

## COP 16: Regional Views

### Cancun Agreements Save the UN process

The UN Climate Change Conference in Cancun ended in the late hours of December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 with the adoption of a package of decisions that aimed to set up a "Green Climate Fund," protect tropical forests and share clean energy technologies. Despite protests from Bolivia who pointed out that the deal was just not ambitious enough and "went back to the Copenhagen Accord", the package, dubbed the "Cancun Agreements" was welcomed by the other Parties in the final plenary.

Many compromises were done to clinch the deal at the 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP 16) signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). "We had to give up a lot of what we wanted" said one delegate from the developing world, "but so did everyone else". According to Greenpeace International, "Cancun may have saved the process but it did not yet save the climate". There was real danger that if some sort of agreement was not reached in Cancun, the entire UNFCCC process, which includes 192 countries of the world, might have died out. "Some called the process dead but governments have shown that they can cooperate and can move forward to achieve a global deal", said Greenpeace.



On the key issue of climate finance, governments finally agreed to establish a climate fund to deliver the billions needed for the developing world to deal with climate change and stop deforestation. But they didn't establish any way of providing that money. NGOs say more would have been accomplished in Cancun if it had not been for the negative influence of the United States, Russia and Japan. The latter two made several statements against the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol, while the US came to Mexico with weak commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Cancun Agreements will give business more of the certainty it needs to invest in a low carbon economy and collaboration should now begin in financing, technology, adaptation, and forest protection. However, the big issue of emissions reductions (and the legal commitments to make them real) has not been resolved here. It will be tackled at a later date, probably at the next climate change talks to be held in South Africa in December 2011.

### SAARC: Left Out in the Cold

#### The regional bloc having become an observer in the UN climate negotiations hardly means anything

When the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) failed to submit its position paper in time for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in 1992, the then Indian environment minister TR Baloo dismissed it as a non-issue. "In international summits like this, regional positions do not matter," he had said when asked by reporters how the regional body could bungle like that.

No wonder then that the 25-year old SAARC had to wait for COP 16 in Cancun, Mexico to get an observer status in the United Nations climate convention. And yet, that did not mean it could negotiate in Cancun or any other United Nations-led climate meet. All that happened in the Mexican tourist city with SAARC was that it was granted observer status and its current chair, Bhutan, presented the regional body's position paper. "We believe we can deal with the (climatic) situation better if we do it together and this regional approach is gaining some momentum now," explained Bhutan's agriculture minister Pema Gyamtsho.

While nothing else moved for the regional bloc, countries from the South Asia region did gather in an informal meet at the sidelines of the conference. "It was indeed a nice beginning towards dealing with climate change on a regional basis," said Nepalese environment minister Thakur Prasad Sharma about the informal meeting called by his Indian counterpart Jairam Ramesh.

However, the meeting hardly discussed any regional climate issue in its true sense. "Bilateral issues were discussed during the meet," Indian minister Ramesh told the BBC after the meeting. When asked whether regional issues were included, his answer was: "Yes, regional as well".

That explains how ineffective SAARC as a regional bloc in Cancun was – even during a side meeting. In the mainstream negotiations, SAARC figuring anywhere was simply out of question. "What role will SAARC have in these negotiations is not clear because the member countries belong to different sub-groups that negotiate separately under the UN climate conventions," says Saleem-ul-Haq, a climate expert with the International Institute for Environment and Development based in London.



India and Pakistan meet in Bhutan

Of the eight member countries, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives come under the Least Developed Countries (LDC) bloc while India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are in the Developing Country group. Maldives is also with the Alliance of Small Island States. The different groupings have different, sometimes even conflicting, interests in the UN climate negotiations.

During COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009, for instance, the least developed countries of South Asia threw their weight behind keeping the average global temperature rise under 1.5 degree Celsius from the pre-industrial period. At the same meet, the fast emerging economy India was arguing that the temperature rise limit should be two degrees Celsius.

"I therefore do not expect SAARC countries to take common action in terms of dealing with climate change," says Indian environmental activist Sunita Narain. "I expect governments of the region to use SAARC as a meeting point in which they can put forward their respective actions against climate change." Some politicians in the region have argued that despite the

different sub-groups the SAARC members belong to, the South Asian countries broadly come under the G-77 plus China group in international negotiations. But that has never helped SAARC to speak with one voice, and Cancun was no exception. The reason: regional approach or multilateralism has seldom worked in South Asia say experts.

