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Rich countries out to 'sabotage' climate treaty: China

By Joydeep Gupta

Bangkok, Oct 5 (IANS) Industrialised countries are out to "sabotage" a meaningful treaty to fight global warming before the climate summit in Copenhagen, China's chief climate negotiator said here Monday.

Expressing his disappointment at the lack of progress in the ongoing penultimate preparatory talks here before this December's summit, Yu Qingtai, China's special representative on climate change talks, said industrialised countries were trying to "change the rules of the game five minutes before the final whistle".

He was referring to the proposal made at the Sep 28-Oct 9 talks here by Australia for "common responsibilities" by all countries to fight climate change, an euphemism for large developing countries like China and India to commit to cap their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions if they wanted industrialised countries to reduce theirs.

Emissions of GHG - mainly carbon dioxide - are leading to climate change that is already affecting farm output, making droughts, floods and storms more frequent and more severe and raising the sea level. India is among the countries bearing the burden of the effects.

Under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (KP), industrialised countries except the US are committed to reducing their GHG emissions by over five percent by 2012, compared to 1990. At its heart, the Copenhagen treaty is meant to finalise the level to which they will reduce their emissions after 2012.

With the reference to "common responsibilities", the Australian delegation to the talks here was trying to "murder" KP, said Lumumba Di-Aping of Sudan, the country currently chairing the G77 and China group that negotiates climate agreements together. Australia negotiates on behalf of the so-called "umbrella group" of countries - the US, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

The strong reaction from the developing countries has led to an impasse on the substantive parts of treaty negotiations here as the talks enter their second week. Top US climate negotiator Jonathan Pershing even walked out of a closed-door meeting Monday afternoon, delegates from developing countries said.

Without going into the specific reasons for the walkout, they said it followed criticism of the US for not doing enough to halt global warming, though it has long been the world's largest GHG emitter, being overtaken by China only two years ago.

Asked if these fundamental differences in position would jeopardise any climate treaty, a senior member of the Indian delegation here told IANS: "It's helpful in a way. Countries are setting out their maximalist and minimalist positions, so we know the limits within which we have to negotiate, and get somewhere in the middle. It may not be something any of us like, but it will probably be something we can all live with."

The prime minister's chief climate negotiator Shyam Saran told IANS earlier that India was not prepared to abandon the Kyoto Protocol and negotiate a new treaty for the Copenhagen summit. Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh had told IANS last week: "If the industrialised countries try to impose a legally binding emissions cap on us, we'll walk out" of the negotiations.

At the same time, Ramesh said, any meaningful global climate treaty would "have to have the US on board", thus leaving room for negotiations.

The European Union appeared to have been caught in the middle of this tussle, with Anders Turesson of the Swedish delegation saying Monday: "We don't foresee big compromises here but interesting discussions that clarify issues and where we can find common ground - and where it will be difficult to find common ground - before the ministers take over."

Agreeing that "key political issues" over climate negotiations were "becoming more visible now" he said the pace of negotiations on such issues was "still insufficient".

While holding that the EU was "faithful to the Kyoto Protocol", Turesson felt further progress on how much GHG emission reduction industrialised countries would commit to would depend on what actions large developing countries like India and China announced - the very issue on which talks are bogged down.

Reacting to the state of affairs here, Wael Hmaidan of the NGO IndyACT said: "What little political movement we've seen has come from developing countries. Industrialised countries need to increase their emission targets, plus the finances they are going to provide to developing countries to the adapt to the climate change that is almost totally due to the actions of industrialised countries.

"Developing countries are doing more than they had committed under the Kyoto Protocol, while industrialised countries are not even meeting their commitments."

While over 4,000 negotiators struggled with these differences, outside the UN Conference Centre about 3,000 demonstrators demanded a strong treaty that would help fight the effects of climate change. International NGO WWF, one of the organisers of the demonstration, called on heads of state to get together again before the Copenhagen summit "to unlock the slow negotiation process and give it a clear political mandate".