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Deadline looms

Negotiations in Durban on a knife edge in late-night talks

SOME OF THE NATIONS MOST vulnerable to the impact of climate change lashed out at draft proposals to curb carbon emissions as negotiators at United Nations climate talks in Durban worked into the night to salvage an agreement at the end of two weeks of fraught talks, write *Pilita Clark* and *Andrew England*.

Small island states, which are deemed to be the most at risk, the European Union and others have been insisting on a legally binding agreement by 2015 that would come into force by no later than 2020. However, a draft text released after negotiations continued into the early hours on December 10 instead proposed a "common legal framework".

"It doesn't become operational until after 2020 so we are looking at God knows when ... what is a legal framework, I would like to know," said Karl Hood, Grenada's foreign minister. "My first instinct is to reject it out of hand ... is this a conference of parties or is this a corpse?"

Some EU members also fear the term "legal framework" is too ambiguous and are not ready to sign off on the text.

The talks in South Africa largely centred around an EU offer to sign up for a new round of pledges under the Kyoto protocol, which binds wealthy countries to cut emissions until the end of next year.

But the EU has insisted it would do that only if the rest of the world agrees to start negotiating a comprehensive and legally binding global pact to reduce emissions.

The US and India have both balked at a legally enforceable agreement and though China says it would agree to such a deal, it is unclear if it would accept legal obligations itself.

The result has left negotiators scrambling for a deal that would see key Kyoto commitments extended for a second period, while also getting

Smoke screen: attempts to create a binding agreement to replace the Kyoto protocol have so far proved elusive

some sort of progress on a new global agreement that brings in the largest emitters – China, the US and India.

Connie Hedegaard, the European commissioner for climate, had warned that the talks would end with no deal to save Kyoto unless those three shifted their position.

"If there is no further movement, from what I have seen until 4 o'clock this morning then I must say I don't think there will be a deal in Durban. That is what we are faced with," said Ms Hedegaard.

"The success or failure of Durban hangs on the small number of countries who have not yet committed to the road map. We need to get them on board today. We do not have many hours left, the world is waiting for them."

The delegations from the US, India and China cancelled news conferences scheduled for the afternoon of December 9 as the negotiations became more intense.

"The European Union is standing very firm to make sure that we get a credible, international, legally binding agreement to reduce carbon emissions that has genuine environmental integrity," said Chris Huhne, UK climate secretary. "That's what we want and we are determined to get it."

The talks in South Africa have largely centred around an EU offer to sign up to a new round of pledges under the Kyoto protocol

US denies blocking talks

'Roadmap' approach still up for debate. By *Pilita Clark* and *Andrew England*

THE US HAS REJECTED claims it was obstructing a new global agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions and said it supported European Union calls for a roadmap towards a new climate deal.

In comments EU ministers seized on to claim Washington was starting to support their demands, US envoy Todd Stern appeared to go as far as suggesting Washington now backed the EU "roadmap" plan, the boldest offer on the table at the conference.

"The EU has called for a roadmap. We support that," Mr Stern, America's top official at the UN climate talks, told reporters at a hastily convened news conference called shortly after he was heckled by a young activist accusing the US of blocking the talks.

"Whether it ends up being legally binding or not, we don't know yet, but we are strongly committed to promptly starting a process to move forward on that," he said, adding it was "nonsense" to suggest Washington was trying to delay action in Durban.

But in a sign of the difficult path the US Democratic administration is treading as it tries to avoid providing Republicans with ammunition ahead of next year's presidential election, while not being blamed for wrecking the talks, Mr Stern's office later sought to clarify his remarks.

"Todd Stern said in his press conference that the US could support a process to negotiate a new climate accord," a spokeswoman said. "He did not say that the US supports a legally binding agreement as the result of that process. The EU has supported both a process and the result being a legally binding agreement."

The Durban conference began with low expectations that any meaningful new climate deal could be agreed, even though it comes just one year before the expiry of the main provisions of the Kyoto protocol.

The EU says it will sign up for a new round of binding targets under the Kyoto treaty, but only on condition that countries not bound by that pact, such as the US and China, agree to start negotiating a second, comprehensive and legally binding deal. It wants the deal negotiated by 2015 and entering into force no later than 2020.

PHOTOS: DREAMSTIME; TUI; MAXPPP



Published on December 10 2011

Ministers from the EU said a clear majority of countries now backed their plan, including Brazil, which had previously held its cards close to its chest. Canadian environment minister Peter Kent also said "2015 would be a reasonable target to set to pull together any new climate change regime".

China's statements early in the second week in Durban – which were seen as showing new flexibility to joining an eventual worldwide legally binding climate instrument – captured headlines and delegates' imaginations.

China and the US, the world's biggest and second-biggest carbon emitters respectively, have effectively kept the climate talks deadlocked for years as each balks at making a move before the other.

China suggested it was ready to consider a legally binding deal earlier in the week, but both the US and the EU said it was not clear if Beijing thought it should be bound itself.

China's position remained unclear, as did the exact nature of what the US would end up agreeing to. ■

Published on December 9 2011

Mark Lynas Two weeks of talks in Durban have exposed Kyoto's fatal flaw



THE MALDIVES LIKES TO BE FIRST. In 2009 it was the first country to announce its intention to become carbon neutral. In Durban it was the first developing state to declare its willingness to make a legally binding climate commitment under a new global treaty.

But it does not want to be first to disappear under the waves and, despite the efforts made at Durban, the goal of holding the world's temperature rise below 1.5C – essential for low-lying island states to keep themselves above water – is looking ever more difficult to achieve.

