

Rich nations plot Kyoto's end

The developing countries, individually and through the G77 and China, are defending their interests by putting their own proposals in the drafts of the documents to be adopted at the Copenhagen conference in December. It is a huge battle that the countries are engaged in, and the differences between them are large.

MARTIN KHOR

VERY recently there were three natural disasters in the Asian region: massive floods in Manila, a tsunami in Samoa and the earthquake claiming over a thousand lives in Sumatra.

It was a fitting backdrop to the United Nations climate negotiations that started on September 28 in Bangkok, a reminder that natural disasters, some caused by climate change, are becoming more common and devastating.

Inside the UN's spacious convention halls, the talks were also stormy.

The developed countries delivered one unpleasant surprise after another, leaving the developing countries' delegations in shock as to the audacity and aggressiveness of the onslaught.

It became clear that most developed countries are unwilling or unable to do their fair share in cutting greenhouse gas emissions. And they are pushing the burden and potential blame on to the developing countries, against the rules of the Climate Convention and its Kyoto Protocol.

Worse, it is also now apparent that the rich countries are preparing to ditch the Kyoto Protocol itself, an agreement that

took many years to build, and that is the cornerstone for committing countries to cut their emissions, collectively and individually.

If that happens, it would be a calamity, as there may be nothing to replace it, at least for some time. Meanwhile, emissions are continuing, the world's temperature will continue to rise and the effects will multiply.

What an irony that this vanishing of commitment is coming so soon after climate change jumped to the top of the global agenda just one or two years ago, and when the latest scientific data daily inform us that the situation is worse than that reported just two years ago by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The Bangkok talks are on two tracks: negotiations on emission reduction targets of developed countries from 2013 to possibly 2020 under the Kyoto Protocol, and long-term cooperative action (LCA).

The pledges by developed countries so far are miserably low. The IPCC has estimated that they have to cut their emissions by 25 per cent to 40 per cent by 2020 (compared to 1990 levels).

Developing countries are calling for an aggregate cut of at least 40 per cent. The

combined cut from national pledges made by these countries come up to only 16 per cent to 23 per cent (UNFCCC secretariat estimate, excluding the US) or 11 per cent to 18 per cent (including the US, as estimated by the small island states).

The Chair of the Kyoto Protocol group, John Ashe, on October 2, gave a caustic analysis of the situation. Referring to the gap between the developed countries' pledges and the required cuts, he said, "we will be a laughing stock come December 18" (the last day of the Copenhagen Climate Conference) if the gap is not closed.

The small island states said that the low pledges were consistent with a 3-degree temperature rise or worse, which would have catastrophic consequences. It is widely accepted that temperature rise must be limited to 2 degrees above the pre-industrial level, and recent data indicate 1.5 degrees is more accurate, to avoid a disaster.

