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UNEP and the Executive Director in the News

New American (US): Klaus Says Global Warming "New Religion"

22 decemebr 2009

In the wake of the attention recently given to a policy paper that urged the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to elevate environmentalism to a new religion, Czech President Vaclav Klaus is charging climate-change fanatics with having pursued precisely that course of action.

A paper entitled "The UNEP We Want" briefly attracted media attention just prior to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, and one line that drew particular attention was the assertion: "The environment should compete with religion as the only compelling, value-based narrative available to humanity."

Such a bizarre assertion would essentially establish the global environmental watchdogs as a type of priesthood for Mother Earth.

With the Copenhagen conference ending with more of a whimper than a bang in adoption of the Copenhagen Accord (rather than the more sweeping treaty which had been promoted for months), President Klaus is sounding the warning that the relative failure of the conference has not dulled the fanaticism of the radical environmentalists. According to FOXNews.com:

As the Copenhagen Climate conference comes to a conclusion amidst riots by demonstrators and scrambling by policymakers, Czech President Vaclav Klaus has a message for the world: Global warming is a "new religion," not a science....

"I'm convinced that after years of studying the phenomenon, global warming is not the real issue of temperature," said Klaus, an economist by training. "That is the issue of a new ideology or a new religion.

A religion of climate change or a religion of global warming.

This is a religion which tells us that the people are responsible for the current, very small increase in temperatures. And they should be punished."

The connection between radical environmentalism and 'new age' religion is hardly new. The seemingly instinctive anti-Christian twitch even manifested itself in a humorous way during the Copenhagen conference, with the decision to ban Christmas trees from the conference site.

Although the live trees would have helped to offset some of the massive amounts of supposed "greenhouse gases" being generated by delegates, the religious connotations of Christmas trees were ideologically intolerable for the Internationalist elite.

Since Christmas is a religious holiday, it has no place at a United Nations event, said officials planning the event.

A sponsor providing fir trees for the conference's Christmas trees learned this the hard way when it was turned away by planners of the international event, the Copenhagen Post reported....

"We have to remember that this is a U.N. conference and, as the center then becomes U.N. territory, there can be no Christmas trees in the decor, because the U.N. wishes to maintain neutrality," said Denmark Foreign Ministry official Svend Olling.

The Earth Charter Initiative — which counts Michael Gorbachev, Maurice Strong and Steven Rockefeller among its commissioners — has sought to cultivate a religious ‘angle’ for its mission:

Between 2007 and 2008 ECI implemented a project on Religion and Sustainability that focused on outreach to religious groups and leaders to seek their institutions engagement in using the Earth Charter. This project also involved research and the development of education materials designed specifically for religious audiences.

In early 2009, as part of the ECI decentralization strategy, a Task Force on Religion, Spirituality and Ethics was formed.

This Task Force aims to engage a broad range of individuals, institutions, and organizations concerned with religion, spirituality, ethics, to use the Earth Charter in their efforts toward creating a just, peaceful, and sustainable future for the Earth Community. In particular, the Task Force is reaching out to:

- 1) Leaders of religious institutions and communities
- 2) Scholars and theologians of the world’s religions as well as ethicists
- 3) Individuals and organizations interested in linking religion, spirituality, and ethics to issues of sustainability

Getting back to Klaus’ observations, it seems evident that, having apparently abandoned the old, primarily Christian, religious beliefs which were commonly held throughout the developed world, the radical environmental fringe which dominates much of the “global warming” debate has not abandoned the need for religion. They simply have adopted a new religion.

Again, as Klaus told FOXNews.com, the fate of those living under the adherents of the new environmental religion would find that the tenets of the new faith would shape their lives in terrifying ways:

"We'll be the victims of irrational ideology.

They will try to dictate to us how to live, what to do, how to behave," Klaus said. "What to eat, travel, and what my children should have.

This is something that we who lived in the communist era for most of our lives — we still feel very strongly about. We are very sensitive in this respect.

And we feel various similarities in their way of arguing or not arguing. In the way of pushing ahead ideas regardless of rational counter-arguments."

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Business Daily (Kenya): Weak proposals lock Kenya out of 'green' funds

23 December 2009

Kenya is missing out on funds and environmental clean-up by not presenting strong proposals for support under a global deal aimed at pumping billions of shillings into 'green projects'.

The country is eligible to apply for help under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), one of the Kyoto Protocol tools aimed at reducing carbon emission by investing in environmentally friendly projects in developing nations.

Nonetheless, Kenya has shown signs of improvement, having 14 projects, up from only five last year and none in 2004.

A total of 112 green projects are at different stages in Africa, up from 74 in 2008 and just two in 2004.

But Africa's figures compare poorly to other beneficiary continents.

Only four per cent of the 4,730 CDM projects are in Africa, while Pacific Asia has over 3,700 and Latin America and the Caribbean have close to 820

This is the sorry state of affairs as Africa continues to bear one of the greatest environmental burdens from global pollution, with lakes disappearing, mountain icecaps melting and an increase in related disasters over the last four decades.

Carbon forum

The low level of project uptake in Africa is mainly due to the lack of concrete, viable proposals forwarded to UNEP and the World Bank, the approving and disbursing agents.

But the second all-Africa Carbon Forum, to be held in Nairobi next March will discuss ways Africa can participate and gain more from the Kyoto Protocol kitty.

Kenya has a huge market for carbon market projects, from the 7,000 megawatt-potential of geothermal power whose development is now expanding in Rift Valley to the emergence of big wind farms and the vast latent potential of solar.

One efficient and cheap way of fighting the carbon concentration in the atmosphere is by planting trees.

Already, some 2,000 farmers in Central Kenya are benefiting from the mechanism, selling carbon credits to the United States.

KenGen, the major power generator in Kenya, has entered into an agreement with the World Bank worth Sh1.3 billion to produce cleaner energy.

According to the institution's records, the carbon market has the potential to earn developing nations more than \$25bn (Sh2 trillion) annually.

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Other Environment News

Social Funds (Blog): Institutional Investors Object to Lack of Acknowledgement in Copenhagen

22 December 2009

Open letter from the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment to Heads of State asserts that the Copenhagen agreement ignores the fact that the vast majority of financing of climate change mitigation will come from private sources.

SocialFunds.com -- The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) concluded last week without a binding agreement to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to the extent deemed necessary by climate science. The Conference exposed a rift between developed and developing nations, one that could not be surmounted in time for such an agreement to occur.

Institutional investors were among the parties disappointed by the absence of a binding agreement.

They had hoped that their work during the buildup to the Conference would have at least served as a reminder to governments that, according to Paul Clements-Hunt, Head of the United Nations Environment Program Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), "85% of financing for climate change mitigation will come from private investment."

On December 17, the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), an investor initiative supported by more than 650 institutions representing in excess of \$18 trillion in assets, wrote a letter to the Heads of State gathered at COP15, asking for a clear recognition "of the important role that capital markets, institutional investors and private finance, will play if the global community is to deliver the needed transformation to a low-carbon and resource-efficient global economy."

SocialFunds.com spoke with Clements-Hunt, who provided some details pertaining to the frustration over the failure of the Conference to acknowledge the role of institutional investors in the transition to a low-carbon global economy.

"The letter was driven by the build-up to CoP15, during which institutional investors put a lot of effort into crafting the type of input that would be helpful in deciding how public financing could release the private markets," Clements-Hunt said.

“But at the Conference there was a growing frustration that the investment community wasn’t being listened to.”

Clements-Hunt continued, “Institutional investors put a tremendous amount of effort into the build-up to the Conference, but because of the politics they didn’t get any recognition.”

According to reports from the Conference, developing nations refused to allow text referring to private investment in any agreement, because of fears that such language might lead to less public investment by developed economies.

The PRI letter addressed this issue by stating, “The concerns of some developing countries in Copenhagen that any reference to capital markets, as well as private investment and financial resources, in a Copenhagen agreement, would be connected to a possible reduction in public financing and aid-related commitments associated with climate change are, clearly, of great sensitivity.”

But as the PRI letter points out, “Even in the most optimistic of scenarios, the public funds pledged by industrialized countries and channeled into the rest of the world from 2013 onwards, will amount only to a fraction – one sixth to one fifth - of what is actually needed.”

“Estimates suggest that at least 80% to 85% of the finance and capital required in our collective response to the mitigation and adaptation needs of climate change will come from private investment sources and capital markets,” the letter continued.

Clements-Hunt described the expectations of institutional investors as “Realistic. Two paragraphs of language were crafted to be included in an agreement at Copenhagen. The wording would have provided no more than a foothold, acknowledging the future role of private investment.”

According to Clements-Hunt, the wording of the two paragraphs was crafted primarily by Murray Ward, formerly the head of the New Zealand Ministry for the Environment’s climate change team. The wording reads as follows:

"Recognizing the enormous scale of finance needed for investment in zero and low-carbon infrastructure and systems in developing countries, in particular to achieve a transition to low-carbon and climate change resilient economies in the coming decade;

"Recognizing that public sector interventions and involvements in capital markets can catalyze and accelerate large scales of additional finance from the private sector that is measurable, reportable and verifiable;

"Encourages Parties to report, pursuant to agreed modalities for such reporting, on where their interventions and involvement in capital markets have catalyzed finance and investment in developing countries by the private sector that is measurable, reportable and verifiable;

"Requests Parties to encourage their senior climate change and finance ministry officials to engage in appropriate forums with leading institutional and private investors, financial experts and industry representatives to develop ideas that can lead to the level of scale-up of finance for investment in zero and low-carbon infrastructure and systems in developing countries that is needed to achieve a transition to low-carbon and climate change resilient

economies in the coming decade; and to report on the progress of such efforts to the Conference of the Parties at its sixteenth session."

The acknowledgement was not included in the final wording of the agreement reached in Copenhagen.

The only references to private investment included in the agreement stated, "We decide to pursue various approaches, including opportunities to use markets, to enhance the cost-effectiveness of, and to promote mitigation actions."

The agreement further stated, "Funding (for climate change adaptation by developing nations) will come from a variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, including alternative sources of finance."