The problem, as always, is the obstinacy of the powerful big emitters, none of which – with the exception of the relatively progressive European Union – is prepared to move forward with sufficient ambition in tackling its emissions.

In Durban, the US and India challenged each other for the role of bad guy; each gave the other diplomatic cover in trying to kick meaningful progress into the post-2020 long grass, which would mean disaster for vulnerable countries.

The obvious truth is that the US is out of the game for the foreseeable future. With no prospect of the Senate signing up to a new climate treaty, there is little point in American negotiators even being in the room to ostensibly discuss it.

And with the prospect looming of the next US president being an out-and-out climate change denier, the US is in the peculiar position of being powerful, but increasingly irrelevant, in the UN climate change process.

With the US in the background, all eyes in Durban were on China.

China may be the world's biggest emitter, but it is also the biggest 'mitigator'. Although concrete figures are hard to come by, it is likely that the Chinese spend more on clean energy technologies each year than the rest of the world put together.

In a UN process where verbiage is not in short supply, a country that acts domestically to address the problem the rest of the world talks about is in a powerful position.

In a geopolitical sense, too, China is now the linchpin state. In the chess game of the climate change negotiations, a move by the Chinese is scrutinised like no other.

China's statements early in the second week in Durban – which were seen as showing new flexibility to joining an eventual worldwide legally binding climate instrument – captured headlines and delegates' imaginations.

China's moves are crucial because it is essentially the leader of the developing world, and by no means the most retrogressive member.

But another interesting development in Durban was just how fractured the G77 coalition (established in 1964 to promote the collective economic interests of developing countries) has now become. Indeed little in the negotiations united them.

The small island countries convene in a group called Aosis – the Association of Small Island States – which is pushing for a far more ambitious approach to climate change mitigation than the larger developing countries. It is now obvious that the survival prospects of the islands in particular

The US is in the peculiar position of being powerful but increasingly irrelevant

depend more than almost anything else on the stances taken by the big emerging emitters. And on issue after issue the two groups found themselves in conflict in Durban.

The fact that Durban was crunch time for the Kyoto protocol also illustrated the challenges of updating the UN climate change regime in light of new economic realities.

Kyoto was designed for a world in which rich countries would always be rich, and poor countries would always be poor.

Only rich countries, recognising their greater capacity to act and historical responsibility for past emissions, needed to take on binding targets under Kyoto.

But as Europe staggers under a looming second recession, even as growth continues in China, India, Brazil and others, the fact that Kyoto never had a graduation system – where countries might take on legal targets after their emissions and/or gross domestic product reached a certain level – has made it increasingly anachronistic.

This will be thrown into particularly sharp relief at next year's gathering of the climate circus, COP18, scheduled to take place in the rich Gulf state of Qatar.

Per capita CO₂ emissions from this Opec member are perhaps the highest in the world, and per capita GDP is similarly high (above \$60,000).

Yet it is still designated a developing country party to the talks and consequently has no emissions targets under Kyoto.

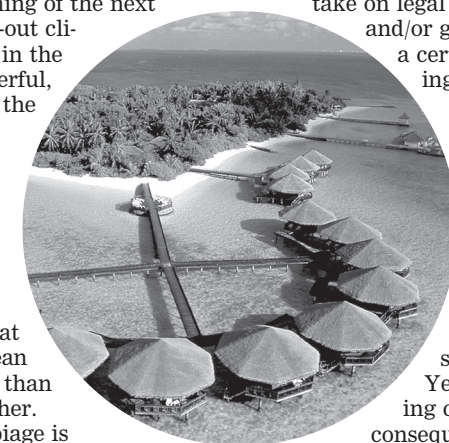
Some of the last to recognise this, ironically, have been the NGOs and campaigners who congregate around the annual climate change meetings. Kyoto's singular key remaining value is as a bargaining tool to push the big developing country emitters into joining a legally binding new treaty.

The Maldives has declared that it would sign such a treaty, and other developing countries have begun to consider a similar stance. For many it is in their economic interests to kick the fossil fuels habit and move as quickly as possible to clean energy.

But, as Durban showed, we are running out of time. The world cannot wait until 2020 for a treaty. For the island states to survive, global emissions must peak well before 2020 – and the prospect of a nine-year filibuster in the climate talks left them feeling isolated and betrayed.

Whether China will come to their aid will be the single most important factor in how the climate change regime progresses into 2012 and beyond. ■

The writer is the author of The God Species: How the Planet Can Survive the Age of Humans



European unity tested at talks

Firm commitments are sought for successor to Kyoto protocol, write *Pilita Clark* and *Andrew England*



COUNTRIES BETTING THE European Union will cave in and accept a weak global climate deal need to think again, the UK warned during the UN climate talks.

"Contrary to what is being put about by some people, the EU is not about to agree" to a second phase of the Kyoto climate treaty without "hard, bankable" commitments from other large nations, said Chris Huhne, the UK climate secretary.

If there were no decent offer from other countries, the EU would be forced to put forward a "graduated" response in return, he warned, in a significant toughening of the bloc's rhetoric.

Mr Huhne's comments underline the increasingly difficult position the EU faces as the only big group willing to put a substantial offer on the table at the two-week Durban talks.

The EU says it will agree to a second round of Kyoto pledges when the first expires in 12 months' time only if other countries not bound by Kyoto, such as China and the US, agree to start negotiating a second, legally binding global pact obliging all nations to share the burden of cutting carbon emissions.

The bloc has long said it wants the second deal negotiated by 2015, but Connie Hedegaard, EU climate commissioner, signalled more flexibility, telling reporters this date was "not cut in stone".

