

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Manu Sharma
manu@climaterevolution.net
+91 9811 576 772

Climate Revolution Initiative



www.climaterevolution.net

RTI reveals Govt. failure to protect public interest in climate talks

25-Nov 2010
New Delhi / Gurgaon

Information obtained under RTI act show that government of India put public interest at stake and risked future of over a billion people in past climate change negotiations. There are now indications of repeat performance during forthcoming climate talks at Cancun, Mexico which are to commence later this month.

India's position on climate change can be summarised in the pledge that is often repeated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh -- no matter what, India will not compromise its economic growth for emission reductions. We will make efforts to reduce emissions voluntarily but will never take mandatory cuts in a binding international agreement, they say.

Such statements are made without acknowledging that this policy comes with inherent risk. If India's emissions continue to multiply three to four folds over next two decades, as projected, it will add additional greenhouse gases to the atmosphere that is already saturated beyond the safe limit, threatening large populations with climate impacts.

More importantly, a business-as-usual emission growth policy leaves India with no leverage and moral right to get other major emitting nations like China and United States to reduce their emissions. Thereby allowing emissions to multiply as climate negotiations remain locked in stalemate as witnessed during COP15 Copenhagen and previous negotiations.

Although domestically India has launched a National Action Plan on Climate Change which contains eight missions covering climate mitigation and adaptation, it makes no time bound commitment to reduce emissions and sets no targets. While a step in the right direction, but in view of the emergency action required by the worsening state of climate the plan remains grossly inadequate.

The decision of Indian policymakers to choose a pathway of continued emission growth is akin to putting economic interest above climate mitigation. Now compelling evidence has surfaced in the form of Right to Information replies received by a climate group showing that this is indeed the case.

The RTI filings, 125 in number – many of which have been made public over the past few months, raise several questions over government claims that it is seriously addressing mitigation of climate change.

No process to monitor climate science

Thirteen RTI applications filed with government show that the government is unconcerned with what international science says about climate change. No process exists within the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to identify and prioritise information on accumulating scientific knowledge internationally on climate change to brief the heads of the two institutions that play the most significant role in determining India's climate policy.

The Minister of Environment and the Prime Minister, therefore are kept in the dark regarding developments such as, comprehensive scientific assessments on the state of our climate; notable scientific literature on related topics and trends within.

There have been several comprehensive scientific analyses such as the Copenhagen Diagnosis published in late 2009 and UNEP's Climate Change Compendium published in Oct 2009 that reveal a startling trend -- observed changes in the present climate and new predictions of future effects go far beyond IPCC's worst-

case projections. Yet none of these would have reached the tables of policymakers in India who remain blind to international developments in climate science.

Although Ministry of Environment last year constituted the Indian Network for Climate Change Assessment (INCCA) a body of 220 Indian scientists to make scientific assessments of climate change domestically yet it continues to ignore international science.

Even exceptional climate anomalies around the world that are attributable to climate change are not noted by both MoEF and PMO. This pattern is repeated across the government. Ministry of Earth Sciences and Ministry of Science and Technology sends no inputs on climate change to either MoEF or PMO.

Increasing urgency not recognised

A RTI query filed with the ministry of environment provided it with a list of over twenty scientific papers, studies, assessments and major climate anomalies since the release of IPCC 4th assessment report in 2007, which provide scientific evidence that the IPCC projections are conservative and / or inadequate.

It asked whether the ministry has taken cognisance of such reports and developments implying that emission reduction targets ought to be much more stringent than currently being sought and if so, what action has been taken by the government to raise international emission reduction targets.

The ministry in its reply stated that while it "looks into" latest scientific developments "from time to time" but could find no record with regard to recognition that IPCC projections are conservative. It further admitted that it could find no records regarding any action taken for raising international emission reduction targets in light of new evidence.

Similarly, other RTI filings show that the government does not recognise uncertainty regarding the most fundamental assumption underlying IPCC projections. Nor does it recognise that the small window of time to prevent dangerous climate change is rapidly closing.

