

From Barcelona to Copenhagen: Is there any hope left? (Part-1)

A new but important trend in climate diplomacy has been evident for the last few months. True to Morgantheu's "power politics," emission power tends to rule the game, where the impacting countries call the shots and the impacted ones are ignored. This is evident from the flurry of negotiations held beyond the UNFCCC process.

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THE last of the five rounds of negotiations on climate change since Cop-14 in December 2008 ended in November in Barcelona. The outcome differs in no substantive manner from the previous rounds. Perhaps Barcelona witnessed the highest number of non-papers, which are in-session documents issued informally. The decision to carry some of these non-papers to Copenhagen for consideration, without adopting any substantive decision is symptomatic of lack of any progress. The expectation is a new deal, particularly on mitigating climate change. Judging by the outcomes of the eight negotiations since adoption of the Bali Action Plan in December 2007, the prospect looks bleak.

What are the issues that still hold us back? Why is there no substantive progress? What is the likely outcome at Copenhagen? What should Bangladesh's strategy be?

As the deadlock continues, the impacts of climate change continue. New scientific studies go even beyond the IPCC AR4 estimates on temperature rise and the consequent impacts on the most vulnerable countries (MVCs). A map released by the UK Met Office Hadley Centre shows significant temperature rises on land, with the hottest days of the year in many highly populated areas being between 6 and 12 degrees C higher than they are now. It also shows that, by 2050, 70 million people in Bangladesh could be affected by floods and 8 million by drought, with increasingly intense cyclones. Against this disquieting future, the trends in emissions by the industrial countries present a contrasting picture: only few countries have reduced their emissions compared to 1990 level.

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"power politics," emission power tends to rule the game, where the impacting countries call the shots and the impacted ones are ignored. This is evident from the flurry of negotiations held beyond the UNFCCC process. The bilateral 5-year cooperation agreement on climate change between China and India is a notable event. There is nothing wrong in these multi-level negotiations, but when they tend to undermine the main global forum, there is a real problem. Where do the MVCs fit in the equation?

The main issues are:

- The most intractable issue is a clear emission reduction target from industrial countries. The EU is committed to keep the rise in temperature within 20C and reduce emission by at least 20% compared to the 1990 level. The Boxer-Kerry Bill at the US Senate proposes to reduce US GHG emissions by 20% by 2020 compared to the 2005 level. This is higher than the proposed reduction in the Waxman-Markey Bill that was passed in the House of Representatives few months ago. Though the US continues to remain the lone holdout of the Kyoto Protocol, President Obama expressed intention to lead climate diplomacy by example, but his superb oratory may not have an easy pass over the Senate far beyond Copenhagen!
- What will the major developing countries do to limit the growth of their emissions compared to the business-as-usual scenario (BAU)? The pressure from industrial countries would have moral strength had they reduced their emissions as promised under the Protocol. There are lots of differences even within the G77. China promised to reduce carbon intensity of its economy by a "notable margin" by 2020. Brazil is considering a freeze of its emissions to 2005 level by 2020. Indonesia pledged to cut emissions by 20% by 2020 from the BAU levels.



How much more can the earth take?

India's position is not yet clear. A confidential letter from the environment minister to the prime minister contains hints of a shift in India's position. The environment minister reportedly advocates for assuming a legally binding target in emission reduction, arguing that India does not want to be seen as a "deal breaker" and as acquiescing with the industrial countries. A Chinese delegate at the AWG-KP session in Bonn in June this year refused to accept the polluter-pays-principle (PPP). However, the meaning of Article 3.1 of the Convention -- the principle of "equity and common but differentiated responsibility based on respective capabilities" -- is the PPP. How come China negates this? It seems that the shift away from the Convention process was engendered by mutual understanding between major polluters of both the industrial and the developing countries. So, despite the walk-out of the 51 African countries in Barcelona, the positions of the key players did not change because the G77 is being undercut from within.

- Will the mitigation regime continue to be an extension of the Kyoto Protocol, with new emission reduction commitments by the industrial countries, or should it be packaged under a new framework covering both the developed and developing countries? This

framework, proposed by Australia in Bangkok, is supported by the US, Japan and the EU, while the G77, led by Africa, opposes such an approach as it blurs the differentiation of the responsibilities of addressing climate change between the developed and developing countries.

