

Copenhagen: What could be the Bangladesh strategy?

In the section on the Means of Implementation in the Adaptation Text, the delegation of Bangladesh may flag the issue of diversification of LDC economies as a means of adaptation.

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THE previous piece tried for a dissection of the hard reality of climate diplomacy, which now hovers around the few major emitters, both from the developed and the developing countries. The UNFCCC-led universal multilateralism has been relegated to some non-voting observer status in the whole drama. The walkout of the 51 African countries for a day on November 4 in Barcelona, led by the Ethiopian leader, is a loud protest, but it seems to have no significant impact on the remaining two days of deliberations.

At the New York Climate Summit in September last, the protest statement of the exasperated Maldives President Mr. Nasheed of his unwillingness to come any more to the charade of climate talks can be cited as another case of extreme frustration. The outcomes of 8 round of negotiations since COP-13 in Bali can be compared to the Doha Round of trade talks -- launched 8 years ago and still struggling to overcome the rich-poor rift -- to scale back subsidies in the North in return for market access to the South.

Despite the unwelcome procrastination, what could be the strategy of the MVCs like Bangladesh? What should be the framework argument? One statement of the Ethiopian leader Meles Zenawi is pertinent here. In an interview on September 16 he said: "The justice of our cause is so patent that we do not expect anybody in the international community to reject the minimum conditions that we set." What justice does he refer to? What is the foundation of seeking such justice?

To begin with, a bare fact needs to be laid out. Everybody will agree that use of atmospheric sink as a Global Commons is non-excludable but contradictory, in the sense that nobody can be excluded from the right to use it, but contradictory in that one's use of the sink reduces space for others. So climate change is regarded as a global public peril and, therefore, carbon reduction aimed at halting it is a

global public good.

This reduction as a public good suffers from problems of undersupply, free-riding and non-participation because some countries are guided by short-term cost-benefit analysis and consider cost to be higher than the expected benefit. But contribution in solving the problem is unequal, and the MVCs contribute least to generate this public bad. However, the climate regime already has a mechanism in the form of a principle in the Convention, which is the common but differentiated responsibility based on respective capability.

The corollary of the CDDR is the Polluter Pays Principle (PPP) for internalisation of a negative externality, like carbon emission. This PPP is applied within the OECD for solution of their trans-border environmental problems. The Rio Declaration or the Stockholm Declaration have provisions for payment or compensation (though the modalities are not spelt out) for extra-territorial damage by a country beyond its border, but they are not being applied globally yet, perhaps because the other side has been rendered weaker through a "divide and rule" policy.

The accepted principle of the CDDR (Article 3.1) is ostensibly the core value of the market economy. The contradiction is that the industrial market economies, led by the US (the lone holdout of the Kyoto Protocol and a likely deal-breaker at Copenhagen), constantly advocate the application of market instruments in managing economic affairs of the developing world, but they themselves don't accept this basic market instrument of internalisation of externality (factoring the impact cost of accumulated GHG emissions) for meeting the challenge of climate change.

The amount of money needed for the purpose is not astronomical. The authoritative Stern Review estimates that action now will cost only about 1% of global economic product. This equals an average cost of about \$0.02 per kilowatt-

hour of electricity, or \$0.25 per gallon of gasoline. The UNFCCC estimates expenditure of about \$200 billion to return GHG emissions to current levels in 2030. This is even less than 0.5% of global GDP or about 0.7% of the "crisis money" mobilised at such short notice to bankroll the greed of western money-lenders.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh is globally recognised as a front-ranking MVC. However, this global sympathy is yet to turn into an effective outcome that could support major adaptation initiatives. On the other hand, the government, from its own resources, has committed about \$100 million for climate change projects. Together with some major policy initiatives, this commitment is unique in the developing world.