As doubts grow about whether China will accept legal obligations to curb its emissions, even after 2020, and the US balks at anything hinting of a treaty ahead of a presidential election year, speculation is mounting that the EU will buckle further.

Three original members of the Kyoto club – Japan, Russia and Canada – have said they will not agree to a second phase of the treaty, the world's only binding climate deal, which is further complicating negotiations.

"There is definitely a spirit to find some sort of solution, but we have to acknowledge there are real concerns," one senior delegate said.

"There is no middle anymore. The red lines have passed; the EU is saying legally [binding]; the US is saying no legal; the Chinese are saying what about the ship-jumpers of Japan and Canada?"

Failure in Durban would weigh heavily on the EU, which has a long history of championing bold climate policies, at home and abroad, and hosted the first of the latest round of UN climate talks in Berlin in 1995.

It was one of the first groups to suggest in UN talks that emissions be curbed to ensure that global temperature rises did not exceed 2C. Its domestic policy, to cut its carbon emissions by 20 per cent from 1990 levels by 2020, is among the world's most ambitious.

But its position has steadily become more complicated as its membership has grown from the 15 countries that negotiated the 1997 Kyoto pact to its current 27.

Some of its newer members, such as coal-dependent Poland, have shown less willingness to embrace policies favoured by countries such as the UK and Denmark.

The prospect of these divisions resurfacing at the Durban talks is also leading some countries to bet that the bloc will cave in.

Ms Hedegaard, a Dane, is jointly leading negotiations in Durban with Marcin Korolec, Poland's environment minister, because Poland holds the rotating EU presidency.

Shaping the future: more than a thousand South African children take to the beach in Durban to press for strong action on climate change

One UK politician in Durban claimed the bloc would be doing better if Poland was not playing such an important role.

"If the UK was in the chair, they would try to find an agreement," said Lord Prescott, a former Labour deputy prime minister who led EU negotiators at the 1997 Kyoto talks, but who is not a member of the EU delegation in Durban.

Lord Prescott said he had been told by one negotiator that some in the EU team in Durban had already told Mr Korolec "he should be speaking for Europe, not Poland".

"To which his reply was, 'Well the French did it all right'," Lord Prescott said, meaning when France held the presidency it spoke for France.

Poland, is all about "coal, coal, coal", Lord Prescott added, a reference to the fact that some 90 per cent of Polish electricity is generated from one of the most environmentally damaging fossil fuels.

Mr Korolec brushed aside Lord Prescott's claims, insisting the EU ministers were united in their determination to achieve a strong, legally binding deal. "I am leading my work here on the basis of a mandate adopted unanimously by the EU environment ministers," he said. "We are pushing with others with a very clear and strong position."

A spokesman for Ms Hedegaard declined to comment.

Veteran observers of UN climate talks are watching the EU closely to see if this cohesion is maintained, especially since its lack of unity was obvious in the fraught 2009 Copenhagen talks. "They are being more cohesive now," said Lord Stern, the economist who led a UK climate review in 2006.

"I hope very much that holds until the end of the week. That makes an agreement more likely." ■

Published on December 8 2011

The EU's position has become more complicated as it has grown from 15 to 27 members

THE ELECTRIC CAR IS NOT THE FUTURE.



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RENAULT NISSAN

Economy and the environment

While wealthy countries squabble, developing nations are left to clean up a mess they did not create

DIPU MONI

The global climate talks in Durban have demonstrated that those most responsible for climate change feel least responsible for the problem, despite possessing the greatest capacity to address it. The flip side is that those worst affected are taking high degrees of responsibility for a problem they had little role in creating, and possess the least capacity to resolve.

In the lead up to Durban, many of the world's large carbon emitters made the low level of their ambitions clear. Japan, Canada and Russia pronounced their reluctance to carry the Kyoto protocol forward and, as yet, no new commitments on emissions have been agreed. There is also still no clarity on the levels of finance that would be available to support crucial climate actions in low-capacity developing countries over the next decade.

Sadly, the current policies on the table fall well short of any reasonable target for reducing emissions, and put the world at risk of much higher warming than 2C. This would be catastrophic, in particular for vulnerable countries such as my own. Just as sad are the subtle efforts by some of the countries who bear the biggest responsibility for climate change to take advantage of divisions among the complex interests of other states who are desperately seeking solutions.

Let us not forget that low-lying countries, such as the Maldives, face the existential threat of total submersion from rising sea levels brought about by climate change, while Bangladesh faces a very real risk of about one-fifth of the country being flooded.

This is why the Climate Vulnerable Forum, which represents 19 countries from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific, recently put forward a 14-point declaration that articulated a firm determination to do as much as possible to bring about a resolution to the climate crisis.

Just as major emitters pursued their low-ambition strategies in Durban, our members have reiterated their high ambitions. This includes a determination to undertake voluntary mitigation actions and to pursue parallel programmes for adaptation that are crucial for safeguarding the wellbeing of our communities.

For its part, Bangladesh has allocated \$300m of taxpayers' money to finance programmes under the national climate change strategy. Other vulnerable countries have taken similar steps.

We remain, however, marginalised and newly emerging economies with large pockets of poverty. Our ability to act continues to be constrained by our low capacity – chronically so, in some cases – compared with the developed nations.

In this sense, the call for climate finance is not just a brazen demand for cash by developing countries. Climate finance will actually make a very



real difference in contributing to the additional reductions of CO₂ that are crucial for the world to meet any target for limiting global warming. Furthermore, since capacities are so low among our vulnerable countries, we know that for every dollar of climate finance not forthcoming, human lives, infrastructure and livelihoods are put at greater risk.