The PRI letter anticipated such a lack of recognition by stating, "It is the extent to which a prospective Copenhagen agreement frames future public financing mechanisms and encourages innovative public-private investment approaches, as well as providing pro-investment signals, that will determine its relevance as a policy framework that frees up flows of private capital, at scale, into climate change mitigation and adaptation in both developed but especially developing countries."

The letter continued, "It appears that, at best, the role of capital markets, private finance and the importance of the vast concentrated pools of savings held in trust by institutional investors, has a most tentative foothold in the collective thinking of negotiators within the COP15 discussions.

At worst, private investment mechanisms and capital markets may not be referenced in a COP15 agreement, or subsequent agreements, for reasons of political expediency."

Subsequent United Nations meetings on climate change are planned for Bonn and Mexico in 2010.

"We still want the acknowledgement, whether in Bonn or Mexico," Clements-Hunt said. "The public policy process has to acknowledge the role of private capital in addressing the risks and opportunities of climate change."

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AFP: EU lashes out as climate discord deepens

23 December 2009

Europe accused the United States and China of torpedoing the Copenhagen climate summit and vowed not to back down in its push for a tough, binding accord to avert the potential disaster of global warming.

Post-summit recriminations deepened even among the select nations, including the United States, China, India and Brazil, that convened behind closed doors to stitch together a widely panned deal in the Danish capital at the weekend.

With scientists warning of the growing threat of drought, floods, storms and rising sea levels, UN chief Ban Ki-Moon acknowledged international disappointment but called the summit an "essential beginning".

Defying the ire of bitterly disappointed environmentalists, Indian Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said his country had emerged "quite well in Copenhagen" by thwarting moves to set binding emissions targets.

However the European Union's Swedish presidency called the summit a "disaster".

Briefing reporters after a meeting of EU environment ministers, Swedish chairman Andreas Carlgren said "disappointment and frustration" was universal among the European nations.

"We are aware that the outcome of Copenhagen doesn't at all match the needs of (the) climate and of mankind," Sweden's environment minister said Tuesday.

"Many commented that it was obvious that (the) United States and China did not want more than we achieved in Copenhagen and that's part of what we have regretted here," Carlgren added.

The summit promised 100 billion dollars for poor nations that risk bearing the brunt of global warming's fallout, and set a commitment to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

But it failed to spell out the concrete cuts to greenhouse gas emissions that scientists say are essential to cap a planetary rise in temperatures.

Carlgren said the EU "will continue to strive for an agreement that is legally binding for all parties and sufficiently ambitious to limit global warming... below 2.0 degrees".

But he warned against one proposal floated by Belgium among others for an EU "carbon tax" on imports from climate laggards, saying this would undermine whatever chance there remains for a global deal next year.

Britain singled out China for blocking a tougher deal in Copenhagen, but Beijing hit back on Tuesday by accusing the EU heavyweight of trying to drive a wedge between developing countries.

Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said "such an attack was made in order to shirk the obligations of developed countries to their developing counterparts and foment discord among developing countries".

She told the state Xinhua news agency "the attempt was doomed to fail".

The powerful OPEC cartel's top official said it was up to rich nations to fight climate change.

"The mess was created by the developed countries and they should pay for it," OPEC's Libyan secretary general Abdullah El-Badri said in Angola.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva blamed US President Barack Obama for the talks' failure, saying he offered "too little" in the way of emissions cuts.

Low-lying and flood-prone Bangladesh, one of the nations most vulnerable to climate change, said that it would seek 15 percent of the first 30 billion dollars committed at the Copenhagen summit.

Environment Minister Hasan Mahmud said Bangladesh's 150 million people made up around 15 percent of the approximately one billion people estimated to be affected by global warming, and deserved "per capita compensation".

The money would be used to build cyclone shelters, reinforce coastal embankments, develop saline resistant crops and for a program of reforestation, Mahmud said.

One measure to emerge from Copenhagen was a programme to discourage deforestation and plant new trees as a way of capturing more of the industrial carbon dioxide that scientists say is trapping atmospheric heat.

Announcing a new initiative grouping the world's main rainforest countries, Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said "efforts related to rainforests may lead to one-third of the emission cuts needed by 2020".

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Reuters: EU calls for more U.S. involvement in climate works

22 December 2009

The European Union called on the United States on Tuesday to play a bigger role in combating climate change, after Sweden described the Copenhagen summit last week as a "great failure."

Following a meeting in Brussels to discuss how to rescue the Copenhagen climate process, EU environment ministers emphasized the need for concrete, legally binding measures to combat global warming.

The European Union went to Copenhagen with the hope of achieving a broad commitment to at least a 20-percent cut in carbon emissions below 1990 levels within 10 years, but that and other firm goals failed to emerge in the final accord.

The two-week, United Nations-led conference ended on Saturday with a non-legally binding agreement to limit global warming to a maximum of 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial times, but did not lay out how to achieve that.

Despite months of preparation and strenuous diplomacy, the talks boiled down to an inability of the world's two largest emitters, the United States and China, to agree fixed targets.

"Expectations and pressure on the United States have risen after Copenhagen ... to really deliver," Swedish Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren told a news briefing on Tuesday after Sweden, as EU president until December 31, chaired pan-EU talks.

Ministers from the EU's 27 member states will meet again in January to discuss what role the EU can play in cobbling together a stronger agreement.

DASHED PLANS

The bloc went to Copenhagen with a unified position and a plan for financing emissions cuts in the developing world, with a commitment to spend around 7 billion euros (\$10 billion) over the next three years to aid poorer countries.

But those aims were largely sidelined as the talks failed to produce a breakthrough. Carlgren described the summit as a "disaster" and a "great failure," despite what he called Europe's united efforts.

"Europe never lost its aim, never, never came to splits or different positions, but of course this was mainly about other countries really (being) unwilling, and especially the United States and China," Carlgren said.

Britain on Monday blamed China and a handful of other countries of holding the world to ransom by blocking a legally binding treaty at Copenhagen, stepping up a blame game that has gathered momentum since the talks ended.

In a sharply worded response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu rejected accusations that China had "hijacked" the climate talks and added: "The statements from certain British politicians are plainly a political scheme."

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown described the summit as "at best flawed and at worst chaotic" and demanded an urgent reform of the process to try to reach a legal treaty when talks are expected to resume in Germany next June.

But Danish Climate Minister Connie Hedegaard, who quit as president of the talks midway through after being criticized by African countries for favoring wealthier nations in negotiations, said there was no point in getting depressed.

"What we need to do is to secure the step that we took and turn it into a result," she told reporters as she arrived for the Brussels meeting on Tuesday. Asked whether Copenhagen had been a failure, she replied:

"It would have been a failure if we had achieved nothing. But we achieved something -- a first step.

"It was the first time we held a process where all the countries were present, including the big emitters."

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AFP: Rich world should pay for climate 'mess': OPEC chief

22 December 2009

The powerful OPEC cartel's top official on Tuesday called for the developed world to fund the fight against climate change, saying the developing world was not responsible for the current "mess".

"The problem is, historically, developing countries, they did not participate in this mess. The mess was created by the developed countries and they should pay for it," OPEC Secretary General Abdullah El-Badri said.

He was speaking at the end of a meeting in poverty-stricken Angola of the 12-member organisation, which sees a threat to its key exports in moves to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

Badri cited "mistrust" between the developed and developing world which has pushed for wealthy countries to shoulder global warming efforts.

"Let us be just and fair and try not to put the burden on the developing countries," he said. "There is a mistrust between developed and developing countries. All of us should sit and try to solve it."

The final accord at UN climate talks last week in Copenhagen, put together by the major emerging and developed countries, has been panned by critics and climate change campaigners as a weak political statement short on specifics.

The accord set a commitment to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit). But it did not spell out the important stepping stones -- global emissions targets for 2020 or 2050 -- for getting there.

The pledges were also voluntary and free from tough compliance provisions to ensure they are honoured.

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AFP: EU seeks way ahead after 'disastrous' UN climate talks

22 December 2009

European environment ministers began Tuesday to plan a new strategy for tackling climate change after "disastrous" UN climate negotiations which the US and China did their best to undermine, the Swedish EU presidency said.

"I call this a disaster, it doesn't at all match the needs of the world and that is what we have to discuss," said Sweden's Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency until the end of the year.

The outcome of the UN climate talks in Copenhagen, which ended last Friday "was mostly for the big ones, for the US and for China and their followers" agreeing on "the lowest common denominator," he told reporters as he arrived for the talks in Brussels.

The Copenhagen agreement was put together by leaders of the United States, China, India, Brazil, South Africa and major European nations, after it became clear the 194-nation summit was in danger of failure.

It promised 100 billion dollars for poor nations that risk bearing the brunt of the global warming fallout and set a commitment to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

The summit outcome has been widely criticised, however, with recriminations among many of the participants.

Belgian Climate Minister Paul Magnette is one of the Europeans seeking a stronger EU line, and sees a kind of climate tax as a possible answer.

"If some countries, including the biggest emitters in the world, continue to block the adoption of binding emission reduction targets, the European Union has to consider... a carbon tax on products imported from these countries," he told the Belgian daily Le Soir Monday.

Otherwise, he added, companies operating in Europe, which has set binding CO2 cuts of 20 percent by 2020, would be at a disadvantage.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has also said that such a carbon tax is worth considering.

However, the idea does not have unanimous EU backing.

"We can't reach our goals through state edicts," German Environment Minister Norbert Roettgen said on Tuesday.

The European Commission is also reticent. "The carbon tax is not a subject for discussion" at the EU ministerial talks, an official said.

No decisions were expected on Tuesday, but the post-Copenhagen debate was underway in Europe.

"The governments are in the process of analysing and leading the debate," one negotiator said, while adding that the next major talks would take place in Seville on January 15-16 after Spain assumes the EU presidency.

Roettgen was not despairing. "This isn't lost," he said.

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AP: South Africa blasts Copenhagen failure

22 December 2009

South Africa says Copenhagen's failure to produce a legally binding climate change agreement was unacceptable, joining a global chorus of condemnation even though it helped draft the final accord.

South Africa's environment minister Buyelwa Sonjica and her two top climate change negotiators said Tuesday that part of the blame rested with the way the host guided the conference.

In their first media briefing since returning from talks in the Danish capital that ended Saturday, the trio described an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion that Denmark was plotting to force its own position on other nations.

