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RTI Shocker: Govt. Admits No Strategy To Push West on Climate

RTI queries reveal that the govt. has no strategy or plan of action to exert pressure on developed nations into making mandatory emission reductions if they fail to do so voluntarily. Future of 1 billion people hangs by a thin thread while India's top policymakers display a shocking disregard for their protection.

Climate Revolution Initiative announced today that Right to Information (RTI) replies received by it has the government inadvertently admitting it has not developed a strategy or plan of action to get the developed world to concede emission reductions in international negotiations. Nor is there any concern about this at the top. This is revealed through replies from the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF), the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and letters exchanged between Jairam Ramesh and Manmohan Singh obtained under the RTI act.

The government's climate policy apparently ends at refusing responsibility to take on mandatory emission cuts and pinning it entirely on the West. But when it comes to the question of what exactly is it doing to protect its citizens from dangerous climate change by ensuring the developed world takes on those cuts, the government's response is revealing. It responded that its "strategy" is limited to "pressing" developed nations in climate negotiations. While perhaps also wishing that they will concede to it on their own.

Future of one billion plus nation hangs by a thread of wishful thinking by its policymakers. It is, as if India owes no responsibility to its citizens for protection of their future from dangerous climate change.

No Information Available

Separate RTI applications filed with MoEF and the PMO did not produce any document containing a framework, strategy or plan of action to get the developed nations to limit their emissions to an extent that the country considers adequate. In its reply, which is available on www.climaterevolution.net, the PMO did not deny this information citing an exemption of RTI Act but in fact admitted that it has no information at all. The only statement MoEF could produce in the name of strategy was that India is "pressing" for these cuts with like-minded states in international negotiations.

Turning Copenhagen Into Another Doha

There is no sense of urgency apparent in India's response as the government seems determined to head onto the same pathway that took turned Doha round of WTO negotiations into a decade long stalemate. After the Copenhagen debacle, it's becoming clear that no progress is to be expected at climate change conference in Mexico later this year as well.

Last week Union Minister of State for Environment, Jairam Ramesh, in a climate summit held by BASIC countries, supported statement that binding emission reductions could best be achieved only in 2011. The summit in South Africa had to be cut short by one day as Jairam Ramesh opted to return to New Delhi ahead of schedule in order to be in the parliament for tabling of "finance bill."

Sleeping With the Devil(s)

If India refuses to take responsibility of emission reductions citing countries whose share in world emissions is much larger, shouldn't we, by extension of that logic, hold them accountable and make them concede emission cuts?

The United States and China together account for close to 42% world CO2 emissions, almost eight times India's share at 5.5%. But over the tenure of Jairam Ramesh as environment minister during the last one year India has come intimately close with both these countries.

In his letters to the Prime Minister, Ramesh defines his visit to China in August 2009 to "have been well received" with "warm and cordial" meetings. All ten points of summary he provides to the Prime Minister, for meetings with China's Climate Change negotiating team contain Chinese positions with regards to climate negotiations. There is no mention of what India wants from China in terms of emission reductions.

In his letter to the Prime Minister regarding his visit to United States in September 2009, Jairam Ramesh describes a seven point message that he says he took everywhere. Six of those points defend India's stand with regards to emission reductions and one advocates compromise at Copenhagen in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once again, there is not a single reference to an occasion where Jairam Ramesh has set serious demands and deadlines for United States to commit action to reduce emissions to protect the interest of Indian citizens who will bear the brunt of climate change impacts.

In fact, in events that unfolded in the run up to Copenhagen and during the Copenhagen conference, India actually reduced its demand of 25 to 40% emission reductions from Annex-1 nations over 1990 level by 2020 to only 25% reductions. The Indian negotiating team also worked closely with China on the same platform even though Chinese emissions are four times as much as India's and represent a serious threat to international efforts to climate change mitigation. Since then Indo-China relationship has seen unprecedented improvement on account of this cooperation.

While United States' domestic efforts on climate legislation have been floundering over the last several months, India has never expressed its concern officially in public and there is no evidence that it is concerned at all. It seems, if the world's biggest emitters of Greenhouse gases continue emitting, there will be no implications for a country that is about to become world's most populous in less than two decades and one that already has the world's largest population of the poor who will be worst affected by climate change.

About Climate Revolution

Climate Revolution Initiative is a series of ambitious proposals and initiatives that can potentially transform the social and political climate on climate change in India and be replicated in any part of the world. Unlike environmental groups, Climate Revolution Initiative argues that there is no possibility that the climate crisis can be addressed through the UNFCCC process. The ambitious initiative aims to educate and mobilise the public to force the governments to change. Climate Revolution Initiative was founded by Manu Sharma, an activist and renewable energy expert. Details about its RTI Initiative, including scanned replies from various govt. authorities, are available on www.climaterevolution.net/rti