During the last few years, our delegation, that often included this author, has earned a reputation as good negotiators. This time our prime minister, who has already become an effective spokesperson of the MVCs, is expected to attend the high-level segment, which will be attended by more than 50 leaders. Therefore, the responsibility of our delegation is multiplied manifold. In such a challenging situation, it is proposed that the Bangladesh delegation focuses, among others, on the following issues:

- **Climate change-induced displacements:** Our prime minister has taken a very unequivocal and strong position on this issue. She stated in her New York speech: "The affected communities would not only lose their homes, they would also stand to lose their identity, nationality, and their very existence, and in some cases their countries." So the PM said that Bangladesh would "make a strong call" for the development of a new legal regime under the UNFCCC process to ensure the social, cultural and economic rehabilitation of climate-induced migrants. The number of such displaced people from our coastal belt may exceed 20 million. At the moment, there is no global instrument that can deal with climate change-induced displacements. The Geneva Convention on Refugees lacks an explicit clause acknowledging the plight of people displaced due to environmental degradation. Many voices are calling for a re-drafting of the Refugee Convention so that it recognises climate refugees. But Article 4.4 of



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How can this be rebuilt?

the Convention stipulates that developed country parties "shall also assist the developing country parties that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in meeting the costs of adaptation." Therefore, in order to give full meaning to "adaptation," the cost of migration due to climate change should be acknowledged as a "cost of adaptation" and hence, a global responsibility. The new Non-paper 53 (combined with Non-Papers 31 and 41) contains text for both national and international aspects of climate change-induced migration (paras 12c and 13b). So the Bangladesh delegation may contribute to the fine-tuning of the text likely to be adopted at Copenhagen.

- **Insurance:** This is coming up as a major instrument of adaptation in a post-Kyoto deal in Copenhagen. There are two full-blown proposals -- one by the island states group, AOSIS, and the other by the Munich Climate Insurance Initiative (MCII). The AOSIS proposal's expression of "compensation" is vehemently opposed by the industrial countries. However, there are positive elements in both these proposals, such as international responsibility, risk reduction incentives and insurance provisions for losses due to climate impacts. It may be recalled that this author, on behalf

of the LDCs, made a presentation on micro-insurance at the Plenary of COP-13 at Bali, where some mechanisms for auto-generation of funding for adaptation in general and for insurance in particular were proposed. The proposal also included piloting of weather index-based crop insurance for poor farmers and a regional model of insurance in South Asia, along the lines of the Caribbean Climate Risk Insurance Fund (CCRIF) supported by the World Bank. Under this model, the Caribbean governments are entitled to get liquidity in the immediate aftermath of a climate disaster. There are good suggestions in Non-paper 41 (paras 4b, 9a & 9b). It is expected that parties will find a compromise at COP-15 in integrating disaster risk reduction and insurance. There is likelihood that COP-15 will give mandate to explore catalytic activities in the form of a 3-year work program. So, the Bangladesh delegation may closely follow this vital agenda and forcefully revive the proposal of hosting a global workshop on micro-insurance before COP-16.

- **Economic diversification of the LDC economies:** In the section on the Means of Implementation in the Adaptation Text, the delegation of Bangladesh may flag the issue of diversification of LDC economies as a means of adaptation. For the purpose, together with

demanding financial and technical support, we may press for, as our State Minister for Environment and Forests Dr. Mahmud argues, quota-free access of LDC exports to industrial country markets. The rationale is that the base sectors of the LDC economies are likely to be hardest hit due to climate change impacts. This has the potential of being a very effective non-pecuniary support mechanism to the LDCs.

- **Developing a vulnerability index:** The Bangladesh delegation may insist on development of a vulnerability index by a COP-designated panel of scientists. Such an index could guide the distribution of funds among competing claims. In developing such an index, a life and livelihood, rather than sectoral, vulnerability approach is more realistic from the human security point of view. The Napa guidelines set the level or degree of adverse effects of climate change and reduction of poverty as two of the four broad sets of criteria for prioritising activities for developing the adaptation program. For the purpose, Bangladesh may lobby with the major MVCs to push this agenda forward. Bangladesh can also hold a meeting with GEF which has expressed its intention for developing such an index.

- **Meetings for promoting bilateral cooperation:** On the sidelines of multilateral negotiations, Bangladesh may be more active in negotiating bilateral environmental cooperation, particularly with Canada, Japan, the UK, EU and the US. It may be mentioned that President Obama has set aside \$80 billion as clean energy fund under the recovery plan. Bangladesh may seek cooperation in areas like transfer of clean energy technology, technical assistance for energy efficiency and reducing system loss, forest conservation and capacity building. It is to be reiterated that, nowadays, environmental diplomacy subsumes economic diplomacy and resource mobilisation for poverty alleviation to ensure sustainable development. We only hope that our diplomacy will now focus more on issues of "low" rather than "high" politics.