One after another, SAARC summits – that have become an annual formality showcasing how Indian and Pakistani leaders confront each other – have recognised the high risks from climate change and have made big regional plans to deal with them. The summit in Bhutan last year had climate change as its main agenda. But not a single climate issue has moved regionally – just like all other major agendas of the region as SAARC continues talking the talk like it has all these years.

Observers and experts believe it mainly has to do with the regional power India's policy of dealing with countries in the region bilaterally rather than multilaterally.

India's national action plan on climate change, for example, says: "We will need to exchange information with South Asian countries and countries sharing the Himalayan ecology". Note how the national action plan talks about working with South Asian countries but avoids using the phrase regional or multilateral cooperation.

Amidst all this, some believe that the registration of SAARC as an observer at the Cancun climate meet and the gradual emergence of climate change as a regional agenda in recent times do hold out some hope. They may do, particularly on discussing climate issues in regional meets, but for SAARC to develop as a negotiating bloc in UN climate meetings? High hopes – given how global and regional climate politics are shaping up.

By Navin Singh Khadka, a BBC journalist

## Pakistan: Moving Forward in Cancun?

**The Cancun Agreements might benefit Pakistan – but what about saving the climate by cutting emissions?**

"There was a downward spiral of trust deficit and progress on substantive issues – we all managed to arrest the slide in Cancun and create a floor on which to build on" explained Pakistan's Lead Negotiator, Farrukh Iqbal Khan during the last week of COP 16 in Cancun. "We are expecting decisions on finance and the possible creation of an international fund". As a member of the G-77 group of developing countries, Pakistan supported the G-77 and China's position on the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol and a "balanced outcome" in the UNFCCC track.

There were two tracks being negotiated – the Kyoto Protocol track (which does not include the US) and the Long-term Cooperative Action track (which was established in Bali to allow the US to come on board). Developing countries, including Pakistan, were very keen to keep the Kyoto Protocol alive in Cancun, the only legally binding instrument to control industrial country emissions (albeit by not more than 5%).

As it turned out, the Cancun Agreements did result in the establishment of a global 'Green Climate Fund' which will

disburse funds to developing countries for adaptation and mitigation. Developing countries like Pakistan hope that this money will be new and additional to existing aid promises, with a balanced attribution to adaptation and mitigation.

For now, the Cancun Agreements have asked developed nations to send to the UNFCCC secretariat details of their part in the \$30 billion of fast-start finance which they promised to deliver between 2010 and 2012. Thanks to behind-the-scenes lobbying by the Pakistani delegation, who insisted on some changes and additional language to be added to the final texts, the 'particularly vulnerable' group of least developed countries, small island states and African countries are no longer singled out for priority funding. The language is much broader now in the final 'Adaptation' and 'Shared Vision' texts, which means other countries affected by climate change like Pakistan can also receive this funding soon.

According to Malik Amin Aslam, the former Minister of State (Environment) and an expert on climate finance who was in Cancun, "the resultant Green Climate Fund was really the main achievement, which should move the climate debate forwards and then provide a ray of hope for vulnerable countries like Pakistan". The disastrous flooding that hit Pakistan last summer caused extensive damage to its infrastructure and agricultural

sector – and given the trend of increasingly erratic monsoon patterns, it could well happen again.

The UNFCCC still has to identify the sources of the money that will form the Green Climate Fund and agree on rules on how the funds will be distributed. Pakistan certainly needs this money. At home, the Ministry of Environment is in the process of finalizing its first draft of Pakistan's national climate change policy. In January the draft will be presented to the cabinet and if approved, the policy will be turned into an action plan.

Other achievements of the Cancun Agreements include deals to preserve and protect tropical forests and a mechanism to share clean energy technologies. The key to achieving the new goal of reversing forest loss by paying developing countries to conserve their forest cover, are good governance and the protection of indigenous rights, biodiversity and natural forests. The safeguards embedded in the agreements on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) obligates countries to ensure these outcomes. The challenge now is in the detail, to turn countries' obligations into reality.

