

All in vain at Copenhagen?

► Given the sharp differences prevailing, the outcome of the Copenhagen summit, going by the past record of such diplomatic conferences, was better than expected.

Bhaskar Balakrishnan

With much drama and pyrotechnics, the finale of the Copenhagen summit produced a mouse of an outcome — in the form of an agreed document drawn up by the US and the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) at the last minute. This document was “taken note of” by the Conference of Parties, which means that it was not a formal approval.

The run-up to the Conference brought out sharp differences among the Parties, over issues such as emission cuts by developed countries, possible low emission paths to development for the developing countries and how to finance these, and the strongly articulated concerns of the AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States) which emerged as a potent lobbying group. Some efforts were made to create a rift among the group of developing countries (G-77) using the AOSIS’s concerns.

Given the sharp differences prevailing, the outcome of the Copenhagen summit, going by the past record of such diplomatic conferences, was better than expected. The accord by the US and BASIC, representing some of the largest emitting countries, represents a good step forward, on which to build upon.

SENSE OF EXCLUSION

The EU and some other groups have felt a sense of exclusion from the final negotiations, but the fact that two of the biggest emitting countries have agreed is an important step. And, in any case, there was no alternative to a disastrous collapse of the meeting, thanks partly to some clumsy handling by the host country, Denmark.

The goal of limiting temper-

ature increases to within 2° Celsius was clearly affirmed. It was agreed that “developed countries shall provide adequate, predictable and sustainable financial resources, technology and capacity-building to support the implementation of adaptation action in developing countries”.

Developed countries are to put on the table by January 31, 2010, their plans for quantitative emission targets which will be subject to international verification. Developing countries will implement mitigation actions, including those to be submitted to the secretariat by January 31.

Least developed countries and small-island developing states “may undertake actions voluntarily and on the basis of support”. Mitigation actions by these countries will be subject to their domestic measurement, reporting and verification the result of which will be reported through their national communications every two years, with provisions for international consultations and analysis under clearly defined guidelines that will ensure that national sovereignty is respected. International support can be sought for such actions and supported actions will be subject to international measurement, reporting and verification.

Developing countries, such as India, with low per capita emissions “should be provided incentives to continue to develop on a low emission pathway”. The document promises that “scaled up, new and additional, predictable and adequate funding as well as improved access shall be provided to developing countries”, to enable and support enhanced action on mitigation.

The commitment by developed countries is to provide new and additional resources, approaching \$30 billion for the period 2010-2012 with balanced allocation between adaptation and mitigation. Priority would be given to the most vulnerable developing countries, such as the least developed countries, small-island developing states and Africa.

Developed countries also “commit to a goal of mobilising jointly \$100 billion dollars a year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries” through private, public,



For India, a 1 per cent reduction in carbon intensity translates into a saving of 0.7 per cent in imported hydrocarbons.

and multi-bilateral sources. A High Level Panel will study how to achieve this target. A “Copenhagen Green Climate Fund” is to be set up to support projects, programme, policies and other activities in developing countries related to mitigation.

TECHNOLOGY MISSION

A Technology Mechanism will be set up to accelerate technology development and transfer in support of action on adaptation and mitigation. This would be of particular importance for India. The implementation of this Accord will be assessed by 2015.

The document is a radical departure from the tortuous, lengthily worded drafts that were circulated earlier. It consists of 12 short, concise paragraphs, shorn of unnecessary jargon and verbosity.

The next Conference of Parties (COP-16) is scheduled in Mexico, from November 29 to December 10, 2010. It would afford an opportunity to review the commitments made by developed and developing countries, the implementation status including progress towards financing arrangements. It is important for developing countries to press hard for concrete progress in implementing the provisions of special interest for them.

There was some controversy over reports that some sci-

entists had felt that global warming concerns were exaggerated. This reflects the fact that our climate models are not accurate enough to calculate the average temperature rise due to a rise in CO₂ levels.

For example, the various models predict under a ‘business as usual’ scenario, the average temperature rise by 2100 to be 2.2° C (NCAR model) to 4.8° C (CCSR/NIES model). Much more work needs to be done to narrow the gaps in the predictions of various climate models, and get a more accurate estimate of the temperature rise at a CO₂ level of say 450 ppmv (parts per million by volume).

GHG EMISSIONS

Data on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from developing countries are not accurate or up-to-date — some figures are over five years old, and do not include all sources. This gap needs to be closed so that a more accurate assessment can be made of the trends. For the developed countries, the UNFCCC tables show some interesting facts regarding the percentage increase over 1990-2007 of GHGs — the figures for some of the large emitters are Turkey (137 per cent), Australia (82 per cent), Spain (55 per cent), US (16 per cent), etc. This indicates which countries need to do more on the domestic front.

India’s announcement of 20-25 per cent cut in carbon intensity provoked criticisms of capitulationism from some domestic critics. This modest target is vital for reducing India’s dependence on fossil fuels and the exploding future import burden that could result.

A 1 per cent reduction in intensity translates into a saving of 0.7 per cent in imported hydrocarbons, worth \$365 million annually, at today’s prices and levels of imports. Our efforts to secure access to hydrocarbon resources outside India have not been very successful, especially against fierce competition. Therefore, embarking on intensity reduction measures is crucial for our energy security and survival, and is not merely an arbitrary concession under pressure.

Post Copenhagen, India needs to put in place a vigorous national follow up task force to explore and take advantage of all the strategic opportunities stemming from the truncated accord.

National action to improve carbon intensity should get high priority — perhaps we should think in terms of a task force and a National Action Plan, as was the case with the IT sector in 1999.

(The author is a former Ambassador to Cuba and Greece. blfeedback@thehindu.co.in)