

Communities, the hegemon and market terror

With the statement yesterday reflecting that the United States (US) government is not concerned about international efforts to address the problem of global warming, the COP 8 has become the culmination of a process where the US, the lone global hegemon, is continuing its irresponsible terror politics on the rest of the world. It has finally achieved its aims of ensuring the removal of issues of equity and politics out of international negotiations.

The local communities that would be directly affected by the problems caused by the warming of the earth's climate are also the ones being marginalised from making decisions about their own futures.

India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru warned after the proclamation of the country's Constitution after independence from the British that the post-Constitution phase should not be "the theft of the nation by lawyers and rule makers". This was because he felt that the Indian Constitution, which was essentially a social document meant to empower the weak and the marginalised could become a document to marginalise and disempower local communities.

At that time, leaders of indigenous communities said that actually the theft of the nation had already taken place even before the Constitutional process in the Constituent Assembly as ethnic minority communities had been sidelined from political decision-making.

More than fifty years later, the "theft of the nation" continues, with India's citizens having only the right to exercise their franchise while decisions are made on their behalf in the name of "economic growth" or "development" or "national benefit" by elites in New Delhi.

We now find a similar process to the theft of the nation in the ongoing climate change negotiations. The biggest polluters are walking away from their responsibilities or looking for ways to avoid reducing their domestic pollution while the rest of the countries haggle over percentages or beg for money. This tragic situation is owed to a lone hegemon who has unleashed a form of terrorism in the name of the "market".

In this situation, where are all the elected representatives of the people? The question for democratic citizens in the North and South is, how do we deal with our inability to influence our own states although we call them democracies? How do we handle a situation where our governments are eager to convert everything into a market opportunity while ignoring the issues of community, equity and justice? Are we all condemned to die as consumers and not as citizens, as humans capable of purposive action? Purposive action that can guide the destiny of our human civilisation and the earth rather than be pushed to slow and passive death by the 'invisible hand of the market'.

*They (outsiders) want
To pull the legs of a
young deer
And leave it to die
Is this justice?
Sever the trunk of the
elephant
And let it bleed its life
out
Is this justice?
Leave the arrow in the
belly of the boar
While it cries till
sunrise when it dies
Is this justice?
Pull the feathers of a
pigeon
And watch it die a
slow death
Is this justice?*

Alsensus Ekka
Sarumohan, Orissa

Voices of the Adivasis/
Indigenous Peoples of India

Edited and published by AICFAIP,
New Delhi

Australia sneaks around looking for carbon dumps

Although the Australian government has so far refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the possibility to use carbon sinks elsewhere rather than cut its own emissions is making Australia try and sneak access to the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

"Today, our Minister for the Environment said that the Australian government should get access to the CDM for its companies without ratifying the Kyoto Protocol. This is a disgraceful state of affairs" said Sarojini from the Australian Conservation Foundation.

"Australia leads the world in per capita emissions of greenhouse gas emissions, but now it has the audacity to come to this conference and tell developing countries that they should have targets for emission reductions.

"I think the Australian government has its head in the clouds. Because the Kyoto Protocol has to be ratified in order to have access to CDM. This is just another example of the biggest polluters like the United States (US) and Australia walking away from the responsibility to reduce emissions at home", she said.

This is not altogether surprising, however, given that the Australian government already has plans to use countries like Vietnam as an international carbon dump. In April last year, the Australian government announced a project to plant eucalyptus and acacia trees in Vietnam. The plantations that are supposed to absorb greenhouse gases will be carried out by the forestry division of Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), in association with the Research Center for Forest Tree Improvement of Vietnam.

A View from Malaysia

According to Yin Shao Loong, researcher at the Penang-based Third World Network, ninety per cent of the World Bank-sponsored oil, gas and coal projects benefit transnational firms based in the world's richest seven countries while less than nine percent of the energy lending goes to meet the needs of the world's poorest two billion people.

He says, "The Clean Development Mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol is basically more Foreign Direct Investment by another name. CDM is far from the ideal of North-South transfer of environmentally-sound technology that was originally visualised in the early phases of international efforts to deal with the problems of climate change.

"The CDM is based on the premise that the impact of greenhouse gases is the same wherever on the planet they are released from and that it is cheaper to slow down emissions growth in developing countries rather than to cut emissions in developed countries".

Shao Loong feels that the paramount objective of CDM is to assist the industrialised countries to

Thailand says "no" to CDM ... well, almost

Thailand has been one of the few countries in the South that has managed to put its foot down and insist that it will not be bullied into accepting projects that entail selling its emission credits. This has largely been due to pressure brought on the Government of Thailand by civil society groups including a nation-wide coalition of farmers and rural communities.