“There are many safeguards in the REDD agreement but in addition we will need proper Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV)” explained Nasir Mahmood, the Inspector General of Forests who was present in Cancun. “REDD will be implemented on a country basis and emissions from forests will be calculated at national levels”. Pakistan, whose forest cover is lower than 3%, is currently in the REDD readiness phase and several workshops have been conducted through out the country to train forest officials.

Pakistan will start receiving funding to protect its forests in another year and a half. “We do need the money, already we are hardly managing with the existing funds” pointed out Nasir Mahmood. In the second phase the MRV will begin and the hope is that the forest department will be overhauled and new legislation will be passed to amend existing laws on forests.

For now the major decisions on how the scheme will be funded and how both 'safeguards' and deforestation will be monitored remain unresolved. Some nations, headed by Bolivia, want the



funds for REDD to come from governments alone, while others see money from corporations buying carbon offsets as the main driver for the scheme. Bolivia says this would be tantamount to "selling mother nature". Bolivia in fact opposed the Cancun Agreements, saying that they were simply not ambitious enough. Most NGOs agree that the agreements adopted in Cancun have failed to make progress on the most essential part: steep, binding emissions cuts for developed countries.

The Cancun Agreements have called for countries to list under the UNFCCC their emission reduction targets and actions which they announced under the Copenhagen Accord. However, even if all their targets and actions are fully implemented, UN estimates show they could deliver only 60 percent of the emission reductions that science says will be needed to stay below the agreed 2 degrees rise in average temperatures. Post-Cancun, the UNFCCC is calling for “all countries, but particularly the industrialized nations, to deepen their emission reduction efforts and to do so quickly”. For now, however, major decisions have been put off until COP 17 in Durban, South Africa.

**By Rina Saeed Khan, an environment journalist based in Islamabad**

## India: The Devil is in the Details

**The Cancun Agreements effectively legitimized the voluntary pledges made in the Copenhagen Accord and many of the details were left unclear**

The agreement reached at last December's climate summit in the Mexican resort of Cancun is suffering the same fallout in most countries as other global agreements before it – while civil society groups bemoan that it's definitely nowhere near enough to slow down catastrophic levels of global warming, governments around the world work in their backrooms to weaken it further and continue doing business as usual. South Asian governments, notably India, have been no exception.

The best that could be said about the Cancun Agreements was that it restored faith in multilateralism after the 2010 fiasco at Copenhagen. But in their quest for consensus the summit hosts from Mexico moved to such a low common denominator that it's

virtually meaningless, according to Sanjay Vashisht, coordinator of the Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSAs) – an amalgamation of civil society groups in the region.

There was no mention of the extent to which industrialised countries would commit to reducing their greenhouse-gas emissions after 2012, at the end of the current commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. Nor was there any agreement on a second commitment period of the protocol; only a decision to keep talking about it.

The well-known Indian environmental NGO, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) was not satisfied with either the agreements or the position in which they had placed the country. “The agreements are bad for climate change action,” said a CSE spokesperson. “There is no global emission reduction target for 2050; nor is there a target for peaking year. No targets have been set for emissions reduction for developed countries. There is no mention of equitable access to carbon space, instead a weak and meaningless language of 'equitable access to



sustainable development' has been inserted, which will compromise India's right to development."

India's Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said during the closing hours of the night-long negotiations on December 10, 2010 that "the BASIC countries [Brazil, South Africa, India and China] are very happy with the agreement. But the 'right to development' has already become a divisive issue in India, with many veteran climate negotiators accusing Ramesh of having given in to the industrialised countries. "Right now developing countries have stronger binds on their development than industrialised countries do," former diplomat and climate negotiator Chandrashekhar Dasgupta said at a recent post-Cancun review meeting organised in New Delhi by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).

For the cause of combating global warming, "it is impossible to say how adequate the agreement is," explained Dasgupta, "because the annexes (where the actual reduction commitments are listed) have been left blank. All we have are some indication from the Copenhagen Accord, though at least the US, Australia and Japan may reduce expectations, while Russia remains a question mark. The agreements are full of escape clauses. For example, Japan says it will reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 25% if non-Annex I (developing) countries do enough, and there is no definition of enough. The US offer of reducing emissions by 17% is conditional on climate legislation going through its Congress, and it is now clear that this won't happen in the foreseeable future. So it's a commitment given in vanishing ink."