In the end, South African negotiator Joanne Yawitch said, the Danes unveiled a draft at the 11th hour that Yawitch said was "seriously problematic."

She said negotiators edited late into the night and came up with a document South Africa found more balanced, but that she felt substantive changes were unwelcome.

Her fellow negotiator Alf Wills said the resulting agreement was limited not only in terms of what it did to save the planet, but in the number of nations that accepted it, saying it did not extend beyond the 28 represented at the late-night negotiations.

Sonjica said substantive talks were hijacked by debates over how to handle the process.

"Process is important, since it determines outcomes, but some ill-restrained interventions combined with poor decisions by those guiding the process meant that process problems caused the loss of three days — precious time indeed," Sonjica said.

Copenhagen's outcome was "not acceptable. It's definitely not acceptable. It's disappointing," Sonjica said.

South Africa along with the U.S., India, Brazil and China drafted the climate change agreement reached in Denmark. The compromise calls for reducing emissions to keep temperatures from rising more than 2 C (3.6 F) above preindustrial levels.

The nonbinding agreement also calls on rich nations to spend billions to help poor nations deal with drought and other impacts of climate change, and to develop clean energy.

Sonjica said South African President Jacob Zuma had discussed with other African leaders whether the talks should be abandoned, but it was decided it would be better to continue to try to influence the talks from inside.

"And maybe what we have now would have been worse" had there been a walk out, she said.

In the days since the talks ended, it seems no one has had much good to say about Copenhagen, resulting in some international sniping.

Several nations have said the industrialized world should have committed to deeper emissions cuts.

British climate change minister Edward Miliband wrote in The Guardian newspaper Sunday that most countries — developed and developing — supported binding cuts in emissions, but that "some leading developing countries currently refuse to countenance this."

He singled out China.

Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said Miliband's opinion piece seemed designed to sow discord among developing nations.

EU officials have complained countries such as Nicaragua, Bolivia, Sudan and Venezuela prevented a more ambitious pact.

South Africa's Wills said the political agreement that emerged from Copenhagen did have positive elements that can be built upon at the next round of talks, scheduled in Mexico City in 2010.

Wills pointed to agreements on how the U.S. and other developed countries would record emission reduction targets, and on how emission reduction action by advanced developing countries like South Africa would be accounted for.

South Africa is the only African nation among the 20 countries that emits nearly 90 percent of the world's greenhouse gases.

But while their country is more industrialized than most on the continent, the majority of South Africans are poor, some living without electricity even as the country's coal-fired power plants contribute to global warming.

There have been suggestions that countries like South Africa could have brought more to the negotiating table in terms of committing to cutting their own emissions.

Wills said such ideas amounted to "shifting the burden from those who are historically responsible for the problem to those who are not responsible."

Yawitch said the challenge ahead will be to rebuild trust among nations that she said was damaged in Copenhagen.

"You can do the impossible," she said, "if people trust each other."

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AFP: Bangladesh wants 15 pct of climate fund: minister

22 December 2009

Bangladesh, one of the nations most vulnerable to global warming, will seek 15 percent of a 30-billion-dollar climate change fund committed at the Copenhagen summit, the environment minister said Tuesday.

Bangladesh, with a population of 150 million, makes up around 15 percent of the approximately one billion people estimated to be affected by global warming, Environment Minister Hasan Mahmud said.

"We demand per capita compensation: 15 percent of the 30 billion dollar fund," he said, referring to the "fast track" finance pledged by rich nations for adaptation to and mitigation of climate change for the 2010-2012 period.

The money will be used to construct cyclone shelters, reinforce coastal embankments, develop saline resistant crops and for a program of reforestation, he added.

The Copenhagen Accord, passed at the weekend, has been widely condemned for failing to spell out important global emissions targets for 2020 or 2050 that are the key to holding down temperatures.

It also promised 100 billion dollars for poor nations that risk bearing the brunt of the global warming fallout, but has not given a fixed payout plan.

The Bangladeshi government is satisfied with the outcome, Mahmud said.

"We haven't said it's a setback. We haven't also said we are very happy. But what we said is that it's an important achievement that the world has reached a consensus to tackle global warming," he said.

"It's not enough for our (least-developed countries') needs," Mahmud said, but added that important progress had been made by creating such a fund for the first time.

His comments came days after Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said she was pleased with the "reasonable conclusion" of the Copenhagen summit.

On the summit's sideline, a charity called Germanwatch published a climate-risk study based on data from insurance giant Munich Re, saying Bangladesh was the country most severely affected by extreme weather events from 1990 to 2008.

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Reuters: India says to better cuts in gas emissions growth

22 December 2009

India said it was willing to rein in its "carbon intensity" -- the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted per unit of economic output -- by between 20 and 25 percent by 2020, from 2005 levels.

"(It) is not only eminently feasible, but can also be improved upon to the benefit of our own people," Jairam Ramesh, the environment minister, said in parliament.

India will prepare a roadmap for a low carbon growth strategy in another four months, he told a news conference later.

The climate change meeting ended last week with a non-legally binding political agreement at the last moment between the United States and the big developing countries -- China, India, Brazil and South Africa.

Ramesh said the BASIC group of countries comprising Brazil, South Africa, India and China was successful in thwarting global pressure to agree to a legally-binding emissions cut.

"It was at this crucial meeting that the BASIC group was able to get agreement on its proposals To ensure that the Copenhagen Accord was not legally binding and there was no mention of a new legally binding instrument in the accord," Ramesh said.

Talks on a binding treaty are to extend throughout next year before the next November/December climate change summit in Mexico.

But Ramesh said the BASIC countries along with other developing nations will stick to the negotiating framework as laid out in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Bali Action Plan and the Kyoto Protocol as negotiations continue until the next summit in Mexico.

"We are not rewriting UNFCCC, we are not rewriting Bali Action Plan or the Kyoto Protocol. Yes, we now have a fourth animal called the Copenhagen Accord. What this animal comes out to be is up to us," Ramesh said.

"It (Copenhagen Accord) is not a legally binding document, it is not a document to replace the Kyoto Protocol and this is not a document to replace the framework convention," he said.

Ramesh said India came out well at Copenhagen and successful in safeguarding national interest.

"For India, climate change is a developmental issue and my mandate was to protect India's right to faster economic growth."

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Reuters: Sarkozy wants global carbon talks in Paris: groups

22 December 2009

Sarkozy met representatives from several environmental campaign groups to discuss last week's Copenhagen meeting, which ended with a bare minimum agreement that fell far short of the ambitions France and many other countries had set.

In a statement, the presidential office said only that Sarkozy had "evoked the conditions of the mobilization that France intended to bring in the coming months" during a lunch with NGOs.

Arnaud Gossement, spokesman for the France Nature Environnement group, said after the meeting that Sarkozy had announced plans to invite the countries which are home to the world's four major forest basins to Paris at the end of January.

He also intended to invite the 28 countries that signed the final Copenhagen accord to a meeting in April or May.

The aim of the meeting would be "to implement the 50 percent objective by 2050," Gossement said, referring to the European Union's ambition of cutting greenhouse gas emissions to 50 percent of their 1990 level by the middle of the century.

But he added that Sarkozy believed that not all of the 28 countries would attend the meeting. "He doesn't see China or Saudi Arabia joining the meeting," Gossement said.

A Chinese official said earlier this week that Beijing will treat talks on a binding global climate change pact in 2010 as a struggle over the "right to develop," signaling more tough deal-making will follow the Copenhagen summit.

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Reuters: Pacific warming continues: Australia weather bureau

22 December 2009

The bureau said in its latest fortnightly report that central Pacific Ocean surface temperatures are now at their warmest level since the El Nino of 1997-98, exceeding temperatures observed in both the 2002-03 and 2006-07 events.

"Similarly, cloudiness and rainfall near the equator remains enhanced, while eastern Australian rainfall remains low; all typical of a mature El Nino event," the bureau said.

An El Nino, which means "little boy" in Spanish, is driven by an abnormal warming of the eastern Pacific Ocean, and can create havoc in weather patterns across the Asia-Pacific region.

The last severe El Nino in 1998 killed more than 2,000 people and caused billions of dollars in damages to crops, infrastructure and mines in Australia and Asia.

The weather bureau said earlier this week that Australia could face a dry start for its summer crops as the El Nino pattern affects rainfall, raising the possibility of lower harvests of sorghum, sugar and cotton.

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BBC News: Why did Copenhagen fail to deliver a climate deal?

22 December 2009

About 45,000 travelled to the UN climate summit in Copenhagen - the vast majority convinced of the need for a new global agreement on climate change.

So why did the summit end without one, just an acknowledgement of a deal struck by five nations, led by the US.

And why did delegates leave the Danish capital without agreement that something significantly stronger should emerge next year?

Our environment correspondent Richard Black looks at eight reasons that might have played a part.

1. KEY GOVERNMENTS DO NOT WANT A GLOBAL DEAL

Until the end of this summit, it appeared that all governments wanted to keep the keys to combating climate change within the UN climate convention.

Implicit in the convention, though, is the idea that governments take account of each others' positions and actually negotiate.

That happened at the Kyoto summit. Developed nations arrived arguing for a wide range of desired outcomes; during negotiations, positions converged, and a negotiated deal was done.

In Copenhagen, everyone talked; but no-one really listened.

The end of the meeting saw leaders of the US and the BASIC group of countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) hammering out a last-minute deal in a back room as though the nine months of talks leading up to this summit, and the Bali Action Plan to which they had all committed two years previously, did not exist.

Over the last few years, statements on climate change have been made in other bodies such as the G8, Major Economies Forum (MEF) and Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum (APEC), which do not have formal negotiations, and where outcomes are not legally binding.

It appears now that this is the arrangement preferred by the big countries (meaning the US and the BASIC group).

Language in the "Copenhagen Accord" could have been taken from - indeed, some passages were reportedly taken from, via the mechanism of copying and pasting - G8 and MEF declarations.

The logical conclusion is that this is the arrangement that the big players now prefer - an informal setting, where each country says what it is prepared to do - where nothing is negotiated and nothing is legally binding.

