



DURBAN CLIMATE TALKS UNDERWAY

Bangladesh suffers the most the climate change impacts

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHAMAN

SALEMUL HUQ
 The seventeenth conference of parties (COP17) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) got underway in Durban, South Africa on Monday 28th November with a colourful Zulu dance and powerful speech by the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma. The presidency of the COP was officially passed on by the Foreign Minister of Mexico who chaired COP16 in Cancun, Mexico last year, to the South African Foreign Minister who will now chair COP17 for the two weeks in Durban.
 The skills of South African leaders in bringing political enemies to compromise and end apartheid will stand them in good stead as they try to bridge the gap between the developed and developing countries at this COP.
 There are two major issues and three

relatively minor (but nevertheless important) issues to be agreed in Durban by 9th December.
 The most important is the fate of the Kyoto Protocol. Durban will either bury Kyoto or renew it. However things do not look positive in the first week as Kyoto parties such as Canada and Japan say they are unwilling to continue while non-Kyoto parties such as the US, China and India refuse to join a legally binding agreement.
 However, so far the parties are simply stating their maximum positions and will need all the skills of mediation by the South Africans to get some compromise.
 The second major issue is the formalisation of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) which is supposed to manage the 100 billion US Dollars a year from 2020 from developed to developing countries. This has more chance of being achieved,

although the USA and Saudi Arabia are not yet on board.
 The three other issues are adaptation, reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) and technology transfer are expected to achieve agreement by 9th December.
 Of course besides the official negotiators from 195 countries there are also many thousand participants from civil society, private sector, media and academics from all over the world in Durban who are organising and participating in hundreds of side events around Durban city. A major advantage of the COPs is the opportunity it gives to so many people to meet, network and share solutions to climate change.
 The Bangladesh delegation in Durban is over a hundred strong due to the Government's enlightened attitude to allowing all civil society representatives

from Bangladesh to be included in the official delegation. The delegation is also very well organised with individuals and teams assigned to different negotiating tracks and holding daily team meetings.
 Next week, after the Minister for environment and Forest arrives, Bangladesh will be hosting two important high level side events. The first will be on the Climate Vulnerable Forum on 4th December and the second on 5th December on the topic of Loss and Damage which is an important new agenda item in Durban. These two events will enable Bangladesh to play a leadership role in the second, high level, week of the Durban talks.
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Capabilities of and threats to Bangladesh

DR. ARUN KUMAR LAHIRY
 Briefly the definition and causes of climate change (CC) are: [1] increased greenhouse gases (GHGs) emission following industrial revolution; [2] increased GHGs level in the atmosphere; [3] more heat energy from sunlight absorbed by increased GHGs and reemitted in the atmosphere; [4] overall increase in the temperature of the planet; and [5] changes in the precipitation and wind pattern along with the temperature. It is proven that the CC is the results of greenhouse effects (GHEs) evidenced by intensified natural disasters, melting of polar icecaps and rising up of sea levels. Most of the world's population lives near coasts, so any changes, which might cause sea levels to rise, could have a potentially disastrous impact.
 The GHGs allow shortwave solar radiation to enter the Earth's atmosphere, but help to stop long wave radiation from escaping, thus traps heat, raising the Earth's temperature, an excess of these gases helps trap more heat and can lead to global warming (GW). Currently the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is considering that Carbon dioxide, Methane, Nitrous oxide, Hydrofluorocarbons, Perfluorocarbons, and Sulfurhexafluoride are the GHGs responsible for GW.
 The Human Development Report-

1998 of the United Nations states that environmental damage almost always hits those living in poverty the hardest. According to the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change-2006 of Nicholas Stern, the poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest by CC, even though they have contributed little to causing the problem. Bangladesh threatened to be one of the first, and surely will be one of the major victims for the country is extremely vulnerable to CC -- more than most other nations on Earth. Thus it is now well known that Bangladesh, an LDC, has become the worst victim of global CC with the lowest CO2 emission of 0.2 ton/person/year.
 Recently Bianchizza has independently reported in London based Tiempo (Vol. 77, Oct., 2010), the capabilities of and threats to Bangladesh:
 Strengths: Ability to diversify income sources; strong social structures based on cooperative principles; traditional knowledge on the damages from deforestation, knowledge about agriculture amongst both men and women; traditional system for communal pooling of assets (borga); capacity to adopt new crops more suitable for new weather conditions, learning from experiences in other regions; very strong social network and cooperation amongst the women (knowledge sharing,