- The time frame, particularly of a mid-term target, for emission reduction commitment is another unresolved issue. The EU and the G77 countries are strong supporters of such a commitment by 2020, while the umbrella group led by the US tends to shelve such mid-term commitments and focuses on targets of 50% by 2050. But the just-adopted APEC Declaration shows a backing away even from this long-term commitment. The politics behind pushing binding commitments far into the future seems to be the fact that the share of G77 countries' emissions, already half of the global total, by that time will exceed that of the developed countries. So the underlying rationale is that the burden will then fall more on the G77 group. Another implicit idea behind shelving of the commitment date to 2050 is that low carbon technology will be available on a massive and affordable scale in developing countries, where emission reduction is and will remain lot cheaper.
- Financing of the mitigation and adap-

tation measures is another most debated issue. This agenda includes at least 4 sub-issues: i) the size of the pot, ii) the source of the funds, iii) the mechanism of fund management, and iv) distribution of the available money. Till date, the money disbursed for addressing climate change amounts to less than \$1 billion, against a pledge of about \$18 billion during the last seven years. From that amount, \$70 million has been diverted to the LDCs. So, the amount pledged falls far short of the UNFCCC estimated need of \$200 billion. The EU has come up with a figure of \$100 billion (\$150 billion) as the yearly need from 2020, in which public financing is likely to be \$22-50 billion. The other sources proposed are emissions trading, auctioning off AAUs, levy from joint implementation and emissions trading, aviation and shipping, and co-financing by developing countries. How much the EU will contribute or how its share will be distributed among its members has not yet been decided. The Mexican proposal of creating a multilateral climate change fund based on population, emission level and capability is being widely discussed. There are disagreements regarding the management of available funds. The industrial countries want to continue with the GEF model, where voting is weighted against contribution. But the developing countries want a management frame under the control of the COP. However, for an interim period, it may be along the lines of the Adaptation Fund management, where the majority of board members come from their side. Next, how to distribute the funds available among the more than 130 G77 countries? EU proposed a high-level body to review the process. For the last few years, the Bangladesh delegation has been insisting on developing a vulnerability index, with criteria agreed by a COP-designated panel of scientists. This index could guide the distribution of funds. The Germans have developed such an index, where Bangladesh figures among the world's 10 MVCs. During the Bonn negotiations, which this author attended, the GEF expressed its willingness to develop such an index.

- Another interesting development relates to the proposal of establishing

new funds. There are already 2 funds - LDC Fund and a Special Climate Change Fund -- under the Convention and the Adaptation Fund under the Protocol. The prime minister of Bangladesh, a very active spokesperson of the MVCs, proposed establishment of a new fund for this group. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, at the APEC meeting, proposed establishment of a global climate fund for mitigation and adaptation. In Barcelona, Japan proposed establishment of 3 funds: i) a climate change fund for implementing mitigation and adaptation measures, ii) an adaptation fund for the MVCs, and iii) a green fund for facilitating an enabling environment and capacity building.

Conclusion: There may not be any ground for hope of a substantive deal at Copenhagen. There might be some decisions on commitment of funding, REDD agenda, adaptation measures including insurance and capacity building, etc. A pessimistic note has already been sounded by the UN secretary general, and even by the most vocal leader of climate diplomacy, the British PM. Though Mr. Brown says that "failure would be unforgivable," the key player -- the US -- is not likely to come up with any reduction commitment at Copenhagen, as the passage of the Senate Bill will take at least few months.

The last nail in the coffin was added by the just-concluded APEC summit. Without the US, the reduction commitment covers only about 30% of global GHG emissions. Mr. Obama has committed to go to Copenhagen, along with more than 50 leaders. Looking at the latest developments, particularly of the discussions beyond the Convention process, it seems that there is likely to be just a "political deal," a framework understanding, and not a "legally-binding treaty" at all, in Copenhagen.

What the content of this political deal will be depends on the intense diplomacy and on-the-spot bargaining among the assembled leaders. In this situation, even a substantive political deal could have been a step forward, since it could be fleshed out in COP15 or at the next COP. In the meantime, the Bangladesh delegation must do its home-work before boarding the flight to Copenhagen.

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Pain falls, drop by drop

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THERE was a fundamental decency in Nurul Islam. And it was there because of the dignity, the sense of self-esteem, which defined his personality. He was a politician in the very real sense of the meaning, which is as much as to say that he was a reminder of the values we once lived by. As one of the foremost of spokesmen for the toiling classes, he was second to none. There was the authoritative about him. There was nothing of the authoritarian you could spot in his long career in the political circuit. He was a bold individual to whom the idea of power was essentially the idea of trust. Politics, in that very broad way of looking at it, was a responsibility that brought the state and its citizens together, through the formulation of social welfare programmes and then pushing them on to fulfillment. It was never about seeking or winning office.

