land for forestry projects can be relieved by "ensuring that the title to the land is separated from the title to carbon". It is as if it had never occurred to him that land whose trees have been signed over to a utility corporation is going to be less able to provide livelihood goods to local people, as the history of enclosure and tree plantations demonstrates.

In a slightly more sophisticated vein, Herman Ott and Wolfgang Sachs of the Wuppertal Institute, an independent think-tank on energy, climate and environment, assert that allocating and trading rights to the atmosphere does not really amount to the enclosure of commons as long as the price of emissions permits is conceived as: "not a rent yielded by a property (in the atmosphere) but ... fee to be paid for the temporary right to use the atmospheric commons beyond its sink capacity. ... [The carbon market] would not be instituted in the first place for identifying the most efficient allocation abatement investments, but forming the price of user rights".

It is as if the two authors had not realised that user rights in most commons regimes are deliberately kept out of the market - partly because if they are priced, they are likely to wind up in the hands of the rich only.

When talking about adaptation to climate change, finally, most diplomats confine themselves to what they apparently think of as "technical" issues such as North-South technology transfer and capital flows. That is what the institutions they are familiar with are set up to engage in. They are accordingly drawn to claims such as that "industrialised countries are not vulnerable to predicted climate change and developing countries would be better helped to cope by hastening their development, not by sacrificing rising prosperity to greenhouse gas mitigation".

Yet in fact, the "underlying causes of vulnerability"

to climate change are hardly confined to the lack of shiny, expensive Northern machines, infrastructure and capital. As Mick Kelly and W. N. Adger of the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom stress, to do with the "inequitable distribution of resources". Helping people become less vulnerable to climate change in Vietnam, for instance, would involve "poverty reduction, risk-spreading through income diversification, respecting common property management rights and promoting collective security". Not to address such issues on the false premise that they have "nothing to do with the climate convention" is to reinforce inequities - and to make people still more vulnerable to the changes to come. The issue of who has rights to the air cannot be avoided any more than the issue of who has rights to land.

The implications for a "market approach" to climate are serious. To talk "carbon credits" or "emissions

credits" is automatically to talk property, access rights and politics. Attempting to conceal commitments to inequality by using the language of economics is likely only to make the inevitable conflicts over property worse. Moreover, whatever stand one takes on this issue has climatic effects. Whether one rewards a pattern of historical overuse of the atmosphere such as the United States's or a pattern of more frugal use such as India's or Vietnam's has huge effects on investment and industrial and land use planning. This, in turn, has further impacts on global warming. These impacts cannot be quantified. And to affect climate in unquantifiable ways is to scotch the possibility of a carbon commodity.

Excerpted from "Democracy or Carbocracy? Intellectual corruption in the debate over climate change" by Larry Lohmann, The Corner House, United Kingdom. October 2001.

Water riots in Gujarat ...

Climate-related disasters are increasing in various parts of India bringing ecological disruption and social conflicts. Achyut Yagnik, referring to the coastline of Gujarat said, "Due to sea level rise, the encroaching sea has affected 31 per cent of the lands. This is having serious impacts on agriculture and drinking water availability. "Earlier, villagers would stay in the village four months of the monsoon rains and would leave the village for the other eight months to find work outside. That has changed. Due to lack of water, many people are now forced to leave their villages and settle outside. These people can be described as environmental refugees," he said.

"If this continues, more than one-third of Gujarat's population will be transformed into environmental refugees", he added.

The scarcity of drinking water in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan is resulting in quarrels over access to water. "We have heard of communal riots in Gujarat. But now, water riots are also becoming more frequent.

"Social conflicts like these will continue if the concerns of the poor and marginalised are not part of government policies and decision-making. I am waiting for the day I hope that will happen in my lifetime when the voice of the vulnerable people are not only heard but these people will be able to decide their own futures", he said.