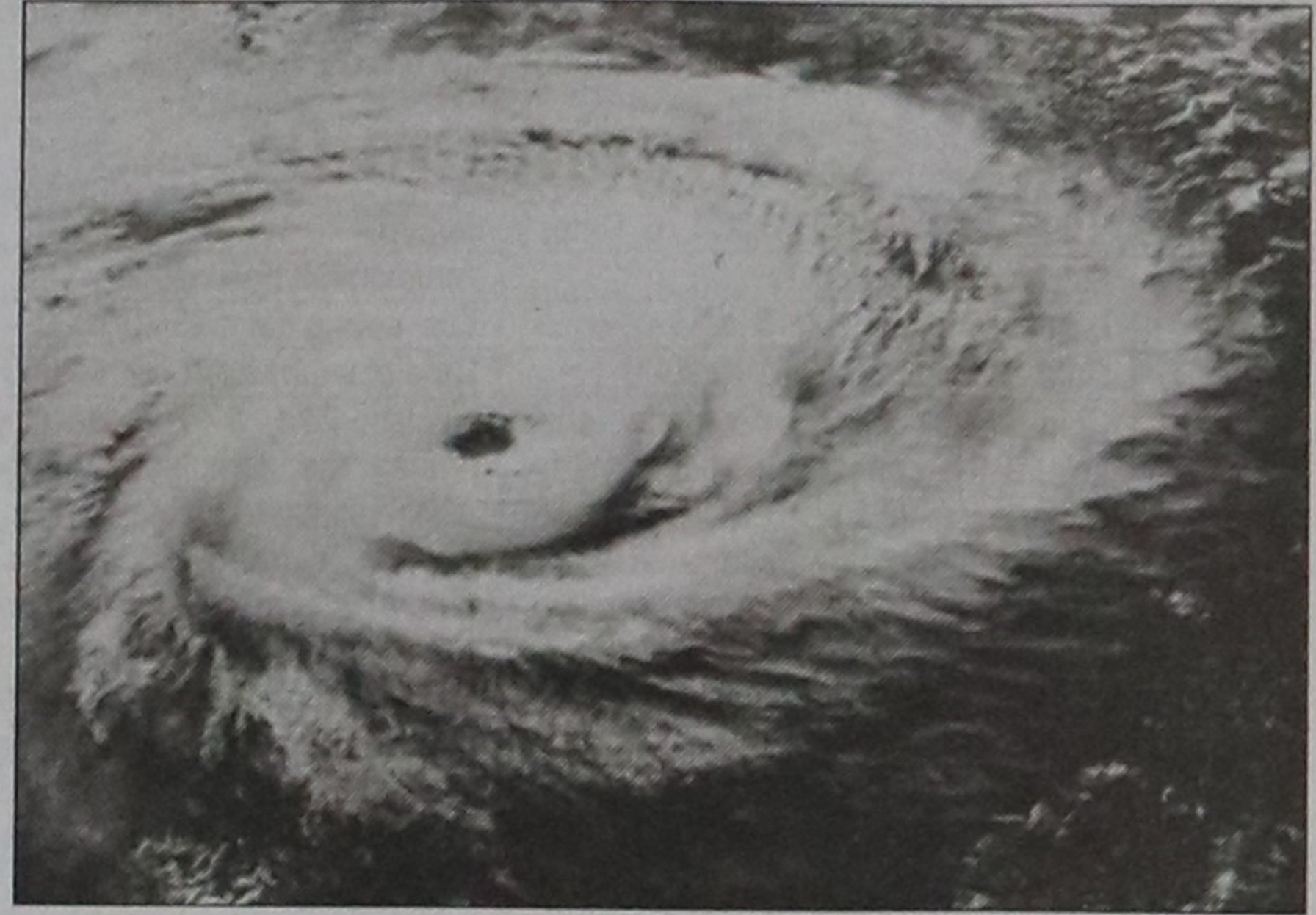
China's Ambassador Yu said in the meeting's stock-taking exercise, "unfortunately there is hardly any stock to take". Unless there is political will, no amount of negotiations will move us ahead. It accused some parties of engaging in a "concerted effort to undermine, challenge, and destroy the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, that is the foundation for international cooperation on climate change".

That principle recognises that developed countries are responsible for most of the carbon dioxide pumped into the atmosphere and they should take the lead in emissions reduction as well as assist developing countries through finance and technology to also take actions.

Last week, the developed countries took the following initiatives that took the

developing countries by surprise:

- They indicated doing away with the Kyoto Protocol (which obliges developed countries to bind emission-reduction targets in a treaty) by advocating a new agreement. The US, which is not a KP member, wants only to have a national target without binding it to a global treaty. It appears to have won over many other developed countries.
- They seem to be refusing to have a second commitment period under the KP, after the first period expires in 2012. In the first period, the countries agreed to cut their combined emissions by 5 per cent (from 1990 to 2012). The developing countries want a second period in which the rich countries cut by at least 40 per cent (in 2020 compared to 1990).
- They are stressing that developing countries have "common" responsibilities, a code for pulling in the developing countries into emission-reduction obligations, while downplaying the "differentiated" responsibilities that recognise that the developing countries have had little role in the historic emissions and need space for economic development.
- While the climate convention obliges developed countries to meet the additional costs of developing countries' actions to combat climate change, the developed countries are now insisting that developing countries also contribute to global public funds.
- They are attempting to split the developing countries' unity by creating new categories such as "advanced developing countries" (which are to be subjected to emission-reduction disciplines, and get little global public



funds) and "especially vulnerable countries" (which are to be promised global funding). The definitions and criteria of who is advanced or who is vulnerable are arbitrary and have not been agreed to.

