

## The sad road from Kyoto to Durban

IN HARD times governments are consumed by short-term problems. But this does not mean the archetypal long-term problem, climate change, has gone away. Science continues to support the case for curbing greenhouse-gas emissions so as to minimise the risks of catastrophe. Meanwhile it is clear how wretchedly the world is failing to do so. Even if countries honour their promises, the UN reckons that by 2020 emissions will exceed the trajectory for keeping warming under 2°C by up to 11 gigatonnes. That is equivalent to more than double the emissions of every car, bus and truck in 2005.

Why is the world failing so badly? In part because changing the basics of how industrial economies are run is difficult, trying to do it at a rush harder still. Tax fossil fuels high enough and they will fall out of use. But the impact on the economy, and on powerful vested interests, of doing so at high speed may not be manageable. That is why many, including this newspaper, accept that a dash to stay under 2°C is no longer plausible. More deliberate action has more manageable costs.

What the world is seeing, though, is scarcely any action at all. Emissions are rising faster than ever. Some politicians, wrongly, think the scientific case for anthropogenic global warming is too shaky. Others, especially in straitened times, are reluctant to spend money on a distant and uncertain threat—especially when their peers are doing nothing. All these faults are on display at the UN's annual climate-change circus, running in Durban until December 9th (see article). Indeed, the main forum for tackling climate change has become a case-study in why this is not happening.

Most of the argument in Durban is about the Kyoto protocol, an initiative that has already failed. Negotiated in 1997, it required developed countries to adopt modest targets to reduce their emissions. Since then, emissions have increased by over a quarter, mainly in developing countries, which are not obliged under Kyoto to do anything to curb them. America, the world's second-biggest emitter, is also not covered, having refused to ratify the treaty. Russia, Japan and Canada will all, in one way or another, abandon it when its main provisions expire at the end of next year. That leaves the EU as the only big emitter considering a fresh five-year round of binding cuts.

### A start, at least

To keep the treaty alive, and so preserve their special status, the developing countries want the Europeans to sign up again. .../... There is thus no point in the Europeans signing—unless they can get something from the emerging grants in return. The EU wants them to commit to taking part in a new mitigation regime. China, India and the rest are resisting this idea; but the Europeans must hold firm. Even if most poor countries will be unable to cut their emissions for some time, because they are growing so fast, they would have to do more to slow their rate of increase. By committing to this they would also put pressure on America, a near irrelevance at Durban, to join in. .../...