No knowledge of safe limit to carbon

The government concedes it has no knowledge whether limiting global temperature rise to 2°C – the target it conceded during Copenhagen negotiations last year -- will ensure safety to Indian citizens or not. Nor does it have any position on atmospheric CO2 targets required to keep temperature under 2°C.

The fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR4) considers 450ppm of CO2 concentration to be the upper limit for keeping temperature within 2°C range. However, 450ppm does not ensure a zero probability of keeping temperature within this limit.

Research published after IPCC AR4 was released has also shown that the actual target to prevent dangerous climate change may be closer to 300-325ppm and certainly not more than 350ppm. RTI replies by MoEF show it has no view on the matter.

Policy process obscured from public

The PMO and MoEF are withholding release of documents related to the process of climate policy formation and international climate negotiations. In response to RTI filings they denied information on climate policy formation process for international climate negotiations.

RTI applications seeking copies of briefs given to Indian negotiators at international climate negotiations, and reports submitted by them to the PMO, have been rejected by the government.

Filed with PMO and forwarded to MoEF, the requests have been rejected on the ground that the disclosures "may affect the scientific and economic interests of the country." It is not mentioned how our economic interests are compromised by releasing information on climate negotiations.

No strategy regarding big emitters

RTI filings reveal that government has no strategy, plans or concern for ensuring that the largest greenhouse gas emitting nations commit to emission reductions. RTI requests filed with MoEF and PMO sought information on India's strategy to ensure emission reduction commitments from developed world. In its replies the government could not produce any strategy document.

RTI disclosures published by Climate Revolution group present compelling body of evidence showing the government response to the challenge posed by climate change to be vastly inadequate.

Manu Sharma, founder of climate Revolution Initiatives charges that "the RTI replies reveal a government ignorant of the state of climate science; unwilling to act as science demands; unconcerned about public safety; unable to determine the right developmental priorities; and, ill-prepared to defend its own claims."

Same pattern at Cancun

India is set to enter the climate talks at Cancun, Mexico -- scheduled from 29th November to 10th December -- with the same set of rules it has played with in the past. These include refusal to accept any legally binding emission reduction commitments and refusal to forego the Kyoto Protocol which is set to expire by 2012.

News reports suggest that India will strive to extend Kyoto protocol at Cancun talks. India favours its extension as it follows the principle of "Common but differentiated responsibility" which allows for the developed countries to make the bulk of emission reductions while permitting developing nations to grow.

Kyoto protocol is an obsolete instrument from 1990s that failed to deliver stabilisation of GHG emissions it promised. Experts argue that expiry of Kyoto protocol is needed as unexpected growth of China and India has blurred definition of developed and developing nations. India, however, does not want to allow it to happen.

In an interview to the Guardian newspaper published 23rd November, Jairam Ramesh said that he had to "protect Indian economic interests", describing the Cancun meeting as "all about politics, not the environment".

If the RTI disclosures about Indian government are anything to go by, ensuring emission reductions will be our last priority at Cancun. India's efforts will primarily be driven by its goal to protect its economy thereby putting to risk future of its citizens.

About Climate Revolution

Climate Revolution Initiative is a public awareness campaign that seeks to transform the social and political climate on climate change in India. It uses Right to Information (RTI) act and media disclosures as key tools to bring about shift in public consciousness about the threat of climate change and about government's unsustainable developmental pathway. Climate Revolution Initiative is led by Manu Sharma, an activist and renewable energy expert.

Additional information

RTI disclosures including scanned replies from various govt. authorities -- www.climaterevolution.net/rti

India pitches for extension of Kyoto Protocol | Economic Times, 10-Nov 2010 -- <http://tinyurl.com/25vvgwe>

Kyoto Protocol failed to deliver emission reductions | Nature, 25-October 2007 -- <http://tinyurl.com/ys8flx>

Interview of Jairam Ramesh | Guardian, 23-Nov 2010 -- <http://tinyurl.com/36j3ybo>