Some key developed countries (the US and France) are preparing to use trade protectionism in the name of climate change to block exports from developing countries through financial charges or tariffs, on the ground that the countries are not doing enough to reduce their emissions.

The developing countries are dismayed by these initiatives, so soon after so many political leaders made stirring speeches and gave firm-sounding pledges to cooperate to fight climate change at the UN Climate Summit in New

York on September 22. The developing countries, individually and through the G77 and China, are defending their interests by putting their own proposals in the drafts of the documents to be adopted at the Copenhagen conference in December.

It is a huge battle that the countries are engaged in, and the differences between them are large. There are only 10 negotiating days left before the Copenhagen conference in December. Five of these will be in this coming week, and another five in November in Barcelona. It is anybody's guess whether Copenhagen can still be a success or will mark a low point in climate politics.

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Poor women's plight

The sorrows, tragedies and sufferings of millions of women need to be brought in front of the world leaders to help save Bangladesh and its people from the long term problems of climate change. In developing countries, because of women's marginalized status and dependence on local natural resources, their domestic burdens are doubly increased and they feel an even greater burden of climate change.

PARVEZ BABUL

HISTORICALLY, women have been the key to food security. But they are not secure; especially poor women die many times before their death. They receive less, but have no rights to demand more. They say less, but are bound to listen more. They eat less, but must produce more to feed others. If we analyze the lives of poor women, we become amazed at how they survive.

Nazma (not her real name), a 32-year-old woman from Patuakhali, lost her house and belongings in cyclone Sidr, which hit in November 2007. Nazma was married at the age of 14 to a 30-year-old day labourer. Nazma had 2 children, but was abandoned by her husband five years ago due to her ultimate failure to pay extra dowry. He married another woman and now lives in the town of Patuakhali, pulling a rickshaw. Nazma's parents, brother and sister died in the 1991 severe cyclone. So, Nazma has no one from whom to seek

any support.

Cyclone Sidr took away 3000 lives, destroyed more than one million households, and snatched livelihoods of millions of people. Before standing up and bracing the loss, the people of the coastal belt faced another cyclone, Aila, in May 2009. Aila pushed them further back with considerable loss of lives and property. Nazma's two malnourished children survived Sidr and Aila, but then she had nothing to feed them.

Nazma received some relief material, enough to last her a few days, but after that, she found no way to save the lives of her children and herself. So Nazma and her children, like many other victims, begged a launch supervisor to give her free tickets to Dhaka. She had to digest much slang from the launch authority. After arriving in Dhaka, Nazma and her children took shelter at Sadarghat launch terminal and passed two days without having any food, and only receiving water from a local restaurant. She looked for a

housemaid's job, but people refused to appoint her, as they did not know her. On the third night, two people came to Nazma and proposed to give her a 'good job'.

Nazma agreed and went with one man—the other looked after her children until she returned. Taking her to a room, the man forced her to have sex with him, paid her just Tk.20, and abandoned her. Nazma cried silently and went to reclaim her children, but she lost her way and could not find them. She cried loudly and searched for them everywhere, but she still could not find them anywhere. Nazma became very tired searching for the children, passing her time in the city without a job, and begging to survive. After ten days, she somehow returned home to her village with the hope that maybe her children had returned there, but they were not.

In her village, she could not find work or food, but took shelter at a landlord's verandah to stay the night. Sidr and Aila affected many people in her area, so thousands of poor women and children, like Nazma and her lost children, were looking for help. There was profound regret, and wailing among many people, but too little help.

Bangladesh experiences floods, drought, cyclones and disaster more frequently now, due to climate change. Scientists forecast a further increase in natural calamities in the future. This is why we need to explore the vulnerability

of poor women and linkages between gender and climate change issues, particularly in relation to enhancing women's capacities to address climate change to save millions of women like Nazma and her children.