The current situation is alarming, and sitting idle is not an option. Climate change implies too great a peril.

Bangladesh is ready to lead by example. We and the other members of the Climate Vulnerable Forum aim to catalyse change and action to mitigate this growing crisis, and call upon the world's major carbon emitters to give manifest commitments to do their part to address the challenges of climate change.

Durban has not endorsed a robust agenda for change. But reason and justice inspire us to lead from the front. This gives us confidence that, in time, we shall prevail. ■

The writer is foreign minister of Bangladesh

Climate catastrophe: (above) one-fifth of Bangladesh could be flooded as sea levels rise

JOSE MARIA FIGUERES



The UN climate change talks in Durban illustrate just how tough it is to squeeze valuable outcomes from rich and powerful governments that adamantly pursue bad policies.

Indeed, the continued postponement of climate action by governments fearful of the economic consequences not only defies the growing momentum in wider society and business to embrace green development, but it also goes against any reasonable sense of economic acumen.

Experiences from Costa Rica – my own country – show how misguided economic policies can ultimately come at a great cost to prosperity.

Once, Costa Rica was almost completely covered with primeval tropical forest. However, such was the rate of deforestation in the country that by the mid-1970s, more than three-quarters of the forest cover had been destroyed. Stripped of its natural asset, Costa Rica's economy began

to suffer amid increasing shortages of the ecosystem services provided by the forest – vital to sustaining key sectors such as agriculture, industry and energy.

A good example is water. Much of the water required by Costa Rica's homes and businesses is generated by the forests. Why? Because the forest draws and captures rainfall and deposits water into the natural supply chain. Water is also vital to Costa Rica's energy supply – more than 90 per cent of the country's energy is derived from renewable sources, such as hydroelectric projects. As such, any decrease in water supplies has a tremendous impact on development.

The reason for this environmental mismanagement was simply bad policy, which mistakenly assumed that all forested land was unproductive. Banks, for example, provided loans to farmers to clear their lands of forests. Ignorant of the economic reality, Costa Rica was inadvertently shooting itself in the foot.

Fortunately, this damaging course was reversed before it was too late. This required government policies that looked at the environment as an economic opportunity, not as a cost. The proceeds of the 1995 carbon tax continue to finance a simple scheme that pays forest owners directly for the water they contribute to downstream consumers. They are also paid for the carbon they sequester through the growing of trees.

Today, forest covers about 50 per cent of Costa Rica. This also helps to fuel the ecotourism

Dose of realism: (below) Ban Ki-moon has warned it will be difficult to agree a new global treaty on climate change

The postponement of climate action is against any reasonable sense of economic acumen

industry – the country's second-largest source of income after the information technology sector.

But we should not stop there. The transition to a low-carbon economy would create huge opportunities for entrepreneurs to reinvent many of our productive processes, while creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in new industries and sectors.

The world's largest carbon emitter governments have spent the past two weeks in Durban discussing more of the usual bad policies. At the same time, the grassroots "Occupy Durban" movement, the refusal of poor countries in the Climate Vulnerable Forum to be silenced on the issues affecting them, and the commitment of the businesses gathered at the World Climate Summit all give reasons for hope.

Twenty years ago, climate concern was marginal at best. Today, all sectors of society are pushing for a new green agenda. We must hope that governments will catch up with us eventually. ■

The writer is a trustee of Dara, an organisation that campaigns for effective aid, and a former president of Costa Rica

Stark warning

UN chief gloomy about pact chances. By *Pilita Clark*

BAN KI-MOON, THE UN secretary-general, has warned that "grave economic troubles" and political divisions meant a new global climate treaty may be "beyond our reach", darkening the mood at the international climate talks in Durban. "We must be realistic about expectations for a breakthrough," said Mr Ban. "The ultimate goal of a comprehensive and binding climate change agreement may be beyond our reach – for now."

His admission added to rising tension at the Durban talks, where familiar suspicions between wealthy and emerging economies began spilling into the open.

Before negotiators were supposed to wrap up a deal at the two-week conference, the European Union cast doubts on China's credibility and India accused wealthy countries of making unfair demands.

Negotiators from more than 190 countries are under pressure to seal a deal extending the main provisions of the Kyoto protocol, the world's only binding climate treaty, before they expire in 12 months' time.

The treaty bound only industrialised countries to curb their emissions and the number willing to sign up for a second round of pledges has dwindled. Delegates are therefore trying to agree on how to start negotiating a more comprehensive pact that would eventually cover all nations, including fast-growing emerging economies whose emissions are rising rapidly.

But the fate of both targets was still unclear. The EU, which is pushing hardest for a new global deal among industrialised countries, cast doubt on suggestions from China's delegation head, Xie Zhenhua, that Beijing might agree to a new, legally enforceable pact.

"Minister Xie spoke warmly about the need for a legally binding deal. Does that then mean that China will also be legally bound?" said Connie

'Binding climate change agreement may be beyond our reach – for now'

Hedegaard, EU climate commissioner, on Twitter. "Sometimes messages are more progressive at public press conferences than in negotiation rooms."

A few hours later, Mr Xie appeared with the rest of the so-called Basic group of countries – Brazil, South Africa and India – and Jayanthi Natarajan, India's environment minister, expressed frustration with industrialised countries urging poorer nations to agree to do more to tackle climate change.

"We have walked the extra mile," she said, citing recent studies showing developing countries were adopting more climate policies than developed nations. "Basic countries are not major polluters," she added. "They have a small footprint in the context of historical emissions."

