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OPINION IN LEAD

Contours of climate concord calling for convergence

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) is taking place in Paris this year in December. This global gathering is expected to create a new international climate agreement to keep global warming below 2°C. There is much hope for a successful outcome in Paris after the failure of Copenhagen in 2009 to come up with such agreement.

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has long warned to radically cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to avoid alarming levels of global warming that has led to more droughts, floods and sea level rise. There are estimates that the Earth has less than 30 years at current levels of GHG emissions before heating 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Many countries have been undergoing extreme weather events with massive loss of life and property.

Delegates from nearly 200 countries met in Germany in early August in the lead-up to COP21. The issues pertaining to legally binding international climate agreement that would set a long term goal for emissions reductions to limit the impacts of global warming to below 2°C remained at the centre-stage in Bonn. In preparation for COP21, countries have agreed to publicly outline climate actions they intend to take under a new international agreement after 2020. Such national-level plans—the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)—will largely determine whether the world is put on a path towards a climate-friendly future.

According to the World Resources Institute, so far 34 countries have submitted their INDCs. The United States (US) submitted its INDC in April with a pledge to cut its GHG emissions by 28 percent by 2025. China has also committed to peak its CO₂ emissions before 2030, and increase its share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 20 percent by the same year. The European Union (EU) collectively pledged to cut its emissions to at least 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, which is hailed as a “strong” commitment. Moreover, leaders of the G7 have already announced in June that they had reached a nonbinding agreement to limit global warming to 2°C. Other contributions, including that of India, will likely come before December.

Global emissions covered by countries that have submitted their INDCs stand at dismal 59.5 percent with some major polluters such as the US and China already submitting their pledges. There are already concerns over transparency and accountability on how nations will share emissions reductions information and how they'll make sure that nationally provided information is credible. There are also concerns that the INDCs need to be scaled-up as experts have already warned that the current levels of emission cuts are not adequate to limit global warming to 2°C. A mechanism that calls for revision and scale-up of INDCs every five year has been gaining voices. Moreover, there have been calls for a climate agreement in Paris that can lead to a phase out of fossil fuels and deliver 100 percent renewable energy by 2050.

On climate finance, the US and EU agreed in principle to keep in place the so-called Warsaw Mechanism. It is the only existing instrument for ‘loss and damage’ beyond 2020 when the new agreement will enter into force. The mechanism was adopted at the COP in Poland in 2013 “to address loss and damage associated with impacts of climate change, including extreme events and slow onset events, in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change”. This mechanism had come against the backdrop of developed countries’ 2010 promise to deliver US\$100 billion a year in climate funds to the developing world by 2020.

The US and EU, however, did not respond to requests to provide details on their new loss and damage proposal as they are reportedly yet to work out the details. Earlier G77 and China had released their own proposal for the inclusion of climate compensation in the Paris deal. Developing and least-developed countries (LDC) have flagged ‘loss and damage’ as a redline issue in Bonn. This issue is important for us to mitigate and adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change.

When the Bonn meeting concluded, it managed to cut the length of the negotiating text from 86 pages to 76 pages. But it is still considered long and complex. Some elements of a global climate pact are coming together, but the document still contains a number of contrasting views. Among the most contentious is that the poorer countries are calling for an end to all GHG emissions by 2050, while oil producing nations are resisting any such deadline. The issue of funding for climate adaptation and mitigation measures, which is very important for the poorer nations, is still to be resolved although the signs are positive.

Bonn meeting has mandated the two officials leading the talks to change the current text to a coherent draft by the next round of talks in October. Although there are differences on the contours of climate accord, one thing everyone has agreed on is that time is running out ahead of the Paris conference. There remains just one more round of talks in Bonn in October before the COP21. The next round of talks provides an opportunity for countries to set a clear path to Paris and converge on the contours of the climate change concord before everyone meets for a global climate agreement in Paris in December.