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Caring for the livelihoods of small fishermen

That puts small-scale fishermen and their communities on the front line of this environmental crisis. It is they who will feel the impact most immediately and most severely if restrictions on fishing are imposed or if fish stocks start disappearing altogether.

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IRONICALLY, one of the great injustices prevalent in many of our societies today is that those who produce our food are often impoverished. In recent years, the struggles of indebted farmers and migrant field workers have increasingly gained attention as food prices have risen and rural poverty has increased. On the other hand, the plight of our fishers, and in particular our small-scale fishers, has rarely been considered. In ignoring their problems, we have created a crisis that now confronts us all.

Our seas are being over-fished. Breeding and spawning areas are being violated. The damage to our coastlines from industrial pollution and ill-considered development is growing. If these trends are not reversed, the livelihoods of untold numbers of coastal communities will be destroyed, industries that provide tens of millions of jobs will wither away or collapse, and a crucial source of food for most people in Asia could eventually vanish. Estimates

are that, for ecosystems to recover and fish remain a food source for us all, the region will have to reduce fishing by 50 percent. The increasing impacts of climate change will only further stress the coastal ecosystem and deteriorate the situation.

Small-scale fishermen are contributors to this problem. They are not the dominant factor in overfishing and environmental destruction, as their percentage of the total catch from the sea is small compared to industrial fishing fleets: one large trawler can net more fish in one day than an entire community of small fishermen can in a month.

The number of small-scale fishermen, however, is vast and the coastal areas and river deltas of Asia are among the most densely populated areas in the world. Nearly 2 million registered vessels are fishing Asian waters, and there are a substantial number of unregistered vessels. Eighty percent of all fishing boats are small.

That puts small-scale fishermen and their communities on the front line of

this environmental crisis. It is they who will feel the impact most immediately and most severely if restrictions on fishing are imposed or if fish stocks start disappearing altogether. We must find ways to engage them as important allies and partners in effecting positive environmental change.

Small-scale fishermen are among the poorest of the poor. They live in forgotten communities barely touched by development, infrastructure or services. Often indebted to middlemen, they overfish in futile attempts to repay their loans and provide for their families. They bolster their catches by "fishing down the food chain" where indiscriminate



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Struggling to survive.

hauls contain high percentages of fish that have low value to fishermen, but are essential for maintaining biodiversity and breeding new stocks.

The tools to reverse this cycle of debt-driven destruction have been used successfully with other communities: empowerment, alternative livelihoods and economic opportunities, microfinance, and community management of resources, plus proper technological options in building capacity for climate friendly and resilience fisheries. These tools are contained in a four-year large-scale regional initiative funded by the government of Spain and facilitated by the Food and Agricultural

Organisation called the Regional Fisheries Livelihood Program. Representatives from six countries around the region gather in Bangkok, Thailand on December 9 to sign on to this initiative. While signatures and commitments are an excellent beginning, real action is needed now.

Action must begin with assisting fishermen and their communities to organise and empower themselves. Fishermen need a voice. If they can establish associations that effectively represent their interests, they can break the cycle of debt, poverty and overfishing. If they are organised, they can serve as guardians of the environment, employing community management to conserve and protect marine resources for us all. Most do not have the skills, however, to accomplish this. Governments and nongovernmental organisations must assist fishermen and their communities to build these associations.

Fishermen will not be willing to become our guardians of conservation if they are locked into dependence solely upon marine resources to survive. Alternative livelihoods, and sources of financing, are essential. Governments and NGOs can help communities develop alternative livelihoods so they have diversified sources of income and are less dependent upon the sea. As important as knowledge and training are alternative livelihoods and micro-financing. These must be put in place

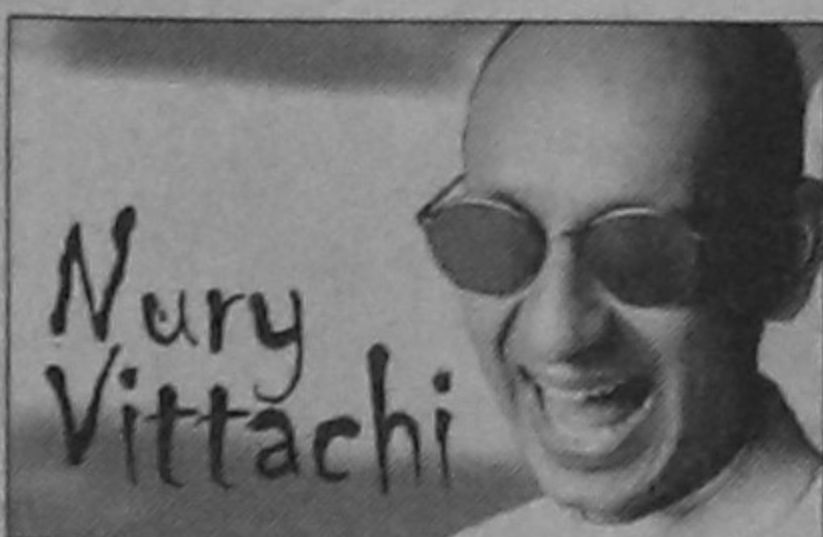
before any restrictions on fishing are imposed, or those restrictions simply will not work.