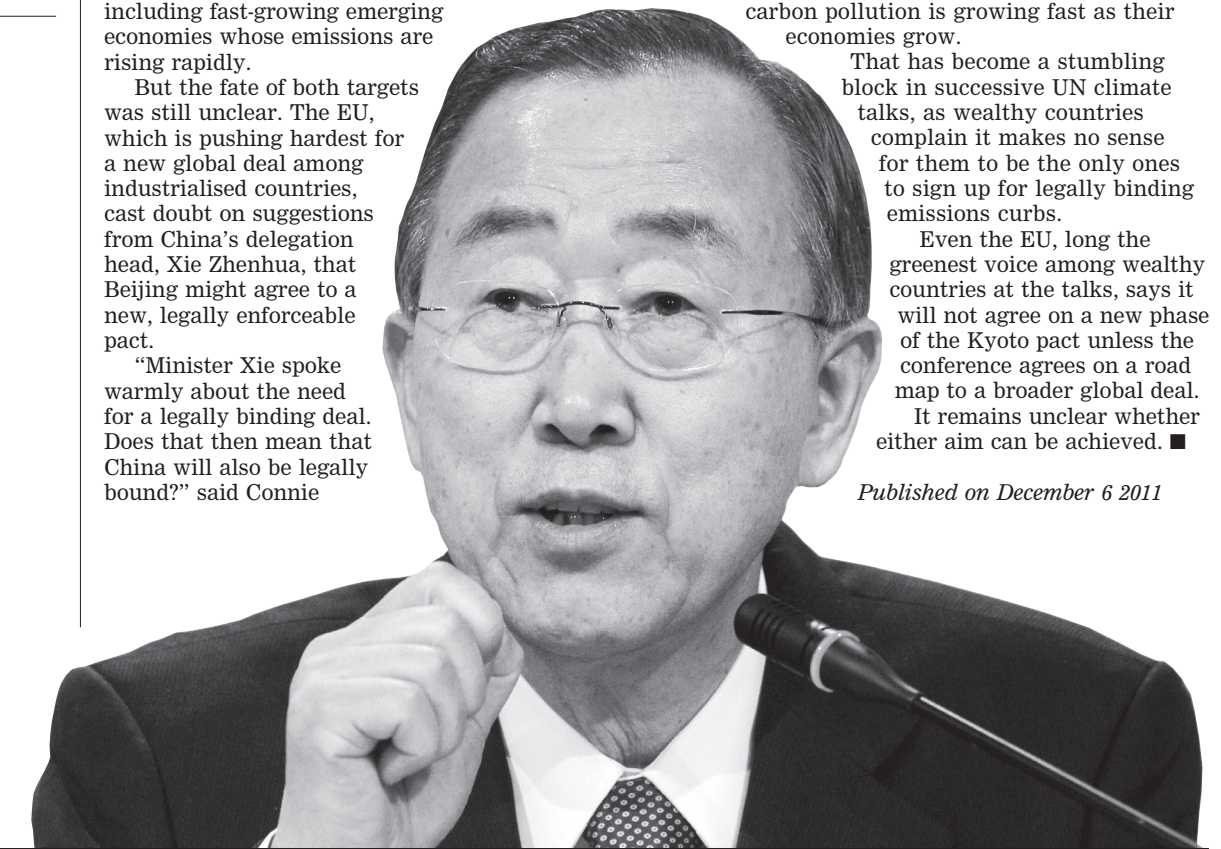
China overtook the US to become the world's largest carbon dioxide emitter in 2007 and India is the third largest, according to the most recent figures. Both lag behind dozens of other countries in terms of per capita emissions, but their carbon pollution is growing fast as their economies grow.

That has become a stumbling block in successive UN climate talks, as wealthy countries complain it makes no sense for them to be the only ones to sign up for legally binding emissions curbs.

Even the EU, long the greenest voice among wealthy countries at the talks, says it will not agree on a new phase of the Kyoto pact unless the conference agrees on a road map to a broader global deal.

It remains unclear whether either aim can be achieved. ■

Published on December 6 2011



Durban Diary



Kelly Rigg is executive director of the Global Campaign for Climate Action, an alliance of more than 270 non-profit organisations from around the world. She has been campaigning for nearly 30 years on climate and energy issues

November 30

Arrived in a hot and humid Durban; had to walk for miles to find the International Convention Centre. But I shouldn't complain – at least it wasn't raining. Narrowly missed the storms and flooding that left eight people dead and thousands homeless in the city earlier this week: a clear message to delegates if ever there was one. The conference got off to a bad start with unconfirmed reports that Canada would formally withdraw from the Kyoto protocol. Like a philandering husband finally filing for divorce.

December 1

Up early after just four hours' sleep. Started the day speaking on a panel about climate change communications. Ended it at a private dinner, where speakers included a well-respected former head of state and a leading US dignitary who defended their country's much-criticised stance on climate change. Sadly, Chatham House rules prevent me from naming either. Favourite quote: "We need to remember where we are, to respect the place where we are. For God's sake, let's not let this continent die."

PHOTOS: REUTERS; GETTY; BLOOMBERG; GOFF PHOTOS



People's plea: Greenpeace activists make demands in Durban

December 2

Negotiations have reached a dangerous place. Delegates came here looking for a post-2012 deal to replace Kyoto, but the biggest emitters are pushing for a time out till 2020 – science be damned. Attended a rally in support of small island states, who have much to lose. Canada seems to be enjoying playing the role of spoiler here in Durban. The country lost a few more friends when its National Post newspaper ran a story warning the revered Archbishop Desmond Tutu to "shut his trap when it comes to the oil sands".

