

Bangladesh must play effective role in climate diplomacy

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MD. MASUM BILLAH

THE largest and most important UN climate change conference in history has begun in the Danish capital Copenhagen from December 7. Delegates from 192 countries are gathering for this long-awaited summit as climate change concerns the whole globe. The organizers warned the diplomats from 192 countries that this could be the best and last chance for a deal to protect the world from calamities induced by global warming. The two-week conference, the climax of two years of contentious negotiations, is convened in an upbeat mood after a series of promises by rich and emerging economies to curb their greenhouse gases, but with major issues yet to be resolved.

The conference opened with video clips of children from around the globe urging delegates to help them grow up in a world without catastrophic warming. On the sidelines, climate activists competed for attention to their campaigns on deforestation, clean energy and low carbon-growth. Mohammad Shinaz, an activist from the Maldives, plunged feet-first into a tank with nearly 200 gallons of frigid water to illustrate what rising sea levels were doing to his island nation. "I want people to know that this is happening. We have to stop global warming," he said. The first week of the conference will focus on refining the complex text of a draft treaty. But the major decisions will await the arrival next week of envi-

ronment ministers and the heads of state in the final days of the conference which ends December 18. It is proposed to fund \$10 billion each year for the next three years to help poor countries create climate change strategies. After that, hundreds of billions of dollars will be needed every year to set the world on a new energy path and adapt to new climates.

On the eve of the summit, UN's



chief climate negotiator Yvo de Boer said the tasks were in excellent shape. He told the BBC that many countries were now making pledges over curbing greenhouse gas emissions. "Never in 17 years of climate negotiations have so many different countries made so many pledges. It's unprecedented."

Connie Hedegaard, Denmark's

former Climate Minister, the president of the conference, said the key to an agreement is finding a way to raise and channel public and private financing to poor countries for years to come to help them fight the effects of climate change. Mr. de Boer said offers of finance for clean technology for poor countries were also coming through and talks were progressed on a long-term vision of passive carbon cuts by 2050.

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protest in Copenhagen and around the world on 12 December to encourage delegates to reach the strongest possible deal.

Outlining the ambitions for the summit, Mr. de Boer said, "I think what we will see coming out of Copenhagen is a package of decisions that define a long term goal. Then first of all, what will rich coun-

tries do to reduce their emission. Secondly, what will major developing countries do to limit the growth of their emissions? And thirdly, prompt finance that will allow developing countries to adapt to the impact of climate change.

On the second day of this conference it was revealed that Bangladesh has been the worst affected by climate change over two decades from 1990. The 'Global Risk Index' said that the top ten most affected countries were all developing nations in the low-income or lower-middle income country group. It was said on the basis of a report made by Germanwatch, a Berlin-based NGO, that 600,000 people died as a direct consequence of more than 11,000 extreme weather events around the world from 1990-2008. Total losses of \$1.7 trillion were incurred over the period surveyed. Bangladesh was among the countries facing 'continuous' climate change impact although more than 80 percent of deaths due to disaster in the country over the period surveyed occurred in 1991 when more than 140,000 people were killed.

Bangladesh incurs annual losses of 1.81 percent of GDP due to extreme weather events. Total losses were \$2.19 billion a year from 1990 to 2008. Bangladesh scored 8 on risk index, Myanmar 8.25, Honduras 12, Vietnam 18.53, Nicaragua 21, Haiti 22.83, India 25.83, Dominican Republic 27.58, the Philippines 27.67 and China 28.58. So, Bangladesh must raise her voice in the conference highlighting the several important issues. She may raise the issue of diversification of LDC economies as a means of adaptation. We may press for say, 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.

On the sidelines of multilateral negotiation, 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 recover 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.

Though Bangladesh is globally recognized as one of the front-ranking and most vulnerable countries, 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 4100 million for climate change projects. Together with some major policy initiatives, this commitment is

unique in the developing world. Now the world leaders and donors take into account this promise.

The affected communities due to climate change would not only lose their home, they would also stand to lose their identity, nationality and their countries. So the Prime Minister of Bangladesh 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 change 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.

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