Dasgupta agreed with CSE in saying "equitable access to sustainable development means absolutely nothing at all". He further added that "We have surrendered the principle of equity," something which India had been championing for years. It argues for equal per capita access to the global atmosphere.

Ramesh had been very anxious that Indians should not be seen as a deal breaker in Cancun, and had mentioned pressure from South Asian neighbours Nepal and Bangladesh, as well as from Brazil and South Africa, for making the moves he had made. But Dasgupta said "no deal is better than a bad deal," and other ex-members of the Indian negotiating team agreed.

But a deal, however weak, has been signed, and for Joint Secretary in the Environment Ministry R.R. Rashmi, the key issue now is how to maintain the differentiation in responsibilities between developed and developing countries without breaching the Cancun Agreements. "We're working on it," he said at the TERI meeting. "We have to give our ideas to the UNFCCC (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) by 20th March."

Rashmi was convinced that these ideas would lead to more protracted negotiations, "and there is not enough time to settle all this by Durban," the South African city where the next climate summit is scheduled towards the end of this year. "There are other major issues that have been unanswered," he added. "Is the agreement legally binding? This looks like a halfway house. These are not full decisions, not a full outcome. This has to be done by Durban, or maybe after."

While the war of words continues, the effects of global warming keep getting worse. More and more scientists are now saying climate change at least exacerbated the devastating floods in



Pakistan last year. The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology has just reported on a long-term study and predicts higher temperatures and higher but less reliable rainfall in South Asia. That should worry planners in India, where over 60% of the farmers rely on rainfed agriculture, and need to know more or less exactly when it is going to rain and how much.

The highlight of the agreements, which UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres called "a balanced package", was the creation of a Green Climate Fund to help poor countries move to green technologies and deal with the effects of climate change. These effects include reduced farm output, more frequent and severe droughts, floods and storms and rising sea levels. The fund is supposed to have US\$100 billion a year by 2020, though no one is sure how such a sum will be raised.

But without any new numbers on the extent to which rich countries commit to reduce their emissions after 2012, the Cancun Agreements effectively legitimised the voluntary pledges made in the Copenhagen Accord. The UN Environment Programme has recently calculated that these pledges will go only 60% of the way to reaching the goal of keeping global temperature rise within two degrees Celsius, another key aim of the Accord. While the goal has not been dropped, there is no clarity on how it will be reached, only a decision to keep talking about it in 2011.

There were small advances during this summit on how to help stop deforestation and transfer green technologies to poor countries, though one of the key demands made by China and India – to continue discussions on how to handle patented technologies – was dropped.

Another positive move was that the Cancun Agreements spoke of the need to build capacity to absorb green technologies in the poorest and most vulnerable countries, but again the details were left unclear. And, as observers of this negotiation process have been saying at least since the Bali summit in 2007, the devil is in the details.

**By Joydeep Gupta, a senior journalist based in New Delhi currently working for the website China Dialogue and Third Pole project**

## Bangladesh: "The greatest achievement of Cancun was the decision to establish the Green Climate Fund"

Exclusive Interview with Dr Hasan Mahmud, MP, State Minister, Ministry Of Environment And Forest (MOEF), Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

**Question:** What was Bangladesh expecting in Cancun? Are they happy with the results?

**Dr Hasan Mahmud:** The objective of the Cancun Climate Change Conference was to reach a global consensus on certain issues. The achievement of an individual country was not so important. I would say it was not frustrating. If you ask me whether I'm glad or not, I'd say, I'm not unhappy. For many days, we were trying to reach a global consensus to face several risk factors of climate change. At Cancun, at last we were able to reach a consensus on many issues, though not on all the things. For the first time the world community has taken a decision to establish "The Green Climate Fund". Bangladesh played the role of facilitator to form this fund. The COP Chair had assigned 10 Ministers of 10 countries to facilitate the ongoing discussions at Cancun. Among them she assigned the Environment Minister of Australia and I to facilitate the discussions on the finance issue. And the greatest achievement of the Cancun Conference was the decision to establish the "Green Climate Fund".