December 3

The centre of Durban became a veritable fortress in preparation for the huge climate march today. A 15-minute shuttle bus ride stretched to 40 minutes as we ran the gamut of barricades. Riot police are out in force, but apart from the odd isolated case, there is no real trouble. An estimated 10,000 people attended – lots of singing and dancing evoked the spirit of the anti-apartheid movement. For negotiators, it was business as usual. Unfortunately, business as usual is pretty much all we are seeing.

China's gamechanger

Rhetorical shift from leading polluter raises hopes of breaking the deadlock on binding targets, says *Pilita Clark*

CHINA HAS THROWN THE UN climate summit into confusion as more than 100 senior ministers from around the world fly into the South African coastal city of Durban for a final week of increasingly fraught talks on how to tackle climate change.

In a distinct shift in rhetoric from last week, the head of the Chinese delegation, Xie Zhenhua, told reporters on Monday that Beijing was prepared to agree to some form of legally binding agreement that would cover all countries.

But he said this could only happen if five conditions were met and probably not before 2020, when the current round of voluntary pledges agreed a year ago are due to end.

The conditions include the European Union and other countries signing a new round of legally binding pledges under the Kyoto protocol; developed countries delivering financing to poorer ones to help them tackle climate change; and respecting the relative capacity of countries to deal with global warming.

Though he said his conditions were "not new", the sight of the world's largest emitter of carbon pollution talking openly about what appears to be a softer position threw negotiators into a round of debate about what the move actually meant.

The EU, which is pushing hardest among developed countries for a new global deal, seized on Mr Xie's remarks, saying they showed that a strong outcome was possible.

"There are real signs from some of the things the Chinese are saying publicly that there may be a flexibility in their position," said Chris Huhne, the UK climate secretary. He said if that was the case there could be "a tremendous outcome in Durban".

But the US, which is reluctant to embrace anything smacking of a legal treaty before a presidential election year, said it was unclear precisely what Mr Xie meant by a new agreement.

"I don't know what he is saying yet," said Todd Stern, the head of the US delegation. "I'll talk to him tomorrow and let you know."

China's position is crucial at the summit because the US and other developed countries have balked at a comprehensive global deal for years, unless they are joined by China, the world's largest emitter. If the Chinese and the EU were able to agree some form of deal it could potentially isolate the US, though the talks are still far too fluid to be sure that this would happen. Other major emerging countries, such as India, say they are opposed to a legally binding global pact.

There have been numerous signs that China's ground is shifting. At the weekend, a small piece of history was made in a large white tent in the grounds of the Durban convention centre, as China hosted the launch of the first pavilion it has ever erected at such a summit.

In a room packed with jostling Chinese journalists, Christiana Figueres, the UN's senior climate

Key player:
China emits more carbon dioxide than any other country, so is crucial to a deal on curbing emissions



official, joined Mr Xie to celebrate the most visible sign of a notable change of strategy by the world's second biggest economy.

Ms Figueres said she was "a little bit sad" that it had taken Beijing 17 summits before they followed the EU and other large countries and showcased their green credentials. "But I'm trusting it is not the last," she said.

That seems highly unlikely, given the effort that China has put into promoting its environmental policies in Durban. Apart from its pavilion and glossy brochures, China has scheduled, or participated in, more than 20 side events here.

In another departure from past years, China has allowed its senior negotiators to give interviews with foreign and Chinese journalists. Non-governmental environmental organisations are also being called in for separate briefings with Mr Xie.

And, more intriguingly, a Chinese representative spoke in the opening plenary session of the summit on behalf of the four so-called Basic countries – Brazil, South Africa, India and China – a surprising move in itself.

"This is the first time the Basics are speaking as a bloc," said Tasneem Essop of WWF, the environmental group. "At the domestic level, clearly they seem committed to dealing with the issues and making a contribution," she said.

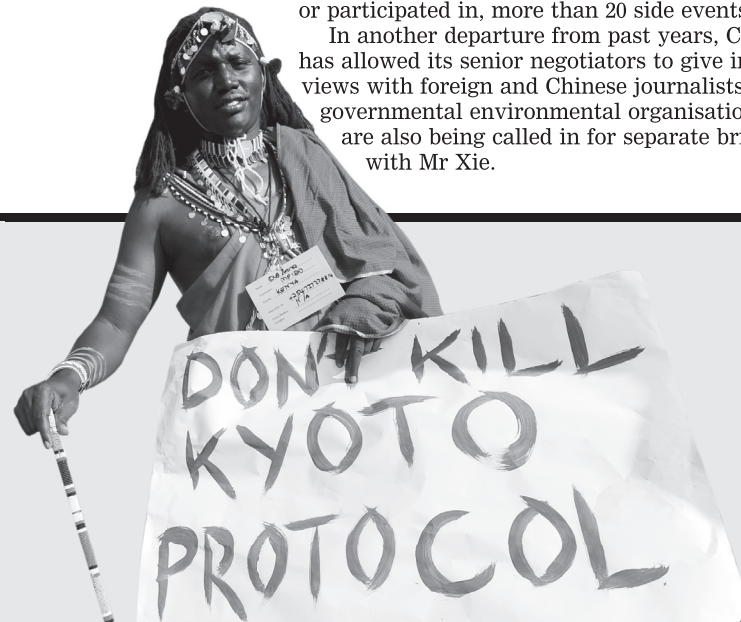
At the global negotiation level, China's position is still complicated. For years it has refused to heed a growing clamour from industrialised countries to stop clinging to its status as a developing country, which means it is not legally bound to cut its emissions under the Kyoto protocol, the world's only binding climate treaty.