Ponglert Pongsawan, a Thai energy research activist attending COP 8, said that the Thai government position is that the government agencies must emphasise domestic projects that can focus on reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. In future, the CDM projects funded by outside agencies or countries would be taken up by the Council of Ministers on a case-by-case basis.

The controversy over CDM in Thailand emerged in early 2002 with a US government initiative

meet their emissions reduction commitment while also making money. For him, it is therefore a mechanism that is designed to help the rich and not the poor. He disclosed that under the existing mechanism a share of the CDM proceeds will also be used to pay the adaptation cost of developing countries. This literally amounts to taxing the poor to pay the poor.

He refers to a recent Dutch study that has come up with the finding that CDM can actually increase global greenhouse emissions because of leakage within the country itself. He states that seven large hydropower projects have been proposed for CDM credits that account for 38 per cent of the proposed emissions reduction credit. Most of these projects will be built whether or not they receive carbon subsidies.

Without urgent action, extreme climatic occurrences such as floods, drought and storms which have already killed millions of people and caused billions of dollars worth of damage will become more frequent. He says the earth stands on the brink of catastrophe and developed countries are exhibiting extreme selfishness and short sightedness in dragging others into this catastrophe.

called the Tropical Forest Fund (TCF) that would establish plantations in Thailand to meet the US targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions in return for reducing debt owed by Thailand to the US. The US proposal would transfer US\$12.6 million into the TCF. The Thai government subsequently shelved the proposal after protests from local communities and nongovernmental organisations concerned about the impacts of large-scale tree plantations.

Ponglert said, "At first the government decided to refuse all CDM, and didn't want to be involved in carbon credits. But later, they have revised their standpoint and said CDM would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

"In my view, the CDM mainly talks of technology and economics. But it's not just a question of technology if we want to find solutions to the problem of global warming. It is an issue of democracy and about the rights of local communities to accept or refuse CDM-type projects".

Baalu and 'Sadangu'

For Tamil-speaking people from Tamilnadu, the state from where Mr. Baalu, the current President of COP 8 comes from, the word 'Sadangu' means ritual. Speaking about COP 8, Rajasekaran, an inland fishing community person living close to Pulicat Lake, says all these meetings have become 'Sadangus'.

But he uses the word in the sense of a ritual performed after the death of a person. He sees processes such as COP 8 as death rituals for local, national and global democratic political processes as well as the planetary ecosystem. Pulicat Lake in Tamilnadu is the second largest brackish water lake in India after Chilika Lake in Orissa. Over 100,000 fishermen depend on the lake ecosystem for their livelihood. Sea fishers displaced from the island of Sriharikota (where the Indian Space Programme is located) were resettled on the shores of Pulicat Lake. This had led to strains on the traditional resource management systems on Pulicat Lake and led to violent conflicts over the fishing resources between the lake fishers and the resettled sea fishers. More recently Pulicat's ecosystem has come under severe threat by energy projects.

Rajasekharan is attending COP 8 along with other local community groups as a representative of communities that would be affected by climate change. He says, "These descriptions like Sustainable Development and Alternative Paradigms have become fashionable phrases exchanged among the elites and the rich who form the majority in such conferences. The promises like 'Food for All' are recycled and offered to people who are hungry while at the same time stealing their livelihoods and thus robbing them of their food and dignity.

"We are facing cyclones, diseases and floods on the one hand, and situations like drought on the other. The policy makers who have a mandate to

legislate policies are busy with matters of sustainability and renewables. The climate is an every-day reality that we face. COP 8 and other such global processes have completely lost track of their main concern and have become a kind of theatre for the rich to fool poor communities like us".

Ethnic community's cultural presence

Narang Pujari, Loda Disari and 25 youth and women of the Orissa Adivasi Adhikar Abiyan, a tribal people's network of Orissa expressed their concern about global warming with an indigenous culture performance outside the Vigyan Bhavan at COP 8.

While the meetings and press conferences continued inside the United Nations (UN) conference, the ethnic peoples sang and danced outside wearing bright, white shirts with the slogan 'Human Rights is our Birthright, What about Earth Rights'.

Narang said, "This is an opportunity to make ourselves heard, to pressure the government to look for solutions to the problem of global warming and to talk to the public about our sustainable way of life".

Prem Patro, also from Orisa said, "We are the custodians of our unique environment and we do not want outside forces to come up with their so-called big projects to destroy our life, way of life, and livelihoods. For us, our forests, water and land is precious. And the bottom-line is that they are non-negotiable".

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Design and lay-out: Akhil Srivastava