



BULLETIN

No. 68 (68) • December 4, 2009 • © PISM

Editors: Sławomir Dębski (Editor-in-Chief), Łukasz Adamski, Mateusz Gniazdowski,
Beata Górka-Winter, Leszek Jesień, Agnieszka Kondek (Executive Editor),
Łukasz Kulesa, Ernest Wyciszekiewicz

India's Position for UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen

by Patryk Kugiel

India may prove to be the country which, along with China, poses the biggest obstacles to an agreement at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. India does not want to accept binding commitments on greenhouse gas reduction and only consents to voluntary targets, pursued as part of national programs. On the other hand, India expects that far-reaching obligations will be assumed by developed countries, which, it believes, should underwrite the costs of climate change policy and technology transfer.

Determinants. India is the fifth largest emitter of greenhouse gases (1.3bn ton CO₂ in 2007), accounting for some 5% of global emissions, but in per capita terms the country takes a distant, 66th position (1.2 ton of CO₂). Its greenhouse (GHG) emissions rose by 65% between 1990 and 2005, and a further increase, by 70%, is expected by 2020. The emission intensity index, however, fell over the period by 17.6%, to below the current all-country average. The biggest polluters in India include the outdated, inefficient energy sector (40%), traditional agriculture (23%) and industry (15%). Electricity generation poses the gravest problems, with fossil fuels representing the bulk of energy sources: 65% overall, of which coal 55% and oil and gas 10%. At the same time, the role of renewable sources has been on the rise: hydro power stations now account for 25% of the total, wind and solar energy for 6%, and nuclear energy for 3%.

India may be severely affected by climate change so it strongly supports efforts to counter the global warming, but the country does not agree to this being done at the expense of an economic slowdown. One of the most dynamically growing economies in the world, at an average annual rate of 8% over the past four years, India is also among the planet's poorest countries, where average per capita income stands at US\$1,000, one third of the population lives in poverty, 39% is illiterate and 44% has no access to electricity.

India's major policy document in the field is the National Action Plan on Climate Change, adopted in June 2008, whose eight "national missions" include solar energy development (to reach 20GW by 2020, i.e. more than the current capacity of all of the world's solar stations, standing at 14GW), increased energy efficiency and afforestation (forest area, as a proportion of the country's territory, is expected to rise from 23% to 33%). Another line of action is nuclear energy development, freed after the conclusion of a nuclear treaty with the U.S. The capacity of all nuclear power stations is expected to increase by 2020 to 20GW, from the present level of 3.9 GW.

Major Elements of Indian Negotiating Position. India is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, but as a developing nation it has not been assigned any obligation to cut its GHG emissions. India wants this arrangement to stay under the new climate change agreement, with the negotiations to be based on the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities." Fearing additional burdens on its economy, it refuses to accept any legally binding international mitigation commitments, the only exception being the possibility of undertaking that the per capita level of GHG emissions will not exceed the developed countries' level. In India's view, the climate change agreement should not petrify the existing disparities in CO₂ emissions, but rather seek an equalization of per capita emissions globally.

The blame for the present climate threats should largely be put on the industrialized countries, India argues, and it is these countries that should shoulder the burden of climate change mitigation

efforts. Just as other members of the G77 group, India expects the developed world to adopt an ambitious binding goal of 25–40% GHG emission cuts by 2020 (against 1990), while in respect of itself the country declares to pursue voluntary, unspecified mitigation targets.

India is in favor of retaining the Kyoto Protocol's clean development mechanism (CDM), of which it is an active participant, pursuing 465 projects (the largest number of registered projects after China). But Indian projects are small and mostly carried out without developed nations' participation, which hardly contributes to technology transfer. A strengthening of the mechanism and its greater internationalization would benefit the country. India says that in addition to mitigation measures, the new climate change agreement should include as its integral element a global adaptation effort. The Indian government estimates annual adaptation costs to stand already at some 2% of the GDP.

The existing environment-friendly technology and equipment, India argues, should be declared global public goods. Royalties for the use of patented technology should be paid from a special international fund. Also, all developed and developing countries should agree on a common initiative in the research and development field, seeking to launch new environmentally sensitive low-cost processes. The products and practices so developed should be freely and equitably available to all, contributing to the emergence of a clean global economy.

Given the scope of the current challenges, a pattern of cooperation based exclusively on market mechanisms and commercial principles is insufficient, India insists. Similarly, the present level of climate policy financing is much too low, and the existing mechanisms are dysfunctional. Therefore, India seeks a new financial architecture, proposing to set up a comprehensive Financial Mechanism under the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC), to be managed by an executive board appointed by parties to the UNFCCC and consisting in equal numbers of developed- and developing-country representatives. A professional secretariat would handle organizational matters, and administration of funds would be assigned to a renowned financial institution. As part of the Financial Mechanism, separate funds could be formed to deal with specific climate policy aspects, such as mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer, research & development.

Financial contributions to the Mechanism would come from the public sector in the developed countries, at a level equaling 0.5% of their combined GDP—but these should not be simultaneously counted as official development assistance (ODA), nor should they replace any existing forms of support (instead, they should rather complement the former). Climate policy should contribute towards the attainment of the developing countries' chief objective: poverty elimination and sustainable development. In particular, climate change measures must not provide any excuse for a deepening of disparities between the rich North and the poor South.

Conclusions. The Indian position for the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen lacks flexibility and falls short of industrial nations' expectations—especially in respect of such questions as an unequivocal commitment to reduce GHG; the method of comparing CO₂ emissions between countries; and the financial contribution to fight climate change. All this reflects not only the priority assigned to a continued high rate of economic growth, but also a conviction about developed countries' historic responsibility for climate change and about the high moral ground from which its demands are made. This holds, in particular, for the manner of computing CO₂ per capita emissions—such as would be just and, at the same time, provide the most useful index for economic comparisons. On the other hand, India is interested in a success of the conference, and does not want to be seen as the country responsible for the negotiations' fiasco. That is the reason why—taking into account the latest initial mitigation commitments announced by China and the U.S.—India has eased its stance, too, declaring a CO₂ reduction of 20–35% per unit of GDP by 2020, as compared with 2005. Further concessions from India would be possible only if the industrialized countries were to embrace ambitious commitments to finance mitigation, adaptation and technology transfer to the developing countries.