Restrictions also won't work if they, and small-scale fishermen, are the sole focus of action. To protect and revitalise our marine resources and coastal communities, governments must adopt an ecosystem management approach. The environment is borderless. Regional cooperation is, therefore, the only path to take. Industries that damage or pollute coastlines and resources must adjust their practices, or government must ensure that they do. Within the fishing industry, the large industrial fishing fleets, and the middlemen and food processing companies, also must play by the rules and join the conservation effort. Otherwise, before long, they may have no industry at all.

We must all be partners in this great endeavour -- and that includes partnering with our small-scale fishers and their communities. By supporting them to improve their lives, we protect our planet and our way of life. Most of us know the proverb "Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." In this critical moment for our planet's health, if we can teach fishermen to fish more wisely, along with teaching them new skills and new livelihoods, we will all have fish for our lifetime -- and for the generations that follow.

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The biggest lawsuit ever



A man in a black suit walks into a courthouse and says to the duty lawyer. "I'd like to file a writ, please."

The lawyer replies: "Certainly, sir. And you are?"

The man produces a name card. "My name is Cho Pub-Lik. But I represent a

group of people. It is a class action lawsuit. I represent the population of Asia."

The lawyer's surprise is shown only in the slight raising of an eyebrow. Mr. Cho adds gravely: "I realise that's a rather large number of individuals. Just over four billion."

The lawyer, undaunted, coolly takes notes. "Fine. Now, who do you want to sue?"

Mr. Cho leans forward and whispers his reply: "The West."

The lawyer blinks. "The West? The entire western world? Let me just write that down. Okay. Is this for the small claims tribunal or the district court?"

Cho leans back in his chair and pon-

ders. "I'm not sure, I was thinking I'd like it heard at a full meeting of the United Nations General Assembly."

The lawyer nods. "I understand, but not many of our cases go straight to that venue. It doesn't work that way. Let's start in the small claims tribunal and work our way up to the UN, shall we? Now, as plaintiff, you need to detail a civil or criminal offence committed against you by the defendant."

Mr. Cho thumps the table. "The defendant is filling the air with CO2. This results in bouts of killer weather, which have caused material losses to my clients: losses, which are expected to increase dramatically in future years. I

have evidence. It's rather large. Can you help me clear these chairs away?"

Cho shouts an order and his assistants wheel in a medium-sized country: the Philippines.

Cho points out cities flattened by killer weather.

"Here we had not one, not two, but three killer hurricanes in one month," he said. "Other exhibits from around Asia include mountains which have lost their snowy caps, cities wiped out by floods, and traditional industries ruined. I have examples outside but I didn't bring them in because I didn't want to crowd your office."

He wags his finger. "Scientists from

both sides of the world are on record saying that there is a significant correlation between killer storms and CO2 in the air."

The lawyer is impressed. "Fine. I'll get my staff to do an inventory. What do you expect in terms of damages?"

Mr. Cho has an answer ready: "We want them to sign a pledge at a meeting in Copenhagen next week to change their ways. Also, we'd like a piece of land which people who have been displaced by killer weather can live on. Florida would do nicely."

Now the story above is a fantasy, of course. But I actually think it wouldn't be a bad idea. You have to deal with people

in ways they understand. The US business lobby stopped America signing the Kyoto agreement, and have tried very hard to derail the Copenhagen summit too. They despise greens, but have huge respect for men in black suits, lawsuits and claims for damages.

Thinks: While we're at it, I wonder if we can sue the US for other evil pestilences they have unleashed upon the world? I'm thinking of Achy Breaky Heart.

And Kraft processed cheese slices. And High School Musical. Worth a try?

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