Climate refugees in own country

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assistance); good cost effective crop management; good awareness of issues and possible solutions, with systems to update information; information sharing between men and women; women's participation in agricultural activities and decision making; social cooperation for research and work; and diversified activities (animal rearing) as income sources.
 Weaknesses: Very low financial capital; very low education levels; unawareness about climate change and its impact on crops; no strategy to overcome threats to agriculture; fatalistic attitude towards worsened environmental conditions; very low social position of women -- information is gender-locked; little or partial understanding of the causes of water-logging; little understanding and sense of ownership of flood protection strategies (raised households) adopted by NGOs; very confused interpretation of information on climate change and its impacts and its relation to crop cultivation; and agriculture knowledge locked in hands of men.
 Opportunities: The need for transport in the area due to a lack of infrastructure provides different employment opportunities; further training and support on best agricultural practices available; NGO activities to raise households; the empowerment of women at decision-making levels, given the migration of men to the mainland; involvement in research; and

learning opportunities from neighbouring communities.
 Threats: Increased soil salinity; unpredictability and increased intensity of cyclones and floods; land erosion by the river; intense cold spells; water-logging; changing rain patterns and a lack of rain; increased intensity of droughts; unpredictability of future changes in climate; incomprehensible information from the Agriculture Department; temptation to get microcredit loans; misleading information from local political leaders; land is very low and extremely exposed to flooding; following a poor harvest there is no money to buy new hybrid seeds for higher crop production; and loss of traditional local varieties of crops and vegetables.
 We should know the CC aspects, so that the risks are reduced, vulnerabilities adapted and impacts mitigated with more resilience. A known problem is better than unknown; 50% problems are solved through mental, ethical and indigenous preparation. A united and known effort is always welcomed for better achievement. While Bangladesh should prepare from within, it needs proper global attention to squarely face a global problem imposed on her with appreciable global support.
 The writer is an environmentalist.



Occurrence of cyclones has increased in frequency

PHOTO: STAR

Green Climate Fund Updates from Durban

GOLAM RABBANI
 The major outcome of the Sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (CoP-16) was establishment of Green Climate Fund (GCF) to combat climate change. The Transitional Committee (TC) consisting of 25 developing and 15 developed countries met four times in last seven months under the leadership of three co-chairs from Mexico, Norway and South Africa, and two vice chairs from Australia and Singapore under the framework of Cancun Agreement. At the end of the last meeting held in Cape Town, South Africa, the TC has prepared the report covering four thematic elements including objectives and guiding principles, governing instruments, operational modalities and monitoring and evaluation to be presented before the parties at the CoP 17. The report was sent with disagreement of the USA and Saudi Arabia, and reservations of some countries such as Venezuela and Columbia.

Dynamics of discussion
 On the third day of the climate negotiation sessions in Durban, the draft report was presented by the Planning Minister of the Republic of South Africa for consideration and approval. The team, task and the mission of the TC was highly appreciated by all parties and groups of parties. However, some countries showed clear disagreement especially on the element of governing instruments.
 It appears that the G77 and China, the largest group in the negotiation process expects that the GCF would be a dedicated fund which is consistent and coherent under the convention. The group stated that the GCF needs to be operationalised and capitalised through an open, transparent and party-driven consultation process. Barbados on behalf of Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) strongly supported the G 77 and China by saying that the group will not accept any delay in operationalization of GCF. AOSIS also looks for separate rapid funding window for LDCs and SIDS under GCF framework. LDCs and many other developed and developing countries want to see the GCF functional as early as possible, preferably by the first quarter of 2012. Some countries such as Singapore fear that the consensus about governing instrument may have risk of not having the instrument at all.
 However, most countries are in favour of having approval of GCF in Durban to be operationalised by early 2012 to combat climate catastrophe. In contrast, USA and Saudi Arabia are still quite opposite in endorsing the current text. USA clearly mentioned that GCF would become the global financial institution. Therefore the governing instrument should be designed with much care. Venezuela on behalf of ALBA hopes to see the outcome of GCF in Durban although the current text is not acceptable to them. On the other hand, Columbia on behalf of some Latin American countries proposed to have informal consultation in open and transparent manner to finalize the text. Pakistan appreciated Switzerland for showing interest to be the host of GCF and urge the developed countries for immediate pledge from here in Durban.

From the corridor
 Some parties and observers were found to be a bit frustrated at the start of the climate negotiation in Durban with messages on Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, negative position of large emitting countries on legally binding agreement, uncertainty on the agreement on KP second commitment period and finally indifferent position of some developed and developing countries on GCF governing instrument. However, negotiation continues with the hope that the success of Durban may be achieved over discussion and debate in the next days of sessions.



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