REPORT

Inclusive and sustainable development through Aid for Trade

High trade costs continue to slow the progress towards greater trade integration of many developing countries, particularly for the LDCs. With the realization that inclusive and sustainable growth cannot be achieved in the absence of effective trade facilitation efforts, the recently released report “Aid For Trade in Asia and the Pacific: Thinking forward about trade costs and the digital economy” calls for concerted action through the Aid for Trade Initiative to reduce trade costs and contribute to achieving the emerging post-2015 development agenda.

Since the start of the Aid for Trade (AfT) initiative, donors have disbursed a total of US\$264.5 billion in official development assistance (ODA) and an additional US\$190 billion in other official flows for financing trade-related programmes in developing countries. Within South Asia, India (US\$2.1 billion), Afghanistan (US\$1.2 billion) and Bangladesh (US\$903 million) were the top recipients of AfT disbursements in 2013. But despite poor quality of infrastructure in all South Asian countries except Sri Lanka, South Asia's spending in physical infrastructure development is very limited. The report thus argues that investment in the maintenance and upgrading of existing and new infrastructure could provide an important boost to economic activity, particularly in Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The existence of poor quality of infrastructure in South Asia continues to hamper domestic, regional and international integration. Consequently, it costs approximately the same to transport goods between South Asian countries as it does to move them between South and East Asia, which is indicative of a considerable degree of dysfunction in the intra-regional transport market and high trade costs in South Asia. Moreover, many countries in the region have been experiencing changes in the different categories of trade costs. In particular, the rapid growth of e-commerce has brought different logistics and shipping issues, which are irrelevant to traditional traders.

Asia and the Pacific is one of the world's leading e-commerce markets accounting for nearly one-third of global transactions. In South Asia, India is emerging as a large e-commerce market. The rise of e-commerce is opening new opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in trade. Though SMEs are the backbone of regional employment and GDP, the vast majority are not engaged in exports likely due to fixed nature of trade costs, which makes them proportionally larger for small shipments. Thus, it is necessary to focus on reducing trade cost for SMEs. Moreover, it is also important to facilitate

SMEs' entry into the digital economy since online trade can significantly lower trade costs and has interesting implications for the gender barriers that impact enterprise growth.

According to the report, once women-led SMEs make it to the formal South Asian economy, larger share of women-led firms are likely to export when compared to male-led firms. But considering that there are only limited women exports in the region, women's entrepreneurship represents untapped potential for South Asian economies. Thus, it is necessary to address the barriers constraining the growth of women-led SMEs, which can to a large extent be done through greater use of information and communications technology (ICT). ICT helps companies and SMEs expand potential global customers and link them into global value chains (GVCs).

But while much of AfT goes to transport and communications infrastructure, including ICT, many trade facilitation projects in South Asia merely aim to support the electronization of customs systems and border processing. In addition, internet penetration continues to be low; only about a fifth of the population has access to internet in the Pacific and South Asia. Against this backdrop, quality ICT infrastructure and SMEs-focused trade facilitation actions will undoubtedly address many of the key constraints to women-led SMEs including high search costs, time poverty and limited access to learning opportunities.

In addition, one specific action that can address persistent high trade costs in South Asia is to ensure the timely implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which will require sustained donor support to developing countries. But many developing countries continue to remain concerned that they will not be able to access necessary support to effectively implement the TFA. But to date, more than three-quarters of total AfT has financed projects in sectors closely related to cutting trade costs such as transportation, agriculture, energy generation and supply, etc. Moreover, the post-2015 development agenda, which aims at inclusive and sustainable development, requires a significantly increased amount of financing. Thus, progress along the line prescribed under the post-2015 development agenda will require AfT to also contribute to inclusive and sustainable development outcomes, in addition to improving trade facilitation. It is also equally important to design effective solutions for cutting trade costs through close collaboration between the public and the private sector, which could contribute to effectively tackling value chain-related constraints.

NEWS

SARSO to set up testing lab for removing non-tariff barriers

The South Asian Regional Standard Organisation (SARSO) is planning to set up a state-of-the-art testing laboratory in Dhaka to remove non-tariff barrier in regional trade. The South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) region is the least integrated as far as trade is concerned as the eight member countries' intra-trade is only 5 percent of their total trade.