**Does Bangladesh expect considerable funding from the Green Climate Fund?**

Actually, disbursement of the funds from the Green Climate fund is yet to start. Till now the Green Climate fund has not been formed, we have taken a decision to form one. So, the process to establish this fund will just start. The question is how will the Green Climate Fund be accumulated, how will it be disbursed? For this, a 40 member interim committee is to be formed, where 25 members will be from the recipients of this fund, the developing world, and 15 members will be from donor countries. Among the 25 members from developing countries, the membership of Bangladesh is already confirmed. Now, how much share will Bangladesh get from this fund? In the Copenhagen Accord, it was mentioned how the developing countries especially the most vulnerable countries like Bangladesh will get preferential treatment, especially from the fast-start fund. And this was added due to our strong demand. In the Cancun agreements, the same thing has been included, how we will get money from funds like the Green Climate Fund.

And another thing is that a balanced allocation is mentioned about adaptation and mitigation. Adaptation has been prioritized here for the fast-start funding. Our main objective is adaptation, mitigation is not obligatory. So, the balanced allocation for adaptation and mitigation is a great achievement for us.

**What about Bangladesh's own adaptation fund? Is it operational? Do you have a framework for it?**

For the first time among developing countries, Bangladesh has made a climate strategy action plan. We've established a fund to combat the risks of climate change with our own resources. By this we've set a unique example for the whole world. Not we, the world community, are saying so. We have allocated seven billion taka (equivalent to 100 million US dollars) on the previous fiscal year and seven billion taka (equivalent to 100 million US dollars) for this fiscal year, to combat the risks of climate change.



Dr. Hasan Mahmud

According to trustee board's rule, we can't expend the whole money from this fund, 34% of this fund must be keep as a deposit in the bank, the rest of the money we will be able to expend. In the meantime, we've already approved many government projects, for the previous year it was five billion taka (equivalent to 71.42 million US dollars) and this year we're taking projects along with NGOs and those are approved on principle. The progress is satisfactory and we've approved many projects and works and already many of those projects have started. Amongst those approved projects, some important projects are: construction of dams in the coastal areas for land reclamation and forestation on the coastal embankments. The duration of these projects is two to three years and these are yet to be completed. After the completion of these projects, the world will realize that we are trying our best to combat the risks of climate change with our limited resources. We have another fund named the Climate Resilience Fund which was established with the help of our development partners. We're hoping to convene the meeting of the governing council in February. Our Prime Minister has already approved its operational manual.

**What about climate refugees in Bangladesh... how do you define a climate migrant and are there any plans for helping them?**

We're continuously persuading the world community to take the responsibility of the climate refugees, I mean climatically induced displaced persons, especially those countries that are responsible for this climate change... we want them to confess their responsibilities and take steps to rehabilitate them. From the very beginning we are saying this and keeping up the pressure. This was not reflected properly in the Copenhagen Accord, but the positive sign is the draft was made at Cancun where climate refugees were mentioned. Yet it's not in a proper shape, but our efforts will continue.

**What are the plans for COP 17 in Durban, South Africa?**

Our expectations for mitigation were not fulfilled at Cancun. The decision about the steps needed to keep the global temperature within 2 degree Celsius for the purpose of mitigation was not talked about more elaborately at the conference. We shall try hard to do this at the Durban Conference. You know Bangladesh has an official negotiation team comprising most of the senior climate change experts, there are also government officials. That team is working now on how triumph may be consolidated. The team is also working to fulfill the aim to strengthen the position of most vulnerable countries, and make louder the voices of the Least Developing Countries. Our aim is to transform the COP

decision taken at Cancun into a legally binding instrument. But that's not so easy. There are many unresolved issues like technology transfer, intellectual property rights. We could not reach any solution on the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment period. On behalf of Bangladesh, we proposed at Cancun that we

are not ready to face any uncertainty at Durban. We'll work for a political settlement of these issues before the Durban conference.

**By Abu Rushd Md. Ruhul Amin, the News Editor of Bangla Vision**

## Nepal: Where Climate Change is not a Priority

**Will the Cancun Agreements mean anything for a country so unstable that it has failed to spend its already available development budgets?**

Officials representing Nepal in the United Nations climate negotiations have joined their counterparts from many other countries in celebrating what they call the success of the recent Cancun conference. They say it saved the multilateral UN process despite all the shortcomings of the agreement.