2. THE US POLITICAL SYSTEM

Just about every other country involved in the UN talks has a single chain of command; when the president or prime minister speaks, he or she is able to make commitments for the entire government.

Not so the US. The president is not able to pledge anything that Congress will not support, and his inability to step up the US offer in Copenhagen was probably the single biggest impediment to other parties improving theirs.

Viewed internationally, the US effectively has two governments, each with power of veto over the other.

Doubtless the founding fathers had their reasons. But it makes the US a nation apart in these processes, often unable to state what its position is or to move that position - a nightmare for other countries' negotiators.

3. BAD TIMING

Although the Bali Action Plan was drawn up two years ago, it is only one year since Barack Obama entered the White House and initiated attempts to curb US carbon emissions.

He is also attempting major healthcare reforms; and both measures are proving highly difficult.

If the Copenhagen summit had come a year later, perhaps Mr Obama would have been able to speak from firmer ground, and perhaps offer some indication of further action down the line - indications that might have induced other countries to step up their own offers.

As it is, he was in a position to offer nothing - and other countries responded in kind.

4. THE HOST GOVERNMENT

In many ways, Denmark was an excellent summit host. Copenhagen was a friendly and capable city, transport links worked, Bella Center food outlets remained open through the long negotiating nights.

But the government of Lars Lokke Rasmussen got things badly, badly wrong.

Even before the summit began, his office put forward a draft political declaration to a select group of "important countries" - thereby annoying every country not on the list, including most of the ones that feel seriously threatened by climate impacts.

The chief Danish negotiator Thomas Becker was sacked just weeks before the summit amid tales of a huge rift between Mr Rasmussen's office and the climate department of minister Connie Hedegaard. This destroyed the atmosphere of trust that developing country negotiators had established with Mr Becker.

Procedurally, the summit was a farce, with the Danes trying to hurry things along so that a conclusion could be reached, bringing protest after protest from some of the developing countries that had presumed everything on the table would be properly negotiated. Suspensions of sessions became routine.

Despite the roasting they had received over the first "Danish text", repeatedly the hosts said they were preparing new documents - which should have been the job of the independent chairs of the various negotiating strands.

China's chief negotiator was barred by security for the first three days of the meeting - a serious issue that should have been sorted out after day one. This was said to have left the Chinese delegation in high dudgeon.

When Mr Rasmussen took over for the high-level talks, it became quickly evident that he understood neither the climate convention itself nor the politics of the issue. Experienced observers said they had rarely seen a UN summit more ineptly chaired.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the prime minister's office envisaged the summit as an opportunity to cover Denmark and Mr Rasmussen in glory - a "made in Denmark" pact that would solve climate change.

Most of us, I suspect, will remember the city and people of Copenhagen with some affection. But it is likely that history will judge that the government's political handling of the summit covered the prime minister in something markedly less fragrant than glory.

5. THE WEATHER

Although "climate sceptical" issues made hardly a stir in the plenary sessions, any delegate wavering as to the scientific credibility of the "climate threat" would hardly have been convinced by the freezing weather and - on the last few days - the snow that blanketed routes from city centre to Bella Center.

Reporting that the "noughties" had been the warmest decade since instrumental records began, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) noted "except in parts of North America".

If the US public had experienced the searing heat and prolonged droughts and seriously perturbed rainfall patterns seen in other corners of the globe, would they have pressed their senators harder on climate action over the past few years?

6. 24-HOUR NEWS CULTURE

The way this deal was concocted and announced was perhaps the logical conclusion of a news culture wherein it is more important to beam a speaking president live into peoples' homes from the other side of the world than it is to evaluate what has happened and give a balanced account.

The Obama White House mounted a surgical strike of astounding effectiveness (and astounding cynicism) that saw the president announcing a deal live on TV before anyone - even most of the governments involved in the talks - knew a deal had been done.

The news went first to the White House lobby journalists travelling with the president. With due respect, they are not as well equipped to ask critical questions as the environment specialists who had spent the previous two weeks at the Bella Center.

After the event, of course, journalists pored over the details.

But the agenda had already been set; by the time those articles emerged, anyone who was not particularly interested in the issue would have come to believe that a deal on climate change had been done, with the US providing leadership to the global community.

The 24-hour live news culture did not make the Copenhagen Accord. But its existence offered the White House a way to keep the accord's chief architect away from all meaningful scrutiny while telling the world of his triumph.

7. EU POLITICS

For about two hours on Friday night, the EU held the fate of the Obama-BASIC "accord" in its hands, as leaders who had been sideswiped by the afternoon's diplomatic coup d'etat struggled to make sense of what had happened and decide the appropriate response.

If the EU had declined to endorse the deal at that point, a substantial number of developing countries would have followed suit, and the accord would now be simply an informal agreement between a handful of countries - symbolising the failure of the summit to agree anything close to the EU's minimum requirements, and putting some beef behind Europe's insistence that something significant must be achieved next time around.

So why did the EU endorse such an emasculated document, given that several leaders beforehand had declared that no deal would be better than a weak deal?

The answer probably lies in a mixture - in proportions that can only be guessed at - of three factors:

- Politics as usual - ie never go against the US, particularly the Obama US, and always emerge with something to claim as a success
- EU expansion, which has increased the proportion of governments in the bloc that are unconvinced of the arguments for constraining emissions
- The fact that important EU nations, in particular France and the UK, had invested significant political capital in preparing the ground for a deal - tying up a pact on finance with Ethiopia's President Meles Zenawi, and mounting a major diplomatic push on Thursday when it appeared things might unravel.

Having prepared the bed for US and Chinese leaders and having hoped to share it with them as equal partners, acquiescing to an outcome that it did not want announced in a manner that gave it no respect arguably leaves the EU cast in a role rather less dignified than it might have imagined.

8. CAMPAIGNERS GOT THEIR STRATEGIES WRONG

An incredible amount of messaging and consultation went on behind the scenes in the run-up to this meeting, as vast numbers of campaign groups from all over the planet

strived to co-ordinate their "messaging" in order to maximise the chances of achieving their desired outcome.

The messaging had been - in its broadest terms - to praise China, India, Brazil and the other major developing countries that pledged to constrain the growth in their emissions; to go easy on Barack Obama; and to lambast the countries (Canada, Russia, the EU) that campaigners felt could and should do more.

Now, post-mortems are being held, and all those positions are up for review. US groups are still giving Mr Obama more brickbats than bouquets, for fear of wrecking Congressional legislation - but a change of stance is possible.

Having seen the deal emerge that the real leaders of China, India and the other large developing countries evidently wanted, how will those countries now be treated?

How do you campaign in China - or in Saudi Arabia, another influential country that emerged with a favourable outcome?

The situation is especially demanding for those organisations that have traditionally supported the developing world on a range of issues against what they see as the west's damaging dominance.

After Copenhagen, there is no "developing world" - there are several. Responding to this new world order is a challenge for campaign groups, as it will be for politicians in the old centres of world power.

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BBC News: Copenhagen climate summit fails green investors

22 December 2009

When most of the exhausted delegates at Copenhagen's Bella Centre finally witnessed a deal, it predictably called for huge investment in clean energy technologies to stop climate change.

But the text didn't specify exactly how that money would be raised - and some at the talks say it did little new to encourage private investment.

The biggest step Copenhagen could have taken to stimulate the green economy would have been to send a strong signal that the price of carbon dioxide pollution will rise.

But the deal that emerged in the early hours of Saturday included no national carbon dioxide caps.

It laid down an ambition to keep global temperature rise to within 2C of pre-industrial levels, but left emission reduction declarations to the end of January - and even then they won't be legally binding.

It means investors are left guessing at the likely future price of carbon.

Airlines and power companies, for example, don't yet know whether upgrading to cleaner technology will be economically worthwhile.

But the signals from Copenhagen have led many to expect caps at the lower end of the range being discussed before the conference and the lack of any reference to a future legally binding framework leads some to question the level of commitment.

"Copenhagen was a big setback for investors who wanted clear and credible policy signals," encouraging investment, says Nick Robins from HSBC.

Carbon markets

As well as being vague on emission caps, Copenhagen left a question mark over the future of carbon markets.

There is one reference to markets in the accord: We decide to pursue various approaches, including opportunities to use markets, to enhance the cost-effectiveness of, and to promote mitigation actions.

The 1997 Kyoto treaty established the global carbon market, allowing credits from clean energy in the developing world to be sold to offset emissions in the West.

But the targets set by the treaty are due to expire in 2012 - and Copenhagen did not renew them.

It means investors don't know whether or how they will be able to sell "credits" from clean energy projects in the future.

Investment from carbon markets to developing countries is already falling - and may continue to.

One thing Copenhagen did was to mobilise support for the idea of channelling an annual \$100bn of funding to the developing world, for adaptation and mitigation, by 2020 - and about half of this, it has been suggested, would be distributed via markets.

But again, how this objective will be achieved, was not specified.

Incentives

There was also little indication of what other incentives there will be for clean energy. Investment in clean energy has already been falling due to recession - by 15% last year.

The EU retains a renewable energy target of 20% of all electricity generation by 2020 - but incentives for renewable energy elsewhere are less clear.

Whilst the talks are stalled "capital will be deployed, but it will be deployed to the high-carbon economy", says Abyd Karmali, President of the International Carbon Markets association.

In other words, business as usual.

Some doubted if a treaty at Copenhagen could ever have provided the money needed.

Analysts Bloomberg New Energy Finance estimate that \$500bn has to be spent on clean energy every year to stabilise greenhouse gases in the atmosphere by 2020.

Many clean technologies need a very high carbon price to be economic.

"These technologies really won't see a breakthrough carbon price until 2025 or later - but the investments need to happen today," says Tom Kerr from the International Energy Agency.

National policies

Catherine Bremner, Head of international development at the Carbon Trust claims the encouraging news is outside the talks.

China and India have both launched policies to encourage clean energy investment and the US allocated one hundred billion in its recent stimulus bill towards clean technologies.

Within the EU, even meeting existing targets will still require major investment.

Separate to its emissions target the EU has an overall renewable energy target of 20.

"We need to be putting two wind turbines down a day for the next 10 years," in the UK alone, to meet EU targets, says Ms Bremner.