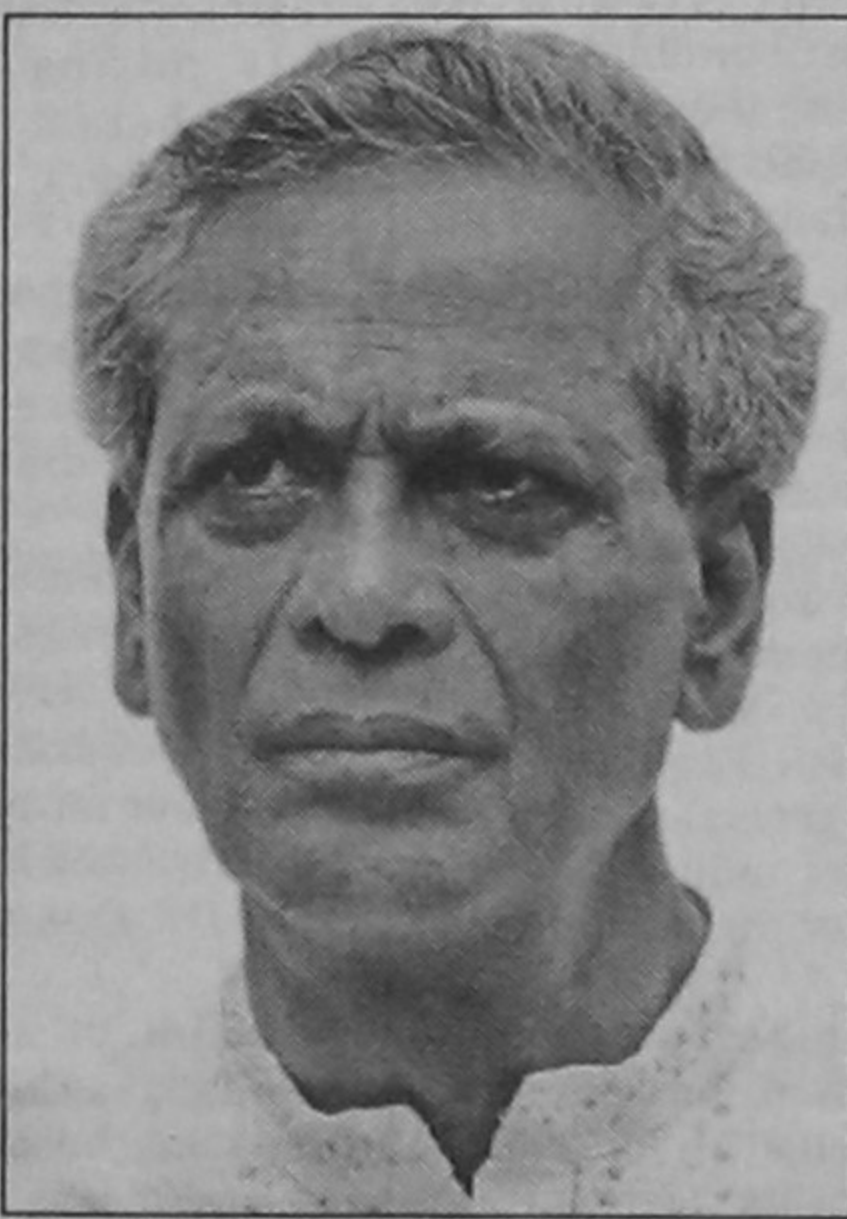
That was the overall principle on which Nurul Islam, as president of the Gonothon Party and as working classes' activist, conducted his life and his career. And that principle led him, in the as yet unforeseen tragic final phase of his life, into making himself part of the secular political grouping which aimed to bring about qualitative change in Bangladesh's politics. As a nominee of the grand alliance for the Jatiya Sangsad at the December 2008 general elections, he was clearly headed for victory. He was part of a band of men and women who meant to recover and restore the respect for politics that had been lost over the years. In Nurul Islam, you saw a personification of that goal. He would have injected energy, through an employment of intellect, into parliamentary politics. He would, like so many others of his kind, have informed the world beyond our frontiers of our ability and our readiness to remember the ideals that once had led us to freedom. He would, in

coruscating manner, have been our window of sophistication to the world. He was a good man; and we looked forward to his triumph, the better to take us a little closer to the heights we had for decades tried scaling.