According to the World Health Organization (Who), public health depends on safe drinking water, sufficient food, secure shelter, and good social conditions. Climate change is likely to affect all of these. Public health services and high living standards protect some populations from specific impacts; however, the health effects of a rapidly changing climate are likely to be overwhelmingly negative, particularly in the poorest communities. Among these effects:

- Rising temperatures and variable precipitation are likely to decrease the production of staple foods in many of the poorest regions, increasing risks of malnutrition.
- Rising sea levels increase the risk of coastal flooding, and may necessitate population displacement. More than half of the world's population now lives within 60 km of the sea. One of the most vulnerable regions is the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta of Bangladesh.

One of the participants of the Third World Climate Conference (WCC-3), organized by the World Meteorological Organization (Wmo) and held from August 31 to September 4, 2009 in Geneva, Switzerland, was our Prime

Minister. The theme of the conference was Climate Prediction and Information for Decision-making. Topics covered by this climate conference included the application of climate prediction and information on societal problems to enable better adaptation to climate variability. We need better climate information for a better future.

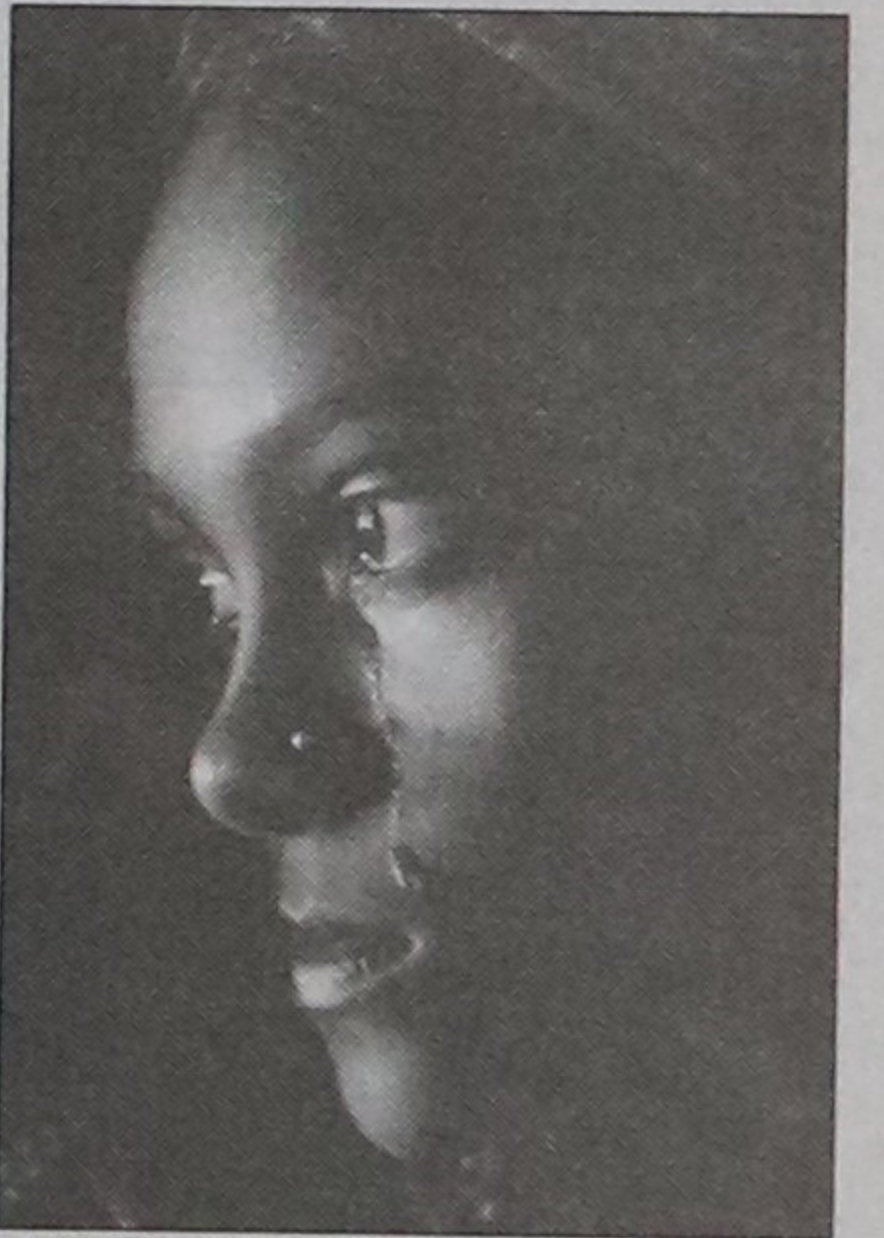
The sorrows, tragedies and sufferings of millions of women like Nazma need to be brought in front of world leaders to help save Bangladesh and its people from the long-term problems of climate change. The United Nations secretary general said, "Climate change poses at least as big a threat to the world as war. For that reason, we have a duty to the vulnerable people who contribute least to the problem, but experience its impacts most severely. And we have a responsibility to succeeding generations. We also have a historical obligation to successfully transit to a low-carbon global economy."