At the same time, it continues to insist that industrialised countries must sign up for a new

Durban Diary

December 4

Day off. Opportunity to reflect on what has been said, and to make plans for next week when the ministers arrive and the stakes are raised. The fate of the negotiations – and possibly the planet – rests largely in the hands of the US, EU and the so-called Basic countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China). As one delegate put it, if this conference succeeds, it will be thanks to China. If it fails, it will be due to the US. The US is pushing for a time-out on new commitments until 2020.



December 7

Congregated on the beach today as more than a thousand children formed a giant lion's head on the sand. This was no cowardly lion – the human banner symbolised the courage that will be needed to face up to climate change. Negotiations have entered the white-knuckle phase. If the EU responds to positive signals by the Basic countries and agrees to save Kyoto, it could unlock the door to more ambitious positions among large developing countries. The uncooperative US should simply be ignored.

PHOTOS: GETTY, GOFF PHOTOS

Design flaws

Dissent has delayed a key climate fund, finds *Pilita Clark*

AFLAGSHIP CLIMATE FUND aimed at channelling billions of dollars to help poor countries tackle global warming has been put on ice at the Durban summit as a growing number of countries bicker over how it should work.

Wealthy countries have promised to mobilise up to \$100bn a year by 2020 to help developing countries combat climate change. A significant portion is expected to flow through the fund, but there have been tensions from the start over how much control donor and recipient countries should have over the fund.

Ahead of the summit, the US and Saudi Arabia said they would not sign off on a report setting out a blueprint for the fund, which took much of the past year to finalise.

Now some developing countries, led by Venezuela and other Latin American nations, have also said they are unhappy with the proposed design of the fund.

They argued it was "unacceptable" for the World Bank – which some nations see as a US proxy with a patchy environmental record – to be the fund's interim trustee, as proposed in the blueprint report.

Other countries such as Nigeria fear that a push by industrialised countries to allow significant private sector involvement in the fund will limit developing countries' control over what sorts of projects are funded. Their objections further delayed the approval of the blueprint.

The president of the Durban summit, South Africa's international relations minister, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, is now to hold informal meetings with delegates to try to settle their concerns. But it is unclear whether this will result in the existing blueprint document being reopened for debate – which could severely delay the fund's birth – or if countries will find a way to resolve their differences.

US deputy special envoy for climate change, Jonathan Pershing, told the conference the US wanted to see the fund become operational in Durban. But there had been a "rushed" timetable for agreeing on its design, he said, and "the final draft text raised a number of substantive concerns and included certain errors and inconsistencies that could result in confusion".

Anti-poverty campaigners agreed there were some aspects of the proposed design of the fund that were not ideal. "But unfortunately, any delay that may now occur would play mostly into the hands of the US and other countries that would rather avoid a discussion of where the money will come from to fill the fund," said Tim Gore of Oxfam.

Privately, some delegates say South Africa's urge to make the summit a success will see the fund approved and the row says more about US negotiating tactics linked to any future global climate deal than it does the future of the fund.

The fund is one of the few measures to emerge from seven years of talks on how countries should share the burden of cutting greenhouse gas emissions, which risk raising global temperatures to dangerous levels. The dispute is just one of many in Durban: not least over

A push to allow significant private sector involvement could limit developing countries' control

what will happen when the main provisions of the Kyoto climate treaty expire at the end of next year.

The treaty, agreed in 1997, has only ever obliged less than 40 major industrialised countries to ratchet back their greenhouse gas emissions, and their numbers have dwindled in the past year.

Japan, Canada and Russia all said they would not agree to a second phase of the pact. Canada may go a step further and formally pull out of the Kyoto treaty altogether, according to unconfirmed reports. The US, the world's biggest emitter until China overtook it in 2007, signed the treaty but never ratified it.

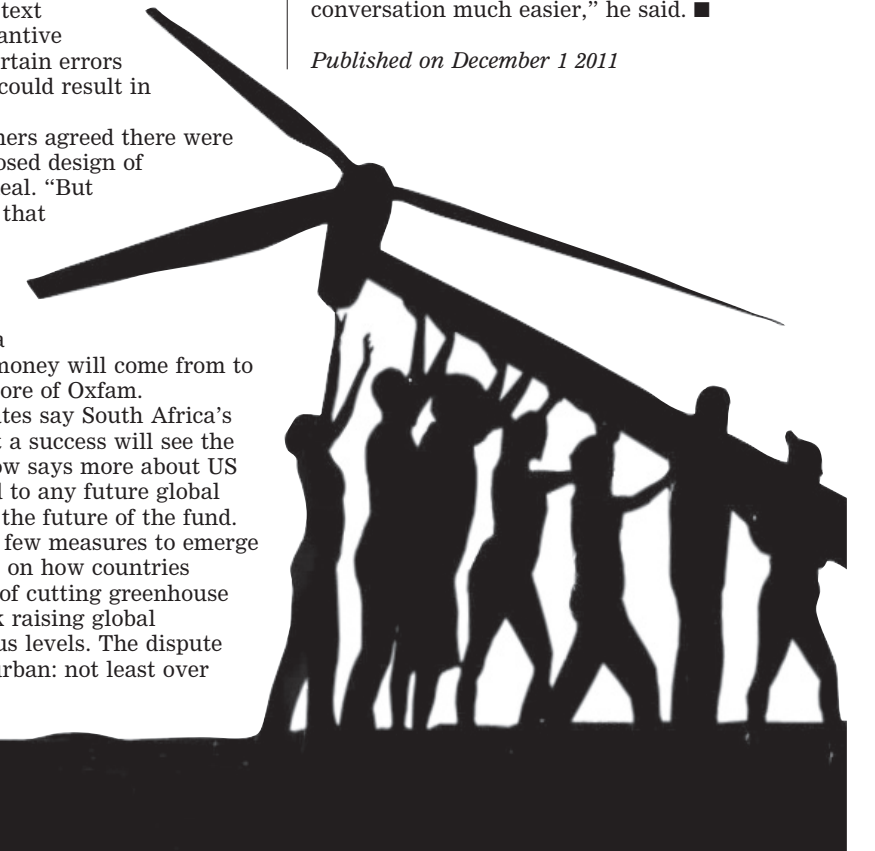
The 27 European Union countries, traditionally seen as green standard bearers in climate talks, are among the last willing to consider a second phase. But even they have said they will only do that if all countries, including big emerging nations such as China and Brazil, eventually sign up to some form of binding carbon emission curbs themselves.