And it was at that precise point that he was cut down. It was a fire in his home that took, first, the life of his young son and then, in barely thirty-six hours, his own. That was a year ago. Even as the nation prepared to usher in a fresh new era in democratic governance, even as citizens peered into what they believed was a new dawn, Nurul Islam died in a blaze that no one has been able to explain to our satisfaction. Yes, there have been all the guesswork and all the putative attempts at arriving at the truth. Inquiries have been undertaken and investigations have been launched to unearth the 'mystery', as many would like to call it, behind Islam's death and that of his son. The tragedy, like so many other sadnesses we have been confronted with in this unfortunate country,

is that precious little headway has been made in digging into the roots of the deaths. Various thoughts, some outlandish and others untenable, have been proffered to explain, or explain away, the tragedy. A wire in the room caught fire; something went wrong with the refrigerator. But that locking of the room from outside? Was that not a sign of sabotage, of murder premeditated, of conspiracy at work? These are questions the investigating agencies have not answered or have chosen to ignore. That Nurul Islam had telephonic threats coming his way in the days immediately before that fire burned him and burned a dream into ashes has not been looked into.

A year on, therefore, life goes on, for those who choose not to care, as it always has. Only Nurul Islam and his son have gone missing, individuals today remembered merely as casualties in a tragic occurrence caused by 'mysterious' circumstances. That is not decency. It is



Nurul Islam

not any enhancement of our reputation as a people we come by when we choose to push Nurul Islam and his politics into

the wilderness that is our voluntary succumbing to amnesia.

A year on, and despite the conscious attempt to forget, despite the urge for life to go on in the usual scheme of things, we wait for justice to be done, to be seen to be done, in the case of a dead, once energizing Nurul Islam versus a society gone insensitive, a bureaucracy rendered meaningless through inaction. Nurul Islam, because of the values he symbolized, remains our claim on all the good we have kept believing in, despite all those stumbles along the way.

And that is reason why we need to know who took the life out of him, out of his child. Until we do, pain will fall, drop by drop, on us all --- until it becomes overwhelming. Until it consumes us. Nurul Islam's perturbed spirit needs to rest.

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US, China could lead way to post-Kyoto deal

The United States and China, the world's two largest emitters of greenhouse gas, have recently announced their medium-term targets for CO2 emission reductions. We hope their commitments will add momentum to the drafting of a fair framework to succeed the Kyoto Protocol, which expires at the end of 2012.

EDITORIAL DESK, The Yomiuri Shimbun

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succeed the Kyoto Protocol, which expires at the end of 2012.

The United States has set itself a target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent from 2005 levels by 2020. US targets also include a 30 percent reduction by 2025, 42 percent by 2030 and 83 percent by 2050.

However, a 17 percent cut from 2005

levels actually represents a reduction of just a few percent from 1990 levels. This contrasts sharply with the target set by the administration of Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, which aims to curb this nation's emissions by 25 percent from 1990 levels. The US targets are very realistic, as restoring the economy is currently Washington's top priority.

China emissions could grow

Meanwhile, China, which has recently surpassed the United States to become the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter, has announced it will reduce carbon dioxide emissions per unit of gross domestic product by 40 percent to 45 percent compared with 2005 levels by 2020.

The Chinese target of cutting emissions per unit of GDP is different from

those adopted by Japan and the United States, which aim for reductions in total emissions volume. Under this approach, China would be allowed to emit more CO2 if its GDP grows.

China is apparently trying to trumpet to the world its contribution to tackling greenhouse gas reduction without damaging its economic growth. It also has stressed that cutting greenhouse gas emissions is a "voluntary action based on our own national situation."

This indicates that Beijing is wary of entering into internationally binding deals on emissions reductions.

COP15 nations divided

The 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Climate Change Convention (COP15) will start in Copenhagen on December 7. The US and Chinese

announcements of midterm targets is undoubtedly one step forward in the lead-up to COP15 discussions that will focus on a post-Kyoto Protocol international framework to be followed from 2013.

In reality, however, there is still a gulf of opinion between major industrialised countries and developing countries on how to tackle climate change. It already appears almost impossible for a post-Kyoto Protocol framework to be adopted in the Danish capital in December. The focus of attention has already shifted to whether the COP15 nations can reach a major political agreement that could lead to the adoption of a new protocol next year.

Moves by the United States and China hold the key to the success of the talks.

There is concern that some developing countries are leaning toward a possible extension of the Kyoto Protocol beyond 2012. The Kyoto Protocol lacks teeth as the United States has withdrawn from it and China, as a developing country, is not obliged to cut its emissions under the pact.

Hatoyama has made an international pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent without seeking the backing of the Japanese public. As a precondition for committing the nation to this target, however, he has stated that all major nations must sign on to a post-Kyoto Protocol framework.

Japan must steadfastly maintain this condition at the upcoming COP15 talks.