But is the country as a whole interested at all? The question is pertinent because Nepal is reeling in a deadlocked peace process and unstable politics has hijacked everything else. The tension between the major ruling parties and the main opposition, the Maoists continues to persist. More so, after the recent departure of the United Nations' mission that had been monitoring the arms and armies of both sides.

It has been more than six months since the current caretaker Prime Minister, Madhab Kumar Nepal resigned and there have been 16 rounds of unsuccessful elections in the parliament for his successor. Amidst all these woes, climate hardly figures in the government's agenda.

The Environment Ministry was the last berth to get its minister when the coalition government was formed almost two years ago – none of the parties wanted it. It has therefore been difficult for the bureaucrats attending the UN negotiations.

In Cancun, for instance, when the negotiations were moving nowhere, Nepalese officials had high hopes on a side event they were organising to push their "mountain alliance initiative." They have been trying to forge an alliance amongst mountain countries because they believe mountain issues have not been properly raised and addressed in these meetings. But the side event turned out to be no more than a routine event because of poor preparation. The Ministry of Environment officials are now waiting for a new, stable government so that they can take the project ahead.

In a positive development, there was an agreement between the Norwegian government and the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) on the monitoring of global warming-induced melting of snow and ice in the Nepalese Himalayas.

At the Cancun meet, officials had also expected that they would get some clue about what happened to the fast-start finance the developed countries had promised to the least developed and developing countries while pushing for the controversial Copenhagen Accord in the Danish capital in 2009. "But we have no idea where the money is now," Environment Ministry Joint Secretary Purushottam Ghimire said during the Cancun meet. "They say it is there, but we wish we could see it."

What the officials could see in the Cancun Agreements were some developments on the adaptation front. "The establishment of the Cancun Adaptation Framework, adaptation committee, among other mechanisms for the implementation of our national adaptation plans is positive news," said Batu Krishna Uprety, another joint secretary at the Environment Ministry.

Developing and least developed countries including Nepal that have prepared their National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) complain that getting the adaptation money under the previous arrangement had been extremely difficult.

Another piece of good news for Nepal in Cancun was that it was re-elected as a member of the Least Developed Countries' Expert Group (LEG), an advisory body that helps deal with climate related technical issues of poor countries.

As a whole, however, the Cancun Agreements have been a mixed bag for Nepalese observers. "The legal outcome of the agreements is very confusing," says Raju Pandit Chhetri, an advocacy advisor with the United Mission to Nepal and a civil society representative. "We are not sure what form will it take – it could include one or two protocols or just the decisions of the Conference of Parties."

The uncertainty the Kyoto Protocol faces after Cancun has also become a concern for the country. There are many Nepalese who believe that the treaty signed in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, is the only legally binding document the world has. "And when we see that neither Copenhagen nor Cancun was able to produce any legally binding climate deal, Kyoto becomes more valuable for us," officials at the Environment Ministry say.

They also point out that while the Least Developed Countries like Nepal have always wanted the average global temperature rise to stay below 1.5 degrees from the industrial level, the Cancun Agreement have two degrees as the ceiling.

The Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of Forests (REDD) was another topic Nepal had pinned high hopes on during the Cancun meet. "But throughout the meet REDD did not make progress as expected because the major players in the negotiations had hijacked it," some officials with the Forest Ministry said. "They said there has to be agreement on all fronts or else there would be no agreement on isolated issues only."

When the overall agreement document came out, some Nepalese participants were positive that it would bring in more adaptation funds for the country believed to very vulnerable to climatic changes. The funds may well come. But the question is, will they mean anything for a country so unstable politically that it has failed to spend its already available development budgets?

**By Navin Singh Khadka, a BBC journalist**



## China: Learns its Lessons

After being blamed in Copenhagen for the failure of the climate talks, China played it safe in Cancun

Before setting off for Cancun, the mainstream Chinese media were gathered for a frank talk with NRDC, the National Reform and Development Committee, the governmental agency which is in charge of climate change negotiation. The head of the delegation, Xie Zhenhua, explained the government's position and called on support from the media. It was quite rare to see the NRDC seeking a talk with the media, especially in such a frank manner, on climate change issues.

