

IANS, 7 Oct 2009

Climate talks still stuck on key issues: India

By Joydeep Gupta

Bangkok, Oct 7 (IANS) Talks to finalise a climate treaty in time for December's Copenhagen summit are still stuck over key issues of the extent to which industrialised countries will reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and how much they will pay developing countries to deal with global warming, India's top climate negotiator said here Wednesday.

As the Sep 28-Oct 9 preparatory talks here neared their final phase, Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Climate Change Shyam Saran said: "There is no agreement on the most difficult issues - mitigation (of GHG emissions) and financing."

"We need an early decision on significant (GHG) emission reduction targets during the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (2013-2020), but there's virtually no progress."

India and 36 other developing countries have proposed that industrialised countries -- which have emitted almost all the excess GHG that is leading to climate change -- reduce their emissions by at least 40 percent by 2020, compared to 1990. "But there's no response to it," Saran rued.

And there's the question of how to get the US - which rejected the Kyoto Protocol - to join the mitigation programme. This could be done through an "enabling agreement" in addition to the protocol, Saran said, while criticising efforts by US and European Union (EU) delegates here to ditch the protocol altogether.

"There's a concerted effort to put the Kyoto Protocol aside and to say we need a new instrument and a new protocol which will include major developing countries like India and China.

"This is clearly not acceptable to India, because it hits at the very heart of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)," Saran said.

"Because the US can't give (GHG mitigation) targets, there's a move to downgrade commitments, change them to a schedule as in WTO rather than keep them as legal commitments," he added.

"This way, we may end up with commitments lower than the current Kyoto Protocol."

Under the current protocol, industrialised countries have committed to reduce their GHG emissions by over five percent by 2012, compared to 1990 levels.

"We're resisting this," said India's chief climate negotiator. "We're saying you can't set the Kyoto Protocol aside through this backdoor method. It remains an important point of contention."

The other big area of disagreement, Saran confirmed, was financing by industrialised countries so that developing countries - which are bearing the brunt of climate change impacts such as lower farm production, more frequent and more severe droughts, floods and storms and rising sea level - could fight global warming.

"Where's the money for this," Saran asked, "either to help adapt to climate change or to support whatever (GHG emission) mitigation actions these countries take voluntarily? We have gone backwards on key issues."

He supported parts of a plan from Mexico to have a global fund to which all countries pay according to their historic responsibilities for global warming, their per capita emissions now and their GDP. But he did not agree that developing countries should also pay into that fund.

Saran felt the fund should have at least 0.5 percent of the GDP of industrialised countries, going up to one percent if possible. Formally, industrialised countries have not put any figure on the table so far.

Asked if this was the end of the road for global climate negotiations, Saran said: "No. It is still possible and we'll continue to press for a strong outcome at Copenhagen."