National and regional schemes often offer direct subsidies of the kind that is hard to agree on at international level.

"People can take stuff that is real at a national or regional level to the bank." Says Michael Liebreich, CEO of Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

His organisation say 700 pieces of new legislation have been passed around the world promoting clean energy - partly thanks to the Copenhagen process.

The US is set to pass its key legislation in the next year.

With the destination of the UN process now unknown a lot depends on it.

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Independent (UK): Brown: we must learn lessons of Copenhagen

22 December 2009

The way world leaders negotiate climate change needs to be reformed, Gordon Brown said last night in the wake of the UN's Copenhagen Climate Conference, where the failure to produce a strong agreement to tackle global warming has disappointed millions around the world.

The unbreakable deadlock that "threatened to pull down the talks" must not be allowed to happen again, the Prime Minister said in a podcast on the Downing Street website – he added that there must be reform of the international institutions in which climate change is discussed.

Mr Brown's evident frustration with the long-term UN negotiating process, which ran into the sand in the two-week meeting in the Danish capital and had to be rescued by an ad hoc agreement by heads of state, was echoed yesterday in comments from the Energy and Climate Change Secretary, Ed Miliband, and also from Oxfam.

Oxfam's climate adviser, Antonio Hill, said that the Copenhagen Accord, the pact eventually agreed last Friday night, was not only "hugely disappointing" but also "reveals how the traditional approach to international negotiations, based on brinkmanship and national self-interest, is both unfit for pursuing our common destiny and downright dangerous".

There was too much at stake for a "politics-as-usual" approach, Mr Hill said.

"We must act quickly to address the shortfalls of these negotiations so that we can make up for lost time and tackle climate change with the decisiveness and urgency needed. This cannot happen again."

Mr Miliband gave his own thoughts about reforming the climate negotiating process when he addressed a special meeting in London of groups who had contributed to the Government's pre-conference efforts to raise the profile of Copenhagen, from scout groups, to business alliances, to environmental pressure groups such as the World Wide Fund for Nature and Greenpeace.

Although Mr Miliband continues to believe in the UN as the body under which global warming should be dealt with, he believes that ministers should be involved earlier in the process. In the lead-up to the Copenhagen summit, civil servant negotiators were involved in much of the discussions, but they did not have the same political clout of ministers.

The other weakness identified jointly by Mr Miliband and Mr Brown was that any one of the 192 states in the negotiating process could, in effect, thwart all the others by refusing to sanction an agreement.

At Copenhagen, this role was performed by China, which refused to agree several elements of the final Copenhagen Accord that the majority of other states had wanted kept in – such as the commitment to halve the world's emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050.

Yesterday Mr Miliband openly referred to China's obstructionist tactics – first detailed at the weekend in the Independent on Sunday – and accused the Chinese of "hijacking" the Copenhagen summit.

"We did not get an agreement on 50 per cent reductions in global emissions by 2050, or on 80 per cent reductions by developed countries, as both were vetoed by China, despite the support of a coalition of developed and the vast majority of developing countries," he said.

Mr Brown was less direct in his criticisms and did not mention China by name, but last night he did say: "Never again should we let a global deal to move towards a greener future be held to ransom by only a handful of countries."

And he stressed: "I believe that in 2010 we will need to look at reforming our international institutions to meet the common challenges we face as a global community."

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Deutsche-Welle (Germany): European Union seeks new allies on climate change

22 December 2009

The EU's environment ministers have said the US needs to become more active in climate talks.

The 27-nation bloc is on the lookout for new climate allies following the disappointing outcome of the Copenhagen talks.

European Union environment ministers on Tuesday scrambled to inject new momentum into climate talks at a meeting in Brussels.

The ministers debated how to find new allies following the United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen, which the EU's Swedish presidency termed a "disaster."

The ministers emphasized the need for concrete, legally binding measures to combat global warming.

But German Environment Minister Norbert Roettgen also spoke of a "coalition of the like-minded" who want effective climate protection.

"We have to find allies that will join us on the path to the next conferences," Roettgen said. "There are such states, and these new alliances must be organized."

Countries such as Japan, South Korea and Australia were named.

The next UN climate conferences take place in Bonn in June and in Mexico at the end of November. Roettgen said the Bonn conference would be "an opportunity to arrive at further steps."

US AND CHINA UNWILLING

Sweden's Environment Minister Andreas Carlgren chaired the meeting for the last time before he hands over that role to his Spanish counterpart on January 1.

Spain is due to take over the EU's rotating presidency at that time, albeit under the aegis of the bloc's full-time president Herman Van Rompuy.

Carlsgren described the Copenhagen summit as a "great failure" despite what he called Europe's united efforts.

"Europe never lost its aim, never, never came to splits or different positions," Carlsgren said.

"But of course, this was mainly about other countries really (being) unwilling, and especially the United States and China."

NO CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS

The EU had hoped to lead the way in forging an ambitious UN deal on fighting climate change.

So far, the EU has pledged to cut emissions to 20 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. It had promised to deepen that cut to 30 percent if Copenhagen produced an ambitious deal.

But EU leaders ruled out that option as soon as the talks ended.

The two-week, UN-led conference in Copenhagen ended on Saturday with a non-legally binding agreement to limit global warming to a maximum of two degrees Celsius over pre-industrial times, but the text did not lay out how to achieve that.

Carlsgren called the agreement the "lowest common denominator."

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Der Spiegel (Deutschland): Versauerung steigert Lärmpegel in Ozeanen

21 Dezember 2009

Kohlendioxid macht die Meere saurer.

Das gefährdet nicht nur Lebewesen mit Kalkschalen, sondern könnte noch eine weitere Folge haben: Der Lärmpegel in den Ozeanen steigt, da saures Wasser Geräusche besser leitet.

Forscher befürchten, dass orientierungslose Wale künftig noch öfter stranden.

Das von Menschen ausgestoßene Kohlendioxid erwärmt nicht nur die Luft, sondern wird auch von den Meeren zum Teil aufgenommen.

Die Folge: Die Ozeane werden saurer. Doch nicht nur das: In einer Studie kommen US-Wissenschaftler jetzt zu dem Schluss, dass es in den Ozeanen künftig auch lauter werden könnte.

Denn Wasser mit einem niedrigeren pH-Wert transportiert Geräusche besser.

Das Ausmaß der Veränderung ist den Forschern zufolge beträchtlich: Bis zum Jahr 2100 wird die Schalldämpfung von tiefen Tönen in bestimmten Regionen der Ozeane um bis zu 60 Prozent sinken, berichten Tatiana Ilyina und ihre Kollegen von der University of Hawaii im Fachmagazin "Nature Geoscience".

Die tiefen Töne im Meer, also Geräusche mit einer niedrigen Schallfrequenz im Bereich zwischen einem und fünf Kilohertz, entstehen vor allem durch natürliche Phänomene wie etwa Regen, Wellen und die Aktivität von Meeresbewohnern.

Aber auch die Schifffahrt oder der Gebrauch von Sonarsystemen tragen zur Unterwasser-Geräuschkulisse bei.

Dass die Versauerung der Ozeane weitreichende Konsequenzen für die gesamte Nahrungskette im Meer hat, diskutierten Wissenschaftler schon ausführlich auf dem Kopenhagener Klimagipfel.

Jetzt befürchten die Forscher um Ilyina, dass sich eine Erhöhung des Geräuschpegels vor allem auf das Verhalten der Tiere im Meer auswirken wird: Wale könnten vermehrt stranden, weil sie die Orientierung verlieren.

Von Buckelwalen und Belugas ist bereits bekannt, dass Schiffsgeräusche ihr natürliches Verhalten verändern. Außerdem könnten Delfine vorübergehend ihr Hörvermögen verlieren.

Insgesamt könnte auch die Kommunikation zwischen Tieren durch die reduzierte Schalldämpfung beeinträchtigt werden, schreibt das Forscherteam.

VERÄNDERTES SÄURE-BASE-GLEICHGEWICHT

Die Ergebnisse aus ihrer Untersuchung ziehen die Wissenschaftler aus einer Computersimulation.

Bei ihren Berechnungen berücksichtigten sie verschiedene Größen, die eine Rolle bei der Ausbreitung des Schalls unter Wasser spielen.

Dabei ergab die Simulation, dass der Salzgehalt, die Temperatur und der Druck des Wassers die Schallausbreitung offenbar nur wenig beeinflussen.

Vielmehr kommt es bei der Schalldämpfung im Meer den Forschern zufolge auf zwei Faktoren an: Zum einen auf die Viskosität, also die Zähflüssigkeit des Meerwassers, zum anderen auf die Menge gelöster chemischer Verbindungen.

Substanzen wie Borsäure, Magnesiumsulfate und Karbonate beeinflussen unter anderem das Säure-Base-Gleichgewicht und bestimmen damit den pH-Wert. Auch Kohlendioxid gehört dazu, und dieser Faktor tritt seit Beginn des 19.

Jahrhunderts besonders hervor: Immer größere Mengen des Klimagases gelangen in die Meere - die Ozeane werden saurer.

Die Forscher haben nun den pH-Wert der Meere in Beziehung zur Absorption von Schallwellen gesetzt.

Demnach bestimmt der pH-Wert die Schalldämpfung besonders bei den tiefen Tönen, deren Frequenzen unter zehn Kilohertz liegen.

Bei Tönen mit mehr als zehn Kilohertz ist die Absorption unabhängig vom pH-Wert; die Viskosität des Wassers wird zur wesentlichen Größe.

Seit der industriellen Revolution ist der pH-Wert der Meere bereits um 0,1 gesunken.

Dadurch wird der Schall von Tönen im Bereich von 100 Hertz bis 10 Kilohertz um 10 bis 20 Prozent weniger gedämpft als noch vor dem Jahr 1800, berichten die Wissenschaftler.

Um zu berechnen, wie der Schall in Zukunft im Meer transportiert wird, griffen die Forscher auf drei Modelle zurück.

Im Mittelwert gehen diese davon aus, dass in den nächsten 100 bis 300 Jahren der pH-Wert in einigen Meeresregionen um 0,6 sinken wird.

Normalerweise besitzt Meerwasser einen pH-Wert von 7,5 bis 8,4, ist also leicht alkalisch. Durch die prognostizierte Versauerung dürfte die Dämpfung der tiefen Töne um 60 Prozent sinken.