It seems like big lessons have been learnt by the Chinese government, if one recalls what happened in Copenhagen a year ago.

On the last and the most dramatic two days of the Copenhagen Summit, the arrival of heads of state including Obama, Wen Jiabao and others complicated the dramas being played out on the negotiation table. Different versions of rumours were spread, especially on what happened during Obama's back-door meeting with the national heads of BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China). Obama released the news immediately after the meeting at a press conference however China chose to keep silent till the end.

This unwise move trapped China into the situation in which China was accused of being the major saboteur of the Copenhagen Summit. Fairly speaking, as a Danish reporter pointed out, Denmark's internal political struggles and its obvious preference for the US position should have been blamed for the failure of the conference, not to mention the role played by the US, the major emitter of the world, who refused to take real action in combating climate change.

After Copenhagen, the Chinese government decided to become more open and transparent, on both climate change actions which have been taken in China, and its position on climate change at the talks. Seeking both internal and foreign media's understanding was one step taken by the NRDC. More importantly, it learnt to be "de-focused".

The climate conference in Cancun was very different from Copenhagen and one did not see much in-fighting among countries, especially between China and the US. When asked a question like, "what do you think of the US's mitigation actions?" Su Wei, the chief negotiator of China, responded in quite a constrained way and even positively pointed out that the US is trying to improve and meet their emission targets. A year ago, in Copenhagen, while being asked the same, Su took the chance and vehemently criticized the US's inaction in emission reductions.

Experts began thinking that there might be a broader issue behind China and the US. "Su, by nature, is not a positive kind of person", observed Jake Schmitt, the director of climate change from the Nature Resource Defense Council, a US-based environmental action group.

So what happened, leading to this obvious improvement of the two countries relationship in Cancun? Remember when Todd Stern, the lead negotiator of the US criticized China for insisting rich nations take action on fixed targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions while China and other big emerging nations adopt only



Sui Wei, Chinese Chief Negotiator

voluntary domestic goals? Su had responded quickly by saying that the US is like "a pig preening itself in a mirror."

By handling the issue with the US with more subtlety, China is trying to avoid becoming the focus of attention again. A senior Chinese negotiator explained, "if a fight occurs again between the US and China, it would mean China has fallen into the trap of the US again."

In fact, after announcing its 2020 carbon intensity target one year ago, China adopted very rigid policies and local governments are trying to achieve the emission reduction targets under the lawful arrangement of China's "Five Year Plan". China's investment in renewable energy ranks the highest globally. All these measures and facts help China to gain much more leverage as well as confidence at the negotiating table.

In contrast, it has been obvious that the US is scaling down its climate policy, largely due to the change of the political climate in the US. Several months ago, the result coming out from the mid-term election of the US has changed the power balance in Congress. Now a group of climate skeptics are in position in the Congress, further reducing the chances of the Climate Bill of being passed.

So from the Chinese government's position, whatever emission target issues or transparency issues including MRV and ICA there might have been in Cancun, and these tricky issues seemingly obstructed the negotiation progress, they were actually bluffs from the US side, since there was nothing the US could offer on the table.

"As one of the largest emitters, a global agreement on emissions reduction would be pointless if it does not include the US," said the Indian Minister, Jairam Ramesh. So it is clear that while China could do more, it doesn't want to move ahead alone. It is also unfair for it to be expected to do so.

By Yuan Ying, who works for the Green News Department of the Southern Weekly in China

## Vietnam: Looking for Opportunities

Vietnam has had a good track record in protecting its forests and is well placed to secure more funding from both REDD and the Green Climate Fund

According to a climate report, in the next twenty years (from 2010 to 2030), Vietnam's overall vulnerability to climate change will rise from severe to acute. This prediction was cited from The Climate Vulnerability Monitor 2010: The State of the Climate Crisis Report, which had research findings on distinct vulnerabilities in 184 countries and all regions of the world. It is clear that Vietnam is one of the few countries most heavily affected by climate change.

