Climate plan promise

Jayanta Basu

The state government will come up with a "time-bound plan" after the elections to implement the national climate action policy, chief secretary Ashok Mohan Chakrabarti has declared.

"The climate change concerns need to be addressed immediately," Chakrabarti said at a recent seminar on "Climate Change and West Bengal: Vulnerability and Adaptation Options" at the state pollution control board office in Salt Lake.

The chief minister was supposed to inaugurate the programme but did not turn up.

The chief secretary claimed government departments would work in unison, with support from scientists and academicians, in areas like "solar energy, enhanced energy efficiency, urban development, especially in devising climate-friendly building codes and increasing green cover".

The departments of science and technology, and environment will organise a follow-up meeting after about six weeks with all the departments and agencies concerned to finalise an "integrated time-bound action plan after the elections", he added.

"We have a climate cell under the chief minister's chairmanship and projects are being pursued on the vulnerability of the Sunderbans and the city to climate change and also on integrated coastal zone management in the state. Two of the projects are funded by the World Bank," said environment secretary M.L. Meena.

Calcutta is among the cities most vulnerable to climate change. The state pollution control board chairman sought more data to understand the possible impact of climate change on the state.

Experts from outside, such as N.H. Rabindranath of Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and H. Pathak of New Delhi-based Indian Agriculture Research Institute, provided evidence to establish the vulnerability of Bengal to climate change.

The Telegraph/ Kolkata/ 11/ 05/ 09

Scientists take steps to check sea level rise

Sulagna Sengupta

The Institute of Environmental Studies and Wetland Management (IESWM) under the state environment department has undertaken a study to measure the rise in sea level in the Sunderbans every year. This, the authorities believe would save some islands in the region from inundation.

The study will also help determine the speed with which the tidal waters reach the river from the sea and recede during low tide. This is the first time such a study is being conducted in the Sunderbans and it will help save the mangrove forest in the area. Previously, the sea level was being calculated on the basis of mean sea level, but no study has been conducted so far to measure the rise in sea level. Mr Somnath Bhattacharya, a senior scientist of IESWM said the current rise in sea level is partly due to global warming and rise in tide levels. Due to this rise, islands like Ghoramara were being submerged.

Villagers and panchayat leaders build dams and embankments to save the islands from being inundated by salt water, but often it has been seen that the water still enters the island. Hence there was a need to formulate accurate data to assess the rise in sea level. Without accurate data, it would be impossible to save these islands. Even if measures were taken, they won't be effective, he added. Experts are optimistic that the project, which started a few months back, would be able to provide its first set of data by June 2009.

Two stations are being set up for collection of data ~ one at Lothian Island on G-plot at the mouth of the Bay on Saptamukhi river and the other deep inside the river in Raydighi area.

The World Bank has already sanctioned Rs 20 lakh for the project.

Mr Bhattacharya said the two stations would generate data for the next 40-50 years.

The Statesman/ Kolkata/ 19/ 05/ 09

Chair to study climate change

The SCMS-Cochin has established a chair to study climate change and related environmental issues with the celebrated bio scientist Dr M S Swaminaanth as chairman of its advisory board. SCMS-Cochin claimed to be the first institution in the country to establish such a chair.

The advisory board of the chair which meets in early June under the chairmanship of Dr Swaminathan will chalk out the action plan for 2009-10, a press release said

The New Indian Express/ Kochi/ 12/ 05/ 09

Civic body to earn Rs 27 cr from trading of carbon credits

The closure of the 25-year-old dumping ground measuring 19.6 hectares at the Gorai creek in Borivli has earned the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) Rs 27 crore by trading of an estimated 31,033 tonnes of carbon credits a year. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has agreed to purchase the carbon credits from the civic body at a cost of 12 Euros per carbon credit till 2014. It has also made the payment for 50 per cent of the carbon credits.

The standing committee on Monday gave its approval to enter into an agreement with the ADB to trade the Certified Emission Reductions — a term used for the units of carbon project after it was validated by one of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC)-approved mechanisms. Though the ADB has made payment for 50 per cent of the CERs, the rest will be paid as per the existing market rate whenever the trading takes place.

One CER is equivalent to one tonne of carbon dioxide reduced. Under the Kyoto Protocol, governments and companies in the European Union can use these credits to offset their carbon emissions and meet part of their reduction targets. Carbon credits are generated mainly in the

developing countries because of the lower project cost. India has cornered nearly 43 per cent of the carbon credits (CERS) issued so far by the CDM executive board.

Officials said they had received offers for the exchange of 9.35 Euros/CER and ADB got an upper hand because they offered the highest rate at 12 Euros. Following the Supreme Court directive, the civic administration in 2007 began shutting the Gorai dumping ground as it had attained its maximum capacity (1,200 tonne/day). The scientific closure will be done by using the 'capping technology' wherein layers of ground gravel and solid material will be used for sealing the dump.