In developing countries, because of women's marginalized status and dependence on local natural resources, their domestic burdens are doubly increased; they feel an even greater burden of climate change. They are also underrepresented in decision-making about climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and most critically, discussions and decisions about adaptation and mitigation.

So, let us empower our destitute and

poor women like Nazma. Their contributions through growing crops, planting trees, producing homestead food will help the country ensure food and nutritional security, and approach climate change efforts with more than just hope and a begging bowl. The landless, poor women like Nazma are in a desperate plight, having lost all their belongings. So, the duty of national and international leaders should be to save their lives, because they, as human beings, have equal rights to stay alive, like others.

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TIPAIMUKH DAM

Adverse impacts on economy and environment

Considering the strong outcry and protests, from the environmental groups and the knowledgeable people of civil societies, both in India itself and Bangladesh, for cogent reasons that the dam not being helpful in any way, for Bangladesh, our government may request our friendly neighbour to reconsider its construction.

PROF. MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN TARAFDAR

IT is widely recognised that all dams in the world have adverse impacts, down stream, at dam site and also up stream. Larger the dam harsher and deeper is the problem. Obviously for this is mandatory requirement of EIA for a dam project, India prepared an EIA for Tipaimukh Dam covering a large area up to the border with Bangladesh. As per international convention for common drainage basin, EIA should be prepared for both the upstream and downstream riparians and damages to economy and environment should be quantified both in physical and monetary terms in order to ascertain the cost of mitigation and apportion it between the disputing parties. Generally, as per environmental rule "Polluters Pay" should be applied.

Since the EIA prepared by India excluded the lower riparian, an independent EIA should be mandatorily conducted for possible affected areas of Bangladesh. This will show, among others things, the adverse impacts on economy and environment which are apprehended irrespective of diversion or

no diversion of water for irrigation in India.

Some less treaded areas of numerous adverse impacts such as release of clear water from the dam in the river channels downstream is no less damaging. The released water lacks sediment which affects soil-fertility, agriculture and fishery. Recycling of released water from dam back to reservoir in the desperate drought period and continuing filling of reservoir in case the reservoir was over designed are not compatible with available runoff from the catchments. During monsoon dam and spillway release causes high flood, submerging even higher lands. Low flow during lean period adversely affects irrigation, agriculture and navigation; causes deposition of siltment for slack water which raises bed level of river channels that accentuate higher flood. Agreement for fair and equitable sharing of water and its validity and tenure should be compatible with the long life of the dam transcending say, half a dozen of generations.

Inflow and reservoir impoundment

Generally the design of reservoir capac-

ity of a dam is based upon the average annual runoff at the dam site from the catchments. If we have discharge reports and data, we can check capacity of the reservoir and other components of the dam, spillways, outlets etc. If we have required data of rainfall, discharge etc we can find out what kind Tipaimukh dam is, whether the dam is designed compatible with annual flow and losses and demand of water for hydropower, irrigation, water supply etc or it is over-designed.

