

Climate at 'tipping point'

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Weather change may be irreversible

PETALING JAYA: While the United Nations-sponsored climate change meetings continue to convene, there's growing fear that the human race may have missed the window of opportunity to reverse a climate disaster.

Since early 2006, scientists have been speaking more urgently about the impending "tipping point": the critical threshold when a small input of greenhouse gases (GHG) will trigger an irreversible impact on the global climatic system.

Although there is no scientific conclusion on when it will occur, climate experts are unanimous in calling for a drastic cut in the short term. But many are disillusioned by the level of commitment proposed by policy-makers in the ongoing negotiations.

Climate activist Gurmit Singh warned that concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would take some time to unleash its full effects on the global climatic system.

"We may have reached the tipping point but be unaware of it. I hope we have not missed it. We have to act fast but there are so many vested interests at work," he cautioned at the one-day seminar Between Bali and Poznan: Concrete Actions on Climate Change.

A regular at international climate meetings, Gurmit Singh was frustrated by the lack of real commitment from historical polluters in the Annex 1 (industrialised nations) group and their puny 5% reduction target instead of 80% to make a decent dent in preventing further concentration of GHG in the atmosphere.

He lamented that Annex 1 countries were merely outsourcing emission reduction through carbon trading and Clean Development Mechanism (the world's biggest carbon offset market) projects but made little progress domestically to curb their emissions, and yet were pressuring developing countries to take on reduction targets.

"The tricks at the negotiation level must stop. I'm worried that attention is diverted from the need for immediate deep cuts.

"Group 77 (the largest intergovernmental organisation of developing states in the United Nations) is currently divided as its 130 members represent a wide range of countries with varying agendas.

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CHOW KOK KEE

the Middle East are reluctant to push hard for emission cuts as that is against their economic interests," said Gurmit Singh.

He added that Asean had played a weak role in negotiations all these years without a common position.

The Kyoto Protocol agreed in 1997 to compel Annex 1 countries to reduce their emissions by 5% of the 1990 level between the first commitment period of 2008 to 2012.

As an individual country, Malaysia is ill-prepared for most of these meetings, revealed Chow Kok Kee, the former chief negotiator for the country in the earlier meetings.

He said that negotiations up to the 15th meeting in Copenhagen next year were crucial to safeguard our interests in the context of "common but differentiated responsibilities".

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"Therefore, it's important to have a dedicated team as the issues increase and there are more technical meetings in the run-up to Copenhagen.

"The number of delegates should increase correspondingly," he noted, pointing to the small team that was sent to the early June meeting in Bonn compared to 50 officials who attended the Bali meeting last December.