"This initiative will help boost regional trade," Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh M Shahidul Haque told the Dhaka Tribune. Seeking anonymity, a Foreign Ministry official said the organisation has already decided to procure fund from foreign sources to set up the lab. "We need the conformity assessment laboratory, which can certify the standard of any product and it will be accepted by all the SAARC countries," said the official.

The headquarters of SARSO, one of the two specialised bodies under SAARC, was set up last year in Dhaka and it has already started its operations.

Bangladeshi exporters often complain that they face non-tariff barriers including standardisation when they export to India or some other SAARC countries. "For the next one or two years, we will set up the standards for the priority products which will be tested in the lab," said the ministry official.

The priority products are those which have the major share in the trading basket. Citing examples, the official said many goods are traded in the region but agriculture products, dairy and confectionery products, and some industrial products and raw materials have the lion's share in the trade basket.

Meanwhile, another Foreign Ministry official said German testing organisation PTB is helping SARSO in developing its capacity. SARSO has also approached ISO and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) to forge a cooperation deal with them, he said. "It will have manifold benefits. If SARSO can reach an agreement with them, its certified products will also be accepted in Europe and American markets," he said. SARSO has already certified some products including refined sugar, biscuit, code of hygienic practice for dairy products, jute and cotton related products, he added.

Source: <http://www.dhakatribune.com>, 28.08.2015.

Afghan customs empowered to verify containers at border

The Pakistan Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has introduced an online module for safe transportation under the Afghan Transit Trade (ATT), which enables the Afghan Customs to verify containers crossing the border. Sources in Pakistan Customs said on 24 August that the Web Based One Customs (WeBOC) online system for trade clearance, had been amended by the Directorate of Automation and Reform, and introduced for verification of transit goods entering the Afghan territory.

"The directorate introduced the role of Afghan Customs as an external user, and they will acknowledge when a container crosses the border," said an official at Pakistan Customs. The latest system has been evolved to eliminate the pilferage of imported goods inside Pakistan. In the past, thousands of containers were missing inside Pakistan as Afghan authorities had not verified those.

The 2011 Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) report identified 71,202 International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) containers that have no information of departure from Karachi or arrival at the border customs stations. In case of 27,871 containers that did arrive at the destinations, their departure information from Karachi was not available.

Another 55,140 containers were shown to have left Karachi, but have no entries of arrival at the border stations. Around 152,054 containers have records for departure from Karachi and arrival at the border customs station, but no record of crossing into Afghanistan. "Finally, not a single container, out of 306,267 was recorded to have ever crossed over to Afghanistan during the almost four-year period under reference," the report had said.

Other amendments made by the directorate in the WeBOC system for Afghan Transit Trade were related to secure release of goods. According to the latest change: "System should generate security release request to Assistant or Deputy Collector concerned when gate-in information is completed regarding all containers for a particular goods declaration (GD)."

The latest changes also restrict traders and clearing agents for filing security release request.

The sources said that the latest update in the WeBOC system would resolve many issues with transit trade and help the country to prevent revenue losses.

The FTO in its report had forwarded many recommendations that are not being materialised or under process. It recommended that customs clearance and cross border certification and reconciliation procedures need massive improvement, consolidation and rationalisation; crosschecks need to be upgraded, diversified and externalised; and transport system used for Afghan Transit Trade needs to be organised on competitive basis, and transporters given a level-playing field, etc.

Source: <http://www.thenews.com.pk>, 25.08.2015.

Fruits, vegetables fail to enter EU markets

Fruit and vegetable shipments from Bangladesh continue to be turned down at the port of entry to European markets due to non-compliance by exporters and poor monitoring by the related government agencies. Between January and July, the EU has rejected 143 export consignments due to pest and absence of phytosanitary or plant health certificates, according to its Food and Veterinary Office's (FVO) reports.