Besonders betroffen wären Regionen im Nordatlantik und Nordpazifik sowie in den subtropischen Gebieten um Hawaii, im Panama-Kanal und in den Gewässern um Japan.

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Le Monde (France) : Bœuf durable ou bœuf émissaire ?, par Denis Sibille

22 Décembre 2009

La société prend conscience de l'impact de l'activité humaine sur l'avenir de la planète.

Le politique tente de trouver des solutions avec le protocole de Kyoto, le Grenelle de l'environnement et aujourd'hui avec le sommet de Copenhague.

Les inerties sont nombreuses, le problème est colossal ; réchauffement de la planète, surpopulation, pauvreté, malnutrition, raréfaction des ressources en eau et en énergies...

Les mégapoles de 20 millions d'habitants qui croissent en Asie et en Amérique latine illustrent bien toute la folie et les déséquilibres de ce monde.

On est loin de nos campagnes...

Que pourtant certains veulent caricaturer, provoquant ainsi des campagnes médiatiques qui finissent par faire de la filière bovine un bouc émissaire, transformé pour l'occasion en "bœuf émissaire".

Les gaz à effet de serre sont souvent sur le devant de la scène.

Toutes les activités humaines y contribuent : transport (27 %), industrie (21 %), logement (20 %), agriculture (19 %) et énergie (13 %).

Les vaches rotent... Certes, en agriculture, l'élevage des ruminants serait responsable d'environ 50 % des émissions de gaz à effet de serre ; principalement à cause du méthane, gaz qui est naturellement émis lors de la digestion des fourrages par les animaux.

C'est ainsi depuis la nuit des temps.

Encore faut-il soustraire le stockage de CO₂ dans le sol des prairies permanentes (11 millions d'hectares en France), qui réduit de 75 % les émissions de méthane attribuées aux ruminants, ce que semblent avoir oublié certains scientifiques.

De plus, il convient de ne pas tout imputer à la production de viande et de répartir le CO₂ à proportion entre viande et lait, qui sont souvent issus de la même vache.

Les Français consomment en moyenne 373 g par semaine de viandes de boucherie (bœuf, veau, agneau, porc frais, viande chevaline) : inutile donc de proposer, comme certains récemment, une journée sans viande, car avec ces chiffres de consommation, on est déjà à trois journées par semaine sans viande de boucherie au menu...

Comme les autres secteurs de l'économie, l'élevage et la filière sont au centre des débats de société de demain et la discrétion ne fera pas disparaître le problème...

Les éleveurs et la filière entendent prendre la parole eux aussi pour éviter les amalgames et corriger les excès.

Ils sont convaincus de l'intérêt de la production bovine, que ce soit en termes de nutrition, de santé, d'écologie, de territoire et d'économie.

C'est le "bœuf durable".

Ils s'interrogent sur l'obstination à boucler le cycle de Doha entamé il y a... 9 ans ; la théorie de l'OCDE de spécialisation des continents, reprise en dogme par l'OMC, est à revoir...

Il faut cesser d'enlever toutes les protections douanières au nom du tout commerce, que seules les contraintes sanitaires tempèrent à ce jour.

L'absence de régularisation a fait chanceler tout le système financier, cette même cause viendra à bout de la forêt amazonienne.

C'est le droit de chacun d'être végétarien, éleveur, welfariste, écologiste...

Mais c'est le devoir de tous de contribuer à trouver des solutions à l'énorme défi environnemental ; elles ne sont jamais simples et sectaires, elles sont toujours complexes et donc peu médiatisables dans une société réductrice et sourde aux nuances.

Ce n'est pas l'affrontement des cupidités et des idéologies, des paraîtres, des clichés et de l'argent qui fera gagner l'humanité, c'est une véritable prise de conscience des enjeux et une politique du raisonnable qui le fera.

Notre modèle de production de viande bovine est un excellent projet territorial et environnemental, culturel, économique et social ; c'est un projet citoyen où la filière s'engage sur la voie du bœuf durable.

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Good Planet(Blog) : Copenhague n'est pas la fin d'une belle idée

21 december 2009

Le résultat de la Conférence de Copenhague est décevant, même si cet échec était, pour certains, inscrit dans le faible niveau des engagements des pays signataires de la Convention Climat.

Beaucoup espéraient qu'à l'occasion de ce rendez-vous historique dans la capitale danoise, chaque pays allait mettre sur la table des propositions améliorées dans le but de débloquer la négociation.

C'est tout le contraire qui s'est produit. Mais ni la démarche, celle d'une négociation inscrite dans le cadre de l'Organisation des Nations Unies, ni l'ambition soutenue par les organisations non gouvernementales de stabiliser le climat de la Terre, ne doivent être remises en cause.

Alors que la communauté scientifique réunie au sein de GIEC préconise une réduction comprise entre 25 à 40 % des émissions de gaz à effet de serre avant 2020 afin d'avoir une chance sur deux d'empêcher la température moyenne du globe d'augmenter de plus de deux degrés, les annonces des uns et des autres sont toujours restées en deçà.

Que d'obstacles pour parvenir à un accord satisfaisant pour l'humanité ! Même l'Europe, avec une réduction de 20 % de ses propres émissions, semblait dire à la face du monde que la stabilité climatique n'était pas l'objectif visé. Bref, des Etats-Unis à la Chine, en passant par les pays pétroliers, chacun s'est défaussé de sa responsabilité, s'est dérobé à ses obligations.

C'est pour cela que, dans cette histoire, il n'y a ni vainqueur, ni vaincu car nous sommes tous dans le même camp, celui des perdants. Il n'y a ni bon, ni méchant, mais beaucoup d'égoïsme à courte vue, de médiocrité partagée et d'insensibilité au sort des autres.

Notre avenir commun repose sur l'engagement de tous et non de quelques hommes ou – femmes d'Etat dont on a pu mesurer le manque de volonté et de vision.

Depuis la conférence de Bali, les ONG ont fourni un travail colossal et de longue haleine pour convaincre, rapprocher les positions, défendre des principes d'équité et d'efficacité mais les représentants de la société civile mondiale se sont retrouvés exclus des derniers jours de la négociation.

La Fondation GoodPlanet, à sa mesure, poursuivra donc son travail d'information et d'éducation du grand public en France et dans le monde afin de mobiliser la société civile dans la lutte contre les changements climatiques.

Nous continuerons notre programme Action Carbone, dont l'objectif est de combattre une injustice en apportant une énergie propre et renouvelable à ceux qui dans les pays du Sud n'en disposent pas, ou en luttant contre la déforestation au profit des populations locales.

Nous avons encore le choix, même si la communauté internationale, en ne se fixant ni objectif, ni contrainte, a rendu l'effort à accomplir plus grand, plus difficile et plus urgent.

Nous devons rassembler nos forces pour obtenir le plus rapidement possible un accord contraignant permettant de réduire de 40 % nos émissions de gaz à effet de serre et de remplacer la majorité des énergies fossiles utilisées aujourd'hui par des énergies sans carbone.

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El País (España): La indigestión de Copenhague

23 Dic. 2009

Al mundo le cuesta digerir el fracaso de la Cumbre sobre Cambio Climático de Copenhague.

Todos los países echan balones fuera y se culpan unos a otros de no haber logrado un acuerdo vinculante para actuar con decisión contra el calentamiento.

Si anteayer la secretaria española de Medio Ambiente, Teresa Ribero, acusó a Estados Unidos de dejar de lado a la UE, ayer alzó la voz el país más contaminante del planeta, China.

Pekín reaccionó con ira a unas declaraciones del ministro británico de Cambio Climático, Ed Miliband, y acusó a Reino Unido de querer sembrar la cizaña entre los países pobres sobre el resultado de la cumbre.

En un artículo de opinión publicado el domingo pasado en *The Guardian*, Miliband dijo que Pekín había "secuestrado" la cumbre al haber rechazado que el tratado fuera vinculante y haber impedido que se incluyeran reducciones cuantificadas de las emisiones de CO2.

"No logramos un acuerdo sobre el 50% de recorte en las emisiones para 2050 o el 80% de reducción para los países desarrollados.

Ambos fueron vetados por China, a pesar de que tenían el apoyo de una coalición de países desarrollados y la inmensa mayoría de los países en vías de desarrollo", escribió Miliband.

"No podemos permitir de nuevo que negociaciones en puntos fundamentales sean secuestradas de esta forma", afirmó el ministro.

Jiang Yu, portavoz de Exteriores china, no se mordió la lengua en su réplica.

"Las declaraciones de determinados políticos británicos son claramente un ardid político. Su objetivo es desviar las responsabilidades hacia los países en desarrollo y provocar la discordia entre éstos", dijo.

El ministro de Exteriores, Yang Jiechi, aseguró que las negociaciones han producido "resultados importantes y positivos", al empujar a las naciones ricas a dar pasos para recortar las emisiones y comprometer ayuda económica y tecnológica a los países pobres para luchar contra el calentamiento.

El acuerdo de Copenhague fue decidido, esencialmente, en una reunión entre el presidente estadounidense, Barack Obama; el primer ministro chino, Wen Jiabao, y líderes de India, Brasil y Suráfrica.

El pacto fija el compromiso de limitar la subida de la temperatura del planeta a dos grados, pero no da cifras de emisiones para 2020 y 2050.

China lo respalda. Wen dejó bien claro en el cónclave que la prioridad absoluta para Pekín es "el desarrollo económico y la eliminación de la pobreza", y que la lucha para que la temperatura no suba más de dos grados, como piden los científicos, "es un objetivo a largo plazo".

Apoya también el texto final India: "Nuestro interés no sólo ha sido protegido sino fortalecido", resumió el titular de Medio Ambiente, Jairam Ramesh.

Lo curioso es que uno de los países que se sentó en la mesa en la que se gestó el pacto, Suráfrica, ha acabado por desmarcarse.

"Para nosotros es definitivamente inaceptable", dijo ayer la ministra de Asuntos Ambientales, Buyelwa Sonjicael, quien añadió que había considerado retirarse de la reunión, pero finalmente decidió no hacerlo tras consultar con otros países africanos.