That's why Vietnam's government would like to "drive towards a low-carbon economy". "Vietnam is trying to do something to limit greenhouse gas emissions at the national level", says Koos Neefjes, Senior Advisor on Climate Change at UNDP Vietnam.

However, it is not easy when international financial resources are scarce for poor countries. "Vietnam is not considered as the priority nation in spite of being affected by the negative impacts of climate change," said Koos Neefjes, a climate expert who speaks Vietnamese well.

To reach its target, the delegation had 15 ministerial bilateral meetings to share their negotiation viewpoints as well as to call for more funds in COP 16. According to Pham Van Tan, a Vietnamese negotiator, they talked with representatives of Japan, South Korea, Mexico, US, Holland, Australia, Poland, Norway and World Bank to "seek these nations' support for Vietnam's adaptation".

Vietnam understood that it did not have a big impact on COP 16 but it could make mutual concessions. To make its voice stronger, it persuaded other ASEAN countries to come up with a common view in the multilateral meetings. "The initiative has been agreed by representatives of ASEAN countries" said Tan. At the joint high-level segment of the UN climate change conference, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Cao Duc Phat stated that Vietnam, the current ASEAN chair in 2010, "believes that ASEAN should receive prioritized financial and technical support in responding to climate change".

Vietnam's delegation must have smiled when developed countries agreed to pay developing countries US \$100 million per annum by 2020 to adapt to climate change and develop green technology. It is really a significant agreement for Vietnam. Its government should "research to prepare for its legal system" and then "we can access foreign support as soon as there are official international commitments" explained Tran Hong Ha, the Deputy Head of Vietnam's delegation at COP 16.

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) was also one of Vietnam's biggest concerns in Cancun, Mexico because the government considers forest development as the right way to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and also reduce deforestation. That's why Dr Phat, who is the leader of the UN-REDD Vietnam programme came to Cancun. His appearance was meaningful because most of the Vietnamese delegations at the previous climate summits were normally led by leaders of the Ministry of Nature Resources and Environment.

REDD+ is often mentioned in Vietnam's activities at COP 16. Even in the national statement at the joint high-level segment of the UN



climate change conference, it was listed as one of the four guiding principles. "An agreement on REDD+ mechanisms and its effective implementation is critical for emissions mitigation by countries", said the fifty-seven-year-old minister. Vietnam has been lucky to raise more funds for its forest development from UN-REDD programmes. Several ideas for new projects under the latest climate commitment have been submitted to the government. "We suggested priority projects that ministries and offices and local provinces should focus on", said Ha, the Deputy Minister of Nature Resources and Environment. They should be focused on "finance systems and activities that would limit deforestation and illegal logging".

In fact, Vietnam has had a lot of bilateral meetings promoting its ideas. And some had good results. The Southeast Asian country got the biggest financial support for the phase two of its UN-REDD pilot project. "Norway committed to fund US\$ 100 million for our phase two... of which a part is directly supported for the local community," said Dr Cao Duc Phat, Vietnam's Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

The new commitment is 20 times bigger than the total fund for the phase one (US\$4.38 million). However, it's not the final target. "We would like to call for US\$ 500 million" said Dr Nguyen Ba Ngai, Deputy Director of Vietnam's Directorate of Forestry. And it is not too ambitious a goal since the developing nation has the support of big donors and leading forest experts. "Vietnam is the best country to protect forests" said Norway's Minister of Environment and Development, Erik Solheim at the Cancun high level event on agriculture, food security and soil carbon. "Vietnam is a lesson and let's learn from Vietnam".

The Director of the UN Forum on Forests, Jan McAlpine, also welcomed Vietnam's efforts and considered it a "taste of innovation". This year, the only country that finished the phase one of the UN-REDD pilot projects with the funds from Norway will host two important meetings on REDD. "Next March, Vietnam will host the policy Board Meeting of the UN-REDD and the Participants Committee Meeting of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCDF)", said Dr Cao, who was in Cancun for only two days. The experts and donors will then discuss the finance mechanism of phase two. The World Bank, UN and big donors will also be present and it's a good opportunity for Vietnamese officials to introduce these new projects to international donors. They may also help Vietnam to access the Green Climate Fund.

By Binh Tran, the online editor of the climate change section of Hanoi Radio and Television