The use of fake phytosanitary certificates (PCs) and modification of such documents by a section of errant exporters were some of the reasons behind the EU's repeated rejections. The January-July data on rejections is 67 percent of the total rejection notifications issued by the EU's FVO in 2014. The EU has already extended a ban on betel leaf imports from Bangladesh until 30 June 2016 due to traces of bacteria in the leaves that cause health hazards. The EU, listing six vegetables from Bangladesh as critical items, had earlier also sought actions from the government.

Subsequently in May, the government shared an action plan with the EU promising to ensure shipment of vegetables and betel leaf through contract farming arrangements between exporters and farmers as well as guarantee registration of exporters, according to officials of the Agriculture Ministry. The Ministry also decided to include certain security features to prevent the use of fake plant health certificates to ship vegetables to the EU, one of the main buyers of the country's fresh farm produce.

However, the EU, in its notice on the extension of the ban on betel leaf imports from Bangladesh, said the action plan is 'incomplete and there are no guarantees on its effective application and enforcement'. Repeated detection of fake PCs and shipment of various kinds of vegetables without PC are other reasons behind the extension of the ban on betel leaves, insiders said. "There are weaknesses among all the stakeholders, including my people at the airport. Such incident will not happen if all play stronger roles," Rahman said.

Dhaka Customs House Commissioner Lutfur Rahman said it is difficult for customs officials to check the authenticity of the PCs instantly in the absence of automation. Mohammad Mansur, general secretary of Bangladesh Fruits, Vegetables & Allied Products Exporters' Association, said the problem of vegetable exports without PC or with fake PCs is taking place repeatedly due to the absence of coordination among government agencies.

The problem could be checked if the plant quarantine station officials remain present in the cargo build-up area, where exportable items are kept and finally packaged for loading on planes. Md Anwar Hossain Khan, deputy director of export of Plant Protection Wing (PPW), said his organisation has stopped issuing PCs

for 42 exporters for non-compliance, with cases filed against eight firms. Khan said the PPW has also started registration for exporters who are interested in exporting vegetables, fruits, betel leaf and potato. So far, 34 firms have signed up.

PPW will not issue PC unless a firm registers for exporting, he said, adding that there are plans to set up a scanner at the airport to check items before shipment and issue e-PCs in the coming days to prevent fraudulence. Export receipts from vegetables, cut flower and foliage, and fruits decreased 38 percent year-on-year to US\$153 million in fiscal 2014-15, according to the Export Promotion Bureau.

Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net>, 20.08.2015.

Bangladesh to build warehouse in Gujarat to boost export to Indian market

Bangladesh plans to conduct export to India from Gujarat where businessmen plan to build a warehouse, in what is seen as a way of bridging a yawning trade gap between the two countries. Business people say trade from the Gujarat hub may start early next year. They hope to increase the volume of export at least to US\$1.0 billion from next fiscal year.

A business delegation, led by Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) president Abdul Matlub Ahmad, will visit the Indian state on 23 August to discuss the trade plans with policymakers and government officials. The Indian government has agreed to provide 50 acres of land in Gujarat to Bangladeshi businesspeople to build a warehouse from where merchandise, especially apparel items, can be sent directly to retail shops across India.

"If everything goes accordingly, we hope to build the warehouse and distribution centre within this year and hope to start export from the storehouse from early next year," said the FBCCI president, Mr Matlub Ahmad. According to businessmen, the warehouse will be used to store merchandise produced in Bangladesh in large quantities preparatory to marketing. Thereafter, the goods will be distributed across India through supply chain. Besides apparel products, the warehouse will also be used for storing and trading in other exportable items, like leather and leather goods, ceramics, jute and jute products.

"Once the formalities are over, we will set up a company in India and build the largest warehouse and distribution centre there," he said. The apex body of apparel industry, according to Mr Atiq, will also set up 1,000 retail stores across India and these efforts will help narrow the current trade deficit between the two neighbouring countries.

According to industry sources, a large number of Bangladeshi apparel products are now being sold on the Indian market through giant international buyers. If those can be sold directly, then both delivery time and cost can be cut. The Indian buyers will also get similar benefit from this deal position as they will be able to get these products at low prices by spending less time.