Los lamentos por el desenlace de Copenhague se sucedieron ayer por todo el mundo. También Europa expresó su decepción de forma contundente.

El ministro sueco de Medio Ambiente, Andreas Calgren, presidente de turno, calificó de "desastre" y "gran fracaso" la cumbre. "Vamos a discutir cómo continuar las negociaciones y cómo llegar más lejos", anunció.

En la misma línea se expresó el ministro de Asuntos Exteriores español, Miguel Ángel Moratinos.

En el Gobierno descartan que se logre un acuerdo internacional vinculante sobre cambio climático antes de finales de 2010.

Mientras tanto, hay quien ha decidido pasar a la acción.

El presidente de Francia, Nicolas Sarkozy, ha propuesto una reunión con los países que albergan las mayores regiones boscosas (Amazonia, Siberia, Indonesia y Congo).

Curiosamente, la misma idea que ha tenido Noruega, que va a convocar a Brasil, Indonesia, Papúa- Nueva Guinea, Guyana y Gabón.

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Deutsche-Welle (Deutschland): EU sucht nach Kopenhagen-Pleite Verbündete

22 Dezember 2009

Die EU will nach dem gescheiterten Gipfel in Kopenhagen an ihren Klimazielen festhalten.

Die Umweltminister beraten über neue Wege, wie unter den Schwellenländern Verbündete gefunden werden können.

Den europäischen Umweltministern steht die Müdigkeit - und die Ratlosigkeit - bei ihrem Treffen am Dienstag (22.12.2009) ins Gesicht geschrieben.

Es waren lange Verhandlungsnächte in Kopenhagen.

Und der Gipfel war alles andere als von Erfolg gekrönt - im Gegenteil: Der schwedische Umweltminister Andreas Carlsson, der den Vorsitz des EU-Rats innehat, spricht von einem Desaster: "Es war wirklich ein riesiger Misserfolg, und wir müssen daraus lernen."

Wenigstens standen die Europäer in Kopenhagen zusammen, betont der deutsche Umweltminister Norbert Röttgen.

Und das tun sie jetzt auch in der Analyse der Konferenz.

Dass die Weltgemeinschaft sich in Kopenhagen verbindlich auf die Begrenzung der Erderwärmung um zwei Grad festgelegt hat, sei als Ergebnis "weit davon entfernt, was wir Europäer fordern und weit davon entfernt, was wir für notwendig halten".

ALLIANZEN VERZWEIFELT GESUCHT

Die EU macht für den enttäuschenden Ausgang der Konferenz den mangelnden Willen vor allem der USA und Chinas verantwortlich.

China ist es in Kopenhagen gelungen, einige Schwellenländer auf seine Seite zu ziehen. Die Europäer konnten ihre Forderungen somit nicht durchsetzen.

Das soll so nicht mehr vorkommen, betont Bundsumweltminister Röttgen, der die "Nutznießer unserer technologischen und finanziellen Angebote" unter den Schwellenländern - also Ländern wie Südafrika, Brasilien oder Indien - für Allianzen mit den Europäern gewinnen will.

Andere Länder müssten nun über den Wettbewerb im Bereich Umwelttechnologie motiviert werden mitzumachen.

Sachargumente reichten nicht mehr, ist Norbert Röttgen überzeugt: "Vielleicht müssen wir dazu übergehen, nachdem wir nicht so richtig haben mitziehen können, dass wir sie nach vorne treiben müssen."

EU HÄLT AN REDUKTIONSZIELEN FEST

Wie das aber genau geschehen soll, welche strategischen Konsequenzen aus der Kopenhagen-Pleite zu ziehen sind, darüber wollen die europäischen Umweltminister im Januar beraten, wenn sie bei ihrem nächsten informellen Treffen im spanischen Sevilla zusammenkommen.

Wirklich sicher ist im Moment eigentlich nur: Die EU will an ihren selbst gesteckten Klima-Zielen festhalten, also den CO₂-Ausstoß bis zum Jahr 2020 um 20 Prozent senken. Deutschland hat sich selbst sogar zu einer 40-Prozent-Reduzierung verpflichtet.

UNEINS ÜBER STRAFZÖLLE FÜR EMISSIONSSÜNDER

Geteilter Meinung sind die Europäer im Falle einer CO₂-Steuer an Europas Außengrenzen.

Insbesondere Frankreichs Präsident Nicolas Sarkozy hatte wiederholt EU-Strafzölle auf Produkte von Emissionssündern verlangt, sollte in Kopenhagen kein Abkommen zustande kommen.

Das ist nun passiert - aber Sarkozys Pläne bekommen Gegenwind unter anderem vom deutschen Umweltminister.

Einen "staatlichen Dirigismus" zur Vermeidung von Standortnachteilen für westliche Firmen lehnt Norbert Röttgen ab.

Erreicht werden könnten derartige Ziele nur "durch eine Kombination technologischer Entwicklung und auch staatlicher Markt-Einführungshilfen für solche Technologien, die sich preislich noch nicht am Markt behaupten können."

KLIMAZIELE NICHT MEHR UN-ANGELEGENHEIT?

Angesichts der großen Enttäuschung von Kopenhagen fordern manche Experten, die internationale Klimapolitik aus dem UN-Rahmen zu heben.

Klimaziele müssten künftig nur noch unter den Industrie- und Schwellenländern ausgehandelt werden - also unter den G20-Staaten.

Das lehnt der deutsche Umweltminister ab.

Er hält an den Vereinten Nationen als Organisation fest, denn sonst würden einzelne Länder aus Machtpositionen heraus für den Rest der Welt handeln: "Das ist nicht die

Ebene völkerrechtlicher Geltung, transparenten Handelns und eine Weltordnung, wie ich sie mir vorstelle."

Die Vereinten Nationen müssten jetzt aber auch Ergebnisse liefern, so Röttgen.

"Legitimität ohne Ergebnisse lässt sich auf Dauer nicht durchhalten."

Die nächste Klima-Konferenz im Juni 2010 in Bonn werde ein wichtiger Schritt in den weiteren Verhandlungen, um dann im Dezember in Mexiko doch noch zu einem verbindlichen Abkommen zu kommen, das das Kyoto-Protokoll ablöst. "Aber es bedarf neuer Ansätze, ein 'Weiter so' gibt es nicht."

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**RONA MEDIA UPDATE
THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE NEWS
Monday, 21 December 2009**

UNEP or UN in the news

- With better stoves, UN aims to cut risk of murder for women seeking firewood – Tehran Times
- A new green – The Times of India

With better stoves, UN aims to cut risk of murder for women seeking firewood – Tehran Times

The United Nations recently launched a pilot project to provide fuel-efficient stoves to some 150,000 women in Sudan and Uganda to cut the risks of murder, rape and other violence they face in gathering firewood, while at the same time protecting the environment.

The Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings (SAFE) stoves initiative organized by the World Food Program (WFP) and other UN agencies, will be rolled out next year to reach eventually up to 6 million refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returnees in 36 nations, where they are forced to walk further and further into the bush into unsafe areas to collect firewood.

"Women and girls should not have to risk their lives and dignity, and precious trees should not be lost, in the simple act of trying to cook food for their families," WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran said. "The SAFE stoves launch will help protect them and the environment with practical and urgently needed solutions."

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also welcomed the project at an event in Copenhagen held on the sidelines of the UN climate change talks.

He described the initiative as showing “a virtuous circle in action, thanks to technology – environmental protection... improved safety for women... access to clean energy for the poor... enhanced climate security.”

The project “is a simple, inexpensive and win-win solution...

[that will] provide immediate, tangible benefits to their users,” he added.

WFP researchers have found that some women spend a full day’s wages on firewood alone. Others sell off food rations to purchase fuel. The SAFE project will scale up distribution of fuel-efficient and “improved mud” stoves to assist almost 100,000 women in North Darfur. These stoves consume less firewood and lower health risks associated with smoke.

In Uganda, WFP will focus on refugees and pastoralists in the drought-hit Karamoja region. It will provide more than 35,000 households and 50 schools with fuel-efficient stoves, as well as helping women to find other sources of income.

Project partners include the Women’s Refugee Commission, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Environment program (UNEP).

http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=210496

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A new green – The Times of India

Dipal Gala, TNN 21 December 2009

Ruchi Soni recalls how she always had to urge her parents not to throw garbage out of the car and to carry jute bags when shopping. She never asked herself, “Is my little contribution really helping to keep the city clean?”

A student of The Energy and Resource Institute (TERI), Delhi, Soni witnessed a breakthrough, when the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Al Gore and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) chaired by RK Pachauri, chancellor of TERI University. It made her realise that “pressing environmental issues like climate change are in fact, linked to world peace.”

She adds, “It provided me with the impetus to contribute in my own way towards environmental preservation.”

As a student, Soni pursued several internships to gain a practical understanding of environment protection. She joined the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, CMS Vatavaran, Energy Alternatives, and more recently, the World Bank, as an energy analyst. She also wrote a paper to suggest ways for solving the problem of depleting energy sources in fossil fuels and mounting wastes from development. It discussed ways to create energy out of waste.

Soni represents a new generation of young minds that believe wealth generation and environmental protection have to be inclusive. Aashish Gaurav, a third-year chemical engineering student at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur is another example. Recounting his experiences, he says, "In school, I participated in tree plantation programmes and cultural events. Later, I focused on the bigger issues around environment protection — conceptualising, implementing and organising a carbon trading workshop in college and working as an associate member for an annual technomanagement festival, wherein I was instrumental in planning the global warming theme."

In his first year at the IIT, he modelled a solar hydrogen fuel cell powered vehicle and investigated the roadmap for implementation of such vehicles in the commercial sector. As part of his summer project at The Energy and Resources Institute, Bangalore, Gaurav worked on developing bio-degradable plastics from cellulose derivatives. He also won the gold in Cheminnovation 2008, an industrial strategy forum for presenting the most viable waste recycle strategy for a Bhilai-based aluminium plant.

Gaurav insists, "We are here to add to life; not to get what we can from it. My primary duty as an engineering student is to contribute to the progress of science. What I have learnt from my educational institution, must be implemented for the betterment of the country."