A reservoir is designed on annual inflow and demand. Its implication is that in dry season, average low flow in India, as it is this year, reported to be the lowest in 133 years of records, may create crisis in augmenting the impoundment to full capacity on an annual basis. It may be repeated and prolonged in enhanced intensity, when the dam authority may resort to conserve and augment every drop of water released from the dam and within the reservoir. This will be done by recycling the turbine release pumped back upstream to the reservoir. This will deprive the channels downstream.

A kind of crisis will ensue during the rainless dry season as supply may fall short of demand and "mining" of water in the reservoir will take place to the detriment of Bangladesh. Hot, dry and hostile climate will invite dreaded effect with concomitant adverse impact and damage to its economy and environment.

High and low flows and adverse impacts

High flow: We learnt that there would be no barrage or any form of diversion

structure for irrigation in India, we can take that the entire water after flowing over the turbines, would flow unobstructed to Bangladesh. During high monsoon the water level will further rise for the additional influx of flow from the spillways and outlets which remain open for ensuring safety of the dam. This high flood level in the lower riparian is apprehended to occur irrespective of irrigation or no irrigation in India. Erstwhile high lands will be flooded.

Low flow—whether there is irrigation or no irrigation in India, low flow will affect agriculture and fishery, navigation, create pollution and a state of drought and environmental degradation during the dry season. Low flow with slack water will enhance deposition of sediment and raise river bed level, causing snags in navigation.

Water-sharing: Some suggestions

Any agreement on water sharing on an equitable and fair basis for rivers sharing common drainage basin should be long-ranged, depending on circumstances, particularly on the life of the project/structure in question. Like the Tipaimukh dam with modern design and a strong structure may have a life of 100 years or more outliving and transcending five to six generations of people. Agreement should be such that it can successfully face the test of time within its tenure and currency. An equitable and fair share of water that will flow to Bangladesh during low flow season should not fall below an agreed rate of flow, clearly stated in cusecs (cubic feet per second) or cumecs (cubic

meters per second).

As no agreement is sacrosanct, there should be provision for modification or any relevant major change in the document which suits the mutual interest of the two participating parties as and when the situation necessitates it. In case of serious disagreement, the case may be referred to an impartial and expert arbitrator whose verdict would be deemed binding on the disputing parties.

International experience

Now a days high large dams are rarely built and vehemently discouraged in USA, perhaps also in EU countries. Protests from the Green Groups are formidable. A fully designed large hydroelectric dam on Hadeja Jama-are river, could not see the light of the day as government was forced to abandon the construction for the protests of the environmental groups in Nigeria in early nineties. Large-dams are now built only in the Third World developing countries, obviously prioritizing economy over environment. Reportedly, some dams are being broken for flow if severs in USA.

China ranks first in the number of dams (still building in full swing and aggressively). India (still going on) second and USA third (no more dam). Dams in China, India and USA number three to five thousand in each country. China is unilaterally building Mega Dams on the Brahmaputra and Mekong rivers within its territory with apprehension of seriously jeopardizing economic activities and creating monumental environmen-

tal crisis in India and Bangladesh, and Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam in South, and South East Asia, respectively. China appears to have an insatiable hunger for dams and a parched desert thirst for dam waters.

Conclusion

Considering the strong outcry and protests, from the environmental groups and the knowledgeable people of civil societies, both in India itself and Bangladesh, for cogent reasons that the dam not being helpful in any way, for Bangladesh, our government may request our friendly neighbour, India, to reconsider, better stop its construction.

Our request would be very much in the with the recent assertion and assurance pronounced by the Prime Minister of India himself and two other leaders, like India's External Affairs and Power Ministers that "India will not do anything that harms Bangladesh".

Pertinent data and information, collected by the Bangladesh parliamentary delegation who visited India recently are now being analyzed and studied by an expert committee set up at the instance of the Prime Minister. It is expected to come up with much-awaited plausible recommendations and guideline which can help the government arrive at a prudent decision for considering the next appropriate move to deal with the intricately complex and expressly urgent problem.

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