According to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), merchandise shipments to India, also Bangladesh's second- largest source of necessary imports, after China, increased substantially to US\$527.167 million in the just-concluded fiscal year (2014-15). It posted a growth of 15.46 percent over the volume of \$456.633 million of the previous fiscal year.

Despite the growth, exporters, especially the readymade garment (RMG) manufacturers, are not happy. They say shipment of the main item remained almost static on the neighbouring market for various tariff

and non-tariff barriers. Apparel export to India also increased from US\$96.25 million to 104.25 million last fiscal, which exporters said is very nominal compared to other countries. Apparel exports, even in newfound markets, including South Africa, grew 37.05 percent. In China it grew 26.33 percent while 23.88 percent in Australia and 14.02 percent in Japan.

Although Bangladesh experienced substantial growth in import from India, the country's traders faced various non-tariff barriers to access the Indian market, which increases the trade deficit, said an exporter. "Even after duty-free access of Bangladesh-made RMG to India, Bangladesh could not see any significant growth in export mainly because of some tariff and non-tariff barriers and government's lack of initiative in negotiation with the counterpart on different trade-related issues," said an official of BGMEA.

The two-way trade stood at US\$6.6 billion in 2013-14 with India's exports at US\$6.1 billion dollars and imports from Bangladesh at US\$462 million dollars. This represents more than double the value of US\$2.7 billion five years ago.

Source: <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com>, 17.08.2015.

Lack of storage facility limits apple export potential

Though Nepal does produce substantial amount of apples, the domestic market is still flooded with the apples that are imported from various countries. And the reason behind this is that the country lacks proper cold storage facilities. There is high demand for Nepali apples in the market, but they are supplied in the market only during the harvest season, normally from mid-September to December, said a fruit vendor in Kathmandu. "Normally, between February and mid-September, we cannot find Nepali apples in the market."

The apples that are available in the Nepali market are imported from countries like the US, China and New Zealand. However, supply from India dominates local market from February to mid-September.

Supply of one-and-a-half months beyond the harvest season has become possible due to efforts of local farmers of Mustang and Jumla, who have set up small scale cold storage units to preserve their products. Mustang and Jumla are the largest suppliers of Nepali apples in the market. Prior to the cold storage facility, Mustang farmers used to make apple brandy (liquor) from the fruit rather than letting it rot.

As per the price lists collected by The Himalayan Times from various fruit vendors in the Capital, Jumla apples cost NPR 70 to 80 per kg during season in the retail market of Kathmandu, whereas Mustang apples can cost as high as NPR 120 to 200 per kg. In the retail market, apples imported from the United States cost NPR 300 per kg and Kashmiri apples (from India) cost around NPR 200 per kg.

The country's annual import of apples stood at 56,447 tonnes, valued at NPR 1.92 billion in fiscal 2013-14, according to the Trade and Export Promotion Centre. The country's annual production of apples, meanwhile, stood at 35,920 tonnes in the same fiscal, according to the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MoAD). "Apples are being cultivated in 48 districts, but the five districts—Jumla, Humla, Mugu, Dolpa and Kalikot—contribute 41.2 percent of the total production." Likewise, the production from Mustang and Manang stood at 4,172 tonnes or 11.61 percent of the total production, in fiscal year 2013-14. "MoAD has been supporting the farmers to set up cold storage units," according to Uday Chandra Thakur, spokesperson for MoAD.

If the country aims to switch its import-based consumption to domestic production, the government needs to lend support for high capacity cold storage and transport facility to lure farmers to apple farming. *Source: www.thehimalayantimes.com, 15.08.2015.*

SAARC board for joint efforts to strengthen agri sector

The governing board on agriculture of SAARC on 12 August decided to exchange new technologies, research findings and germ plasm to strengthen agriculture sector. "The governing board agreed to exchange new technologies related to livestock, germ plasm and other sectors to ensure strengthening of agriculture and food security in the region," said a senior official of Pakistan Agriculture Research Council.