Satinder Bindra, director, communications, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), believes the youth are particularly sensitive and intelligent about environment issues. The energy that is leading countries around the world to find indigenous solutions, is showcased by the TUNZA web initiative of the UNEP, where 30,000 student bodies share information on what works in their country. "What works in India, can work in Indiana; what works in Gambia, can work in Greece, and given that 47% of the world's population is under 25, this positive, pragmatic approach is heartening," said Bindra. Fifty-three envoys from 19 countries, including Soni and Gaurav, shared their ideas with the scientific community at the Bayer Young Environmental Envoy Programme in Germany.

So, what can one say about the general fatigue around environment discussions, and the issues that seem to bring governments, industries and people at loggerheads? "We have to get over our doomsday mindset, and find solutions through innovation," declares Soni, adding, "I would not like to be part of the lobby of environmentalists, who embrace a strong anti-technology perspective and hold a pessimistic view of the future. My idea of the future is one where scientific advancements and social equity and cooperation exist side-by-side."

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/A-new-green/articleshow/5360808.cms>

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General environment news

- Federal ministers 'hurdle in plastic bags ban implementation' - The Nation, Pakistan
- Film-maker to swim against tide of filth – The New Zealand Herald
- Drawing and colouring to make world a 'Greener' place - Brunei News

Federal ministers 'hurdle in plastic bags ban implementation' - The Nation, Pakistan

By: Yasir Habib Khan | Published: December 22, 2009

LAHORE - Around 95 per cent people throughout the country have completely switched over to polythene bags, known as plastic bags, despite the government's ban on production, import, marketing, sale, display, storage, and distribution and carrying of polythene bags.

According to sources in Federal Environment Ministry, 95 per cent people use plastic bags, 3 per cent paper bags, 1 per cent cloth bags and 1 per cent baskets.

Sources say that a number of ministers in the Federal Cabinet engaged in the business of plastic bag industry are hurdle in the implementation of ban on plastic bags.

The ministers oppose the ban saying that imposing ban on use of plastic bags was not solution to the problem.

They said plastic shopping bag industry was the third top revenue generating industry and putting ban would affect economy that was in deep crisis. They said that only 30 micron plastic bag should be allowed as it is not harmful.

"Everywhere 15 micron plastic bag is used which is harmful. So, the 15 micron plastic bag can be converted into 30 micron instead of banning the production," they added.

They said that public education campaigns about littering and recycling could help more than ineffective bans on products that are used every day by billions of people worldwide.

In April, 2009 Environment Ministry announced that issue of plastic bags, causing serious harm to the environment, would be resolved this year.

It said that laws regarding ban on use of plastic bags already existed but these laws were not being implemented.

Sources say that everyday, millions of plastic shopping bags are thrown away in cities, towns and villages.

Only 10-15 percent is put in dustbins, the rest ended up in drains, sewage channels and open spaces. 80 percent of the drains in different cities are blocked because of polythene bags. Blocked drains force sewer water into drinking water supplies, causing waterborne diseases.

The practice of burning plastic bags produces dioxins and furans, which are excessively and extensively inhaled by the people.

A recently held Gallup Pakistan survey reveals plastic bags have become the principal means of bringing home groceries and other shopping items. The use of traditional means such as cloth bags and paper bags has dropped dramatically. Polythene bags'

recycling causes release of hydrogen cyanide gas which may lead to breathing difficulties and chest problems.

Commonly known as 'shoppers', these plastic bags are available in all sizes, shapes and colours and because of their lightweight, flexibility and low cost they are used and cast off freely.

The black bags are considered more dangerous to environment as compared to white bags, because when polythene bags are recycled they are given black colour and these kinds of bags are completely non-degradable.

Currently, countries that have banned or limited the use of plastic disposables include India, Bangladesh and Bhutan. In Singapore, retailers are discouraging shoppers from using plastic bags.

According to different studies, more than a million birds, marine mammals and sea life dies every year from eating plastic.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, there are 46,000 pieces of plastic litter floating in every square mile of oceans.

It may be recalled that The Lahore High Court, in 2008, has directed the Punjab government to enact legislation within six months to put an absolute ban on manufacture, sale, marketing use and import of polythene shopping bags of all kinds throughout the Punjab.

The court ruled that as the Punjab government had already introduced a ban on the use of black polythene bags and or nay the bags below 15 micron thickness through the Ordinance 2002, it would ensure strict enforcement and compliance of provisions of the ordinance and register criminal cases against the offenders under the said law and Pakistan Penal Code until the government passes legislation on the subject. Only 1 percent of plastic bags are recycled worldwide and the rest, when discarded, can persist for centuries.

They're so aerodynamic that even when they're properly disposed of in a trash-can, they can still blow away and become litter. It's as litter that plastic bags have the most baleful effect.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Regional/Lahore/22-Dec-2009/Federal-ministers-hurdle-in-plastic-bags-ban-implementation>

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Film-maker to swim against tide of filth – The New Zealand Herald

By Kathy Marks 4:00 AM Tuesday Dec 22, 2009

An Australian film-maker is training to swim from Japan to California, a trip that will take him through the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a huge floating rubbish dump believed to cover an area of ocean equivalent to Texas or Queensland.

Richard Pain's plan is to swim inside a giant plastic bottle, made up of thousands of small water bottles, in order to highlight the devastating marine pollution and raise

money for research into the North Pacific Gyre, as the garbage patch is also known.

The "plastic soup", held in place by four competing clockwise currents, consists of garbage thrown off ships or blown off land bordering the northern Pacific.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, it causes the deaths of more than a million seabirds every year, as well as more than 100,000 mammals including whales, dolphins, turtles and seals.

No one has ever swum across the Pacific, and Pain said he realised that attempting the 9000km trip was "completely mad".

But he hopes to "combat green fatigue", he said.

"If I can do something this crazy, everybody else can do something. Whether it's recycle, reuse, rethink, stop using single-use plastics ... just change their behaviour in some simple way."

Pain - who is also making a documentary about his attempt - plans to embark on his record-breaking swim in 2011. The giant plastic bottle will act as a shark cage, while symbolising the cause to which he wants to draw attention.

He hopes to cover 40km a day, swimming for 10 hours, five days a week, which would enable him to complete the trip in 45 weeks.

The garbage patch, estimated to be about 6m deep, is "choked" with plastic items that include kayaks, soccer balls, laundry baskets, Lego blocks, carrier bags, syringes, cigarette lighters and toothbrushes.

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/movies/news/article.cfm?c_id=200&objectid=10616902

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Drawing and colouring to make world a 'Greener' place - Brunei News

By Lyna Mohamad Dec 22nd, 2009

SOME 84 children participated in a drawing and colouring contest organised by the Department of Housing Development at the Tasik Lama Recreation Park in the capital, which also saw a walkathon up the hills of Tasik Lama.

Present as the guest of honour was the Director of Housing Development, Awg Marzuke Hj Mohsin.

Also present was the deputy director, senior officers and staff of the department. Yesterday's colouring contest was split into three categories.

For the Category A (ages four to six), taking the first place was Awg Md Anirul Seigi followed by Awg Noor "Asa Salim and Awg Muhd Khairul Abuar Hj Zainal who came in second and third place respectively.

For Category B (ages seven to nine), the winners were Dyg Hwafanana Zailani, Awg Md Raziq Abd Halim and Dyg Noorashdina Salim who came in first, second and third place respectively.

Meanwhile, for Category C (ages 10 to 12), also the Drawing category, first prize went to Dyg Noorashyikin Salim, second place went to Dyg Siti Noramalina Madili and third place was won by Dyg Amira Sato.

Yesterday's event was held in conjunction with World Habitat Day 2009 themed 'Planning Our Urban Future' where it aims to strengthen warmth, unity and the spirit of friendship among the officers and staff of the department, aside from raising awareness on a healthy lifestyle.

<http://news.brunei.fm/2009/12/22/drawing-and-colouring-to-make-world-a-greener-place/>

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ENVIRONMENT NEWS FROM THE UN DAILY NEWS

22 December 2009

Assembly President hopes next year's Mexico meeting will forge climate pact

While most countries are not happy with the outcome of this month's summit on climate change in Copenhagen, "really good progress" was made towards a binding agreement "to save the world," with the United Nations leading the way to possible adoption at next year's meeting in Mexico, General Assembly President Ali Treki said today.

"There are complaints that some countries have not been dealt with carefully, other countries believe it was not democratic, other groups believe that the matter has been out of the hand of the UN and they would like also that UN would take over this problem again," he told a year-end news conference in New York about the summit, which set no mid- or long-term limits on global warming greenhouse gas emissions for individual countries.

"But I think we should be realistic that what happened there, it is really something positive," he said, noting that he had not expected a concrete binding resolution to emerge. "I think that the conclusion of a certain agreement was really good progress and we have to follow that up.

"We all agree that the United Nations should take the lead and we'll continue to take the lead and we will have certainly the summit of Mexico.

"We'll finish what we have started in Copenhagen. But I'm very happy that the majority of countries of the world are aware of the dangers of this problem and they would like to do what they have to do to save the world and to have an agreement, a binding agreement."

Asked about the years-long debate on expanding the Security Council to represent the world as it is now, not as it was decades ago when the 15-member body was last upgraded, Dr. Treki stressed that everyone is agreed about reform.

“We need reform in the United Nations, in the General Assembly especially,” he said, reprising his call for the revitalization of that 192-member body in the interests of real democracy. At present only Council decisions are binding.

He noted the different points of view on reform – “some people want to enlarge the Council with a new member, permanent member, with veto, without veto” – and underscored African complaints that their continent is deprived of representation as a permanent member.

“I see from my contacts that all agree the African situation should be corrected and Africa should be represented,” he said.

Asked whether relations between the UN and the United States had improved under the administration of President Barack Obama, Dr. Treki referred to the new US leader’s pledge at the General Assembly opening in September to cooperate more and more with the UN.

He said he had talks in Washington last week with State Department officials and members of Congress and “they showed me certainly their support for the United Nations.

“We need to have more discussions especially with the members of Congress,” he added, noting that he had invited some of them to come to New York to meet with UN ambassadors.

“They assured me that they believe that the... problems facing the world as a whole need a collective action through the United Nations.”

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