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China comes out in public support of Indian idea in climate talks

By Joydeep Gupta

Bangkok, Oct 7 (IANS) "Each person is entitled to his fair share of global atmospheric space," China's chief climate negotiator Yu Qingtai said Wednesday, publicly placing for the first time Chinese support to this concept formulated by India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

As the Sep 28-Oct 9 talks here in preparation for this December's climate summit in Copenhagen threatened to get nowhere due to acrimony between developed and developing countries, Yu said: "The (greenhouse gas) emission aggregate of a country does not stand alone. Each person is entitled to his fair share of global atmospheric space.

"China has 1.3 billion people. It is more appropriate and fair to look at (emissions on) per capita basis. That will give you four tonnes per person per year for China, one third of that of developed countries."

India's per capita emission is just over one tonne per year, while it is about 20 tonnes in the US and 12 in the European Union. In 2007, Manmohan Singh had proposed that per capita emissions be equalised, and later committed that India would never exceed the per capita emission in industrialised countries.

But industrialised countries have been insisting on looking at the total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of countries, by which China overtook the US in 2007 to become the world's worst polluter. India is in fifth place.

However, industrialised countries have emitted almost all the extra GHG - mainly carbon dioxide - now in the atmosphere, over the past two and a half centuries.

Pointing this out, Yu said: "Climate change was created by developed countries. They created the problem and developing countries are the victims. In all fairness we can't sit here today and say everybody should make an effort. There has to be differentiation between those who created the problem and others."

Yu was speaking at a media clinic organised by the Climate Change Media Partnership and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). On the same panel, Karl Falkenberg of the European Commission reacted by saying the Chinese proposal would give more people "a right to pollute", an observation that drew a sharp reaction from Yu.

China's top climate negotiator pointed out that even today, 20 percent of the world's population living in industrialised countries contribute 70-80 percent of all the GHG emissions that are leading to climate change - which is already reducing farm output, making droughts, floods and storms more frequent and more severe, and raising the sea level, with developing countries bearing the brunt of the effects.

The panel also showed up the division between developed and developing countries over continuing with the Kyoto Protocol - the current international treaty to fight global warming, under which industrialised countries have to reduce their GHG emissions by over five percent by 2012, compared to 1990, while there is no legal obligation on developing countries to reduce or cap their GHG emissions.

Falkenberg said global warming could be fought "only if we widen participation - with the US on one hand, and emerging large emitters (read China and India) on the other". Chief US climate negotiator Jonathan Pershing supported him, saying even if all industrialised countries reduced their GHG emissions, it would not solve the global warming problem without action by large developing countries.

While saying that a "legally binding agreement should include action by developing countries", Pershing acknowledged that major emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa were already doing a lot to reduce the rise in their GHG emissions.

"We're not asking them (the emerging economies) to commit to the outcome, but only to the action, while we have to commit to the outcome," Pershing said. India's Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh has said recently India was willing to report these actions more regularly to the UNFCCC, an offer echoed here Wednesday by the country's chief climate negotiator Shyam Saran.

Falkenberg said: "It is very unlikely that the US will join the Kyoto Protocol. But we are working very closely with the US to create a legal framework that the US and large developing countries can join."

But the opposition of developing countries to any attempt to derail the Kyoto Protocol remains as strong as before. As Yu put it: "There are two sets of wheels in this vehicle (UNFCCC and the protocol). Now some people are trying to take away one set of wheels. And you know what happens when that is done."