The meeting said that SAARC countries needed to launch joint programmes in the field of agriculture to cope with various challenges. It also stressed the need of experimentation and sharing new technologies as well as research findings to meet the food needs. The meeting decided that if any country introduced a technology or developed a new germ plasm, it must be experimented in other countries to extend its advantages to the member states. Moreover, the official said that the governing board expressed concerns over the Capital Development Authority's (CDA) proposal regarding shifting of National Agriculture Research Centre (NARC) to establish a housing colony at the site.

He said that the PARC Chairman briefed the meeting on the performance of scientists in controlling wheat rust and new innovations in the field of livestock and agriculture. Officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka attended the meeting.

Source: <http://www.brecorder.com>, 13.08.2015.

Activity

Regional meeting on conservation, use and exchange of crop genetic resources: Promoting regional cooperation for a food-secure, climate- resilient South Asia

SAWTEE and Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI), Norway organized a two-day regional meeting on "Conservation, use and exchange of crop genetic resources: Promoting regional cooperation for a food-secure, climate- resilient South Asia". The objective of the meeting was to bring together experts, policy makers, private sector representatives, academic researchers and relevant stakeholders to discuss issues related to governance of crop genetic resources in South Asia.

H.E. Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Secretary General of SAARC, Chief Guest of the programme stressed that SAARC has given utmost importance to the conservation, use and exchange of crop genetic resources. He argued that due to the vulnerability of South Asian countries to natural disasters and climate change, advances in regional cooperation is necessary to generate policy responses to address food insecurity in the region. He opined that the SAARC Seed Bank could be a means to promote regional exchange of seeds important for food security and climate change adaptation.

Dr Kristen Rosendal, Research Director and Mr Steinar Andresen, Research Professor at FNI, focused on how international agreements governing genetic resources have failed to resolve North-South conflicts on access to and commercial use of seeds. Dr Rosendal called for future actions so to promote mutual supportiveness, and secure effective and legitimate division of labour between global regimes governing genetic resources.

Discussing the South Asian contexts and complexities in relation to the governance of crop genetic resources, Mr Kamalesh Adhikari of the Regulatory Institutions Network (RegNet) of the Australian National University called for meaningful regional cooperation on climate change, agriculture and food security. He said, "SAARC countries will benefit by developing regional guidelines and models on how to regulate genetically modified seeds; promote access to and benefit sharing from the use of regional crop genetic resources; and protect farmers' rights to seeds and traditional knowledge".

Talking about the case of India, Dr Anitha Ramanna-Pathak, Assistant Professor, SP Jain School of Global Management argued that though India is considered a global leader in the design of laws on intellectual property, access to genetic resources and benefit sharing, empirical evidence suggests that expected results have not been achieved. She added that the distribution of monetary benefits accrued from access to genetic resources had not been shared equitably with local communities.

Dr Posh Raj Pandey, Chairman, SAWTEE emphasized on the need to consider different paths to enhance regional cooperation on issues related to the conservation, use and exchange of crop genetic resources for a food secure and climate resilient region. He suggested four pathways for the countries to move forward: (i) political consensus between regional countries; (ii) formation of new organizations and instruments based on past experiences; (iii) implementation of regional projects; and (iv) creation of an ancillary path to capture the practical and technical aspects like information sharing. Talking about the High-level Committee on Technology Bank formed by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr Pandey suggested that there was a need to explore whether such a bank could be used to promote the management and sustainable use of South Asia's plant genetic resources and traditional knowledge.

During the two-day meeting, the experts discussed various issues of regional cooperation in relation to the conservation, use and exchange of crop genetic resources. Issues such as the impact of climate and natural disaster; the role of national, regional and global gene banks, and national and international research centres; and challenges and opportunities in implementing various international agreements such as Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), and Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) were thoroughly discussed.

Altogether, 50 experts from South Asia working on plant genetic resource-related issues, along with government officials, journalists and academicians participated in the meeting.

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