The closure of the dumping ground results in the release of methane gas that is 21 times more potent than carbon. The BMC will be capturing the methane gas and will use it to generate electricity. The capture and combustion of methane (transforming it to carbon dioxide and water) results in a substantial net reduction of green house emissions.

The Indian Express/ Mumbai/ 19/ 05/ 09

More city forests soon to score carbon credits

Neha Sinha

To fight climate change, the state government is turning to the woods.

The government's Department of Environment has obtained land for eight new city forests which will come to life this year. Plantation of three lakh trees will begin this Biodiversity Day, on May 22.

This is part of the Climate Change Action Plan of the Delhi government. A Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project has been initiated by it for the Asola Bhatti Mines, where eight lakh trees have already been planted. Last week, validators from the German government surveyed the CDM project, which is now awaiting the Host Country Approval by India. Working by the standard that 4 to 5 mature trees can absorb one tonne of carbon dioxide, Delhi can make millions of dollars through carbon credits by planting trees alone.

Eight new tracts of land have been identified for city forests, which will be at Garhi Mandu (100 acres in the North Forest Division), Jagat Pur (North Forest Division), Gadai Pur (South Division), Rangpuri, Daurala, Malik Pur and Ambrahi (all in the West Division) as well as land in Aya Nagar, where an extension to the existing Aya Nagar plantation will be made.

"We have obtained land for the city forests. In Garhi Mandu, the fencing of the land is also complete. Plantation will begin on Biodiversity Day," said Environment Secretary J K Dadoo.

"The target is to plant three lakh trees this year, of which two lakh will be in the monsoon," he said. The department has also moved files to notify the tracts as forest land. Of the 14 other city forests, not all are notified yet.

The Indian Express / Delhi/ 02/ 03/ 09

A brand new climate change agenda for Delhi

Smriti Kak Ramachandran

With an eye on arresting the Capital's carbon footprint, the Delhi Government has identified a set of 65 action points that each department of the administration would have to follow.

These pointers, put together in a volume titled "Climate Change Agenda for Delhi 2009-2010" and authored by Delhi's Chief Secretary Rakesh Mehta cover a variety of issues like noise pollution, air pollution and water pollution, municipal waste generation and greening.

"Each department has been assigned a set of action points, which they will have to follow and their progress will be monitored on a monthly basis," Mr. Mehta said on Saturday.

The agenda that took a year to shape up is similar to the one released by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last year. "The challenges posed by climate change are a critical issue and each one of us has a role to play in sustaining the eco-system and reducing the carbon footprint. The agenda lists the actions that need to be taken in this direction. While certain steps have already been initiated, the agenda will help us strengthen them and reinforce the idea of safeguarding the planet," said Mr. Mehta.

He pointed out that a map for claiming carbon credits was being drawn and steps to reduce the emission of green house gases were under way.

"Apart from the areas of air, water and noise pollution that need to be addressed, we also need to add land and knowledge to the list. If we address each of these five areas in a holistic manner and put in place an agenda to be followed over the next three years, there will be a huge difference made to Delhi's environment," he added.

The Chief Secretary said though Delhi has taken a lead by switching over to eco-friendly Compressed Natural Gas, a cleaner fuel, transport still remains a critical area.

"Transport is the most critical area, we need more buses and we need to integrate the Delhi Metro railway and the bus service," he said.

On the issue of water pollution, the new agenda calls for promoting decentralised wastewater treatment systems to reduce carriage cost and maintenance of large sewerage system.

While the targets for the State Transport Department include induction of more CNG buses, imposition of congestion tax to check growth of vehicle population and the possibility of using low sulphur diesel/petrol to reduce harmful emissions, the Department of Environment has been marked to work on the possibility of converting waste oil from commercial establishments into bio-fuel.

The Forest Department has been set a target of bringing 500 sq.km under green cover by 2012 and open a new eco-task force by 2009. Creation of about 250 green buildings, increasing the capacity of solar water heating, building retro fitment for 100 buildings for energy efficiency and encourage the use of renewable energy to 5 per cent of the total energy produced by 2012 are some of the targets for the Power Department.

The Delhi Jal Board's brief is to increase the efficiency of water use to 20 per cent, check leakages, install water recharge system in 1,000 buildings and provide sewer connections, complete 80 per cent work on the Renuka Dam project and restore water bodies.

Targets have also been set for the Education Department, the PWD, the Health Department, the Delhi Police and the Industries Department.