... and retreating Himalayan glaciers

Talking about the Himalayan mountain ecosystem, Sridhar said that the mountain glaciers are retreating. "We used to think that it was very difficult to measure glacial retreat. But today everywhere we find that the glaciers are much farther beyond where they were the in the last few years. At least ten glaciers are recorded to be receding in the Himalayas and the northern mountain region. The lower Himalayas and the flat plains of the Ganges River used to have vast expanse of forest. This is a result of the government opening up the land to build dams, tourist resorts and roads. Now, entire sections of the Himalayan region have been deforested or degraded".

He said that the Indian government dismisses local people's experiences about climate change: "The local people are saying that they understand the science of climate change because they are suffering the impacts of the extreme weather situations already" he added.

The local communities have their own customary laws. But then the government comes and takes the resources and alienates the people", he concluded.

From Call of the Communities, an event organised at COP-8 by the Indian National Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC).

Are you with US, Dr Pachauri?

In April 2002, the Geneva-based Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) elected Dr R. K. Pachauri as its Chair.

Dr Pachauri's election quickly turned into a controversy when it was revealed that the United States (US) government was supporting Dr Pachauri over the incumbent Dr Watson, who has criticised the energy policy of the administration of US President George Bush.

The controversy spilled over when environmental groups uncovered a memo from the US oil corporation ExxonMobil - a major contributor to Mr Bush's election campaign - asking the White House to unseat Dr Watson who it considered had an "aggressive agenda".

The Washington-based Natural Resources Defence Council, which uncovered the memo, said that the US support for Dr Pachauri could have been crucial in unseating Dr Watson, an American citizen who was born in the UK. Dr Watson had been appointed to the IPCC by former president Bill Clinton in 1996.

Watson helped produce many reports that shook to the foundations the fossil-fuel industry. He has a strong track record in climate research and is considered one of the world's leading experts on climate change. Watson has also been an outspoken proponent of the need to take urgent action to mitigate the impact of human activities on global warming.

At one point, he is reported to have described US President George Bush as the "only person" who did not accept the scientific evidence of global warming. Watson is a strong proponent of the idea that human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels are the primary forces behind the warming climate, and that efforts to combat global warming must focus on reducing human emissions of greenhouse gases.

Baalu's mouse (continued)

one hand, because of past compulsions and genuine democratic debate and earlier mobilisation among the citizenry by civil society groups on issues such as climate change can take the radical stance of equity and equal property rights to the atmosphere in global climate change negotiations. On the other hand, it can allow the election to the chair of the IPCC individuals like Dr R.K. Pachauri who are preferred candidates by large oil multinationals like EXXONMOBIL and of world leaders like President Bush. If India had serious interests in pursuing its stance of equity then it should have dissuaded Dr Pachauri from contesting. The Baalu draft is symptomatic of the current Indian government's pattern of falling in line with the US demands on India.

Finally, coming to the 'politics of the science of climate change', Dr Pachauri presents the third convergence. The convergence between the behind the scene manipulations to manufacture 'scepticism' about climate change matters and shifting the discourse from one of mitigation to adaptation. Dr Pachauri represents the convergence of the attempts to derail any perspectives about a global commons approach to the atmosphere and thus move away from a global commons management approach to one of property rights, emission trading and credits.

Meanwhile ... the Prototype Diamond Fund takes shape

The discussions on the Prototype Diamond Fund (PDF) for global governance are proceeding quietly behind the scenes. (See CHA 5.) CHA has learnt that the some of the discussions are being bogged down by the text relating to "taxing of unsustainable" oil and mineral operations.

Keen as ever on markets and trade, the World Bank is drafting a position paper for the PDF titled "Opportunities for Trade of Vulnerable Communities". The World Bank delegate said, "At least a billion dollars can be created in the trade of communities vulnerable to climate change". Since the trade will require property rights, the Bank will set up "Vulnerability Certificates" to be evenly divided among the poor nations. "Then these nations can freely buy and sell these certificates to rich nations. The money can then be used for sustainable development", he said. CHA will keep you updated.

Editorial Team

K.C.Malhotra, Achyut Yagnik, Lawrence Surendra, Stanley Williams, Nafisa D'Souza, Bibhu Prasad Tripathy, Samuel Jesupatham, Noel Rajesh, Prem Chandran
Design and lay-out: Akhil Srivastava