"Efforts like introduction of compact fluorescent lamps, setting up of air ambience fund to provide support for battery-operated vehicles, mandatory use of solar water heaters in all buildings above 500 sq metres, nine new city

forests and waster to energy projects will be intensified to ensure the proper implementation of the agenda in helping check the adverse impact of climate change."

The Hindu / Delhi/ 24/ 05/ 09

Sirsa's carbon farmers

A forest conservator in Haryana gets villagers to grow trees and earn money by selling carbon credits

Sreelatha Menon

A forest conservator in Haryana gets villagers to grow trees and earn money by selling carbon credits in the international market.

VS Tanwar, the forest conservator of Hisar in Haryana, has been travelling in southern India on election duty. Despite the break from the summer heat, he is missing something back home. He was in the middle of an excitement that had little to do with the elections.

It has to do with what he has been engaged in with farmers in Sirsa for the past two years. He and his colleagues persuaded farmers and villagers in eight villages, six of them in Sirsa and two in adjoining blocks, to devote some of their barren land, about 370 hectares, to a forestry project. It was with great difficulty that they agreed, he said.

The idea was to apply for carbon credits under the clean development mechanism (CDM) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Tanwar says the project will absorb 12,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide in the next 20 years and give the farmers earnings every five years in the form of carbon credits. A society has been formed of all 200 farmers and the payments will be routed through this set-up.

According to the European Commission, this is the first-ever small forestry project to get a CDM certification. Once the saplings grow, they will begin earning carbon emission reduction (CER) points. The points can be sold to companies in industrialised nations that are under binding commitments to lower carbon emissions to pre-determined targets.

According to Tanwar, at the current rate of $5 per CER, each farmer may earn Rs 1,200 per year after five years. He says the land was useless and anything it earns them is a profit.

The project is part of a larger community forestry project of the Haryana government, which has not applied for a CDM certification. This project, spanning 11 districts, is more than a decade old and tries to link livelihood with forestry and common plantations. Tanwar said the CDM proposal was an afterthought and a separate project was carved out for that.

He said it was worth it and now the Haryana government was looking at it as a pilot so that it could do more such projects in other areas which were infertile or not cultivated.

He says the project is being looked at as an ideal by several states. He says Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh have already made enquiries and have appointed officers to prepare CDM proposals.

According to Tanwar, the fact that it took a decade for a small community forestry proposal to get certified as a CDM was partly because it was new as a CDM option and there was little awareness about it. Forests as carbon sinks are the most obvious way to fight carbon emissions. But whether artificial forests which qualify for CDM are as good as existing forests which are crying for protection is a question that is still awaiting an answer from policy makers and global climate negotiators at Bonn. Hence, there have been demands for compensation for states for avoiding deforestation, a proposal that has not got any positive response so far.

This is competing with the easier option of compensation for afforestation, or Reducing Emissions through Deforestation (RED), which allows a state to first cut down a forest ("for development'') and then plant a new one in some other place. While this might create a carbon sink, it would not be enough compensation for the wealth of bio-diversity that would be lost with the natural forest.

Business Standard/ Delhi/ 03/ 05/ 09

'Skewed' climate draft upsets India...

Nitin Sethi

The first draft for negotiating the international climate change deal, released on Tuesday, has rankled the Indian government with purported biases in favour of the industrialized countries in some parts.

The draft text — the basis for the 190 countries to negotiate the possibility of a deal by the end of 2009 — is meant to be a summation on different countries' suggestions of what the world should do in the long run to check climate change.

The Indian government, which along with several other key countries in the negotiations from the industrial or the developing world had made its submissions that were to be summarized in the text, had also demanded that the draft be aligned and shown clearly corresponding to the different elements of the overarching UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) — the mother text in a way — that all countries have ratified. India has on several earlier occasions said that only submissions that fall within the convention should be entertained and be shown in alignment with the various provisions of the text. But the text put up on the UNFCCC website has not been so arranged and all kinds of proposals, including those that Indian officials believe violate the provisions of the mother convention, have been included skewing the negotiations in favour of the industrialized nations.

Some industrialized countries that the industrialized countries take actions to mitigate climate changing greenhouse gases but gives the poor and developing countries the carbon space to grow economically.

"By not indicating how the country recommendations included in the negotiations text is in alignment with the convention, the window is left open for allowing in issues that are otherwise not mandated," an Indian official explained.

"In one place the draft gives developing countries just two options, to deviate their emissions from the current baseline by 15-30% by 2020 or reduce by 25% from 2000 levels by 2050. Even if a large number of developing countries don't support this and have alternative views, providing just two options to choose from binds our hands down to start with," another official explained the small tricks in the text that are not to the government's liking.

"Now if we have to push for an alternative here, the other groups will ask for compromises in other sections of the text, which skews