But this is not going to happen unless wealthy countries that never ratified Kyoto, particularly the US, agree to make similar commitments, says Brazil's chief envoy in Durban, Andre Correa do Lago.

"We have to see what the US can do because I think nobody can expect large developing nations to be able to do more than the US," he said, adding that he believed the EU had this week backed away from its original stance.

"Now the dialogue is much better because they are not talking about conditions, they are talking about reassurances, which makes the conversation much easier," he said. ■

Published on December 1 2011



China has allowed its negotiators to give interviews with foreign and Chinese journalists

phase of Kyoto when the first expires at the end of next year. Only a dwindling minority are prepared to do this, and even then only if China eventually agrees to similar legally binding emissions targets.

It is unclear whether Beijing's apparent shift amounts to enough for this summit to agree anything resembling a meaningful accord on tackling global carbon emissions. ■

Published on December 5 2011

Arguing as the world burns

Beliefs about climate change have nothing to do with science, writes *Simon Kuper*



WHEN YOU WRITE about climate change, you get even more angry emails than when you write about Muslims. Last time I tried, one reader berated me for mentioning “fictional pompous Al Gore’s enriching scheme of global warming” in my “ridiculous article”. This man ended with a quote from Einstein: “Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I’m not sure about the former.” Another reader, whose sign-off cited his PhD, explained to me that all the international summits weren’t “about man-made climate change ‘science’ ... but really about a larger ‘global wealth distribution scheme’”.

It’s tempting to blame “climate sceptics” for the world’s inaction on man-made climate change. (The United Nations’ latest summit in Durban won’t save the planet either.) Greens often talk as if the enemy were not climate change itself, but a self-taught band of freelance sceptics. No wonder, because fighting culture wars is the fun bit of politics. However, this fight is pointless. The sceptics aren’t the block to action on climate change. They just wish they were. Instead, they are an irrelevant sideshow.

Sceptics and believers quarrel about the science because they both start from a mistaken premise: that science will determine what we do about climate change. The idea is that once we agree what the science says, policy will automatically follow. That’s why the Nobel committee gave Mr Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) a peace prize.

Mysteriously, though, the policy still hasn’t followed the science. Almost all scientists already agree on the science. An article in the PNAS, journal of the US National Academy of Sciences, last year found that 97 per cent of actively publish-

ing climate scientists believe man-made climate change is happening. Nonetheless, the world hasn’t acted.

Clearly then, science doesn’t determine policy, concludes Daniel Sarewitz of the Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes in Washington. Yet the pointless quarrel about science continues.

It’s pointless first of all because what most people believe about climate change has little to do with science. After all, hardly any layperson understands it. Rather, people’s beliefs about climate change follow from their beliefs about the world. “We disagree about climate change because we have different belief systems,” writes Mike Hulme, professor of climate change at the UK’s University of East Anglia.

American sceptics, for instance, are disproportionately likely to be conservative white males, say the sociologists Aaron McCright and Riley Dunlap. Conservative white males don’t like governments interfering with business. They don’t like global co-operation. Nothing will convince them that we need global co-operation to interfere with business and tackle climate change, especially not if Al Gore says so.

Conversely, liberals, who do like global co-operation and interfering with business, are going to believe in climate change, even though hardly any of them understand the science either. “Climate change has joined gun control, taxes and abortion as a form of social identity marker,” writes Matthew Nisbet, social scientist at American University in Washington. In this debate, and not just in the US, almost nobody is open to persuasion.

Beating the sceptics around the head with the science just gives them attention. It also allows them to roar in triumph whenever the believers get any bit of science wrong, as when the IPCC exaggerated the melting of Himalayan glaciers. The squabble also creates a one-dimensional argument about climate change: do you believe it’s real or not? I’ve found to my cost that many

The sceptics aren’t the block to action on climate change ... They are an irrelevant sideshow

people can only read articles about climate change as statements of either belief or scepticism. This obscures better questions, such as what exactly we should do about climate change.

The quarrel with the sceptics is additionally pointless because they are a small minority – under a fifth of the 35m Americans who actively engage in this issue, estimates Jon Krosnick, social psychologist at Stanford University. In a poll sponsored by the World Bank in 15 countries in 2009, “in each country the public believed climate change to be a serious problem”, writes Roger Pielke Jr, political scientist at the University of Colorado. He adds: “The battle for public opinion has essentially been won.” Admittedly, he cautions, most people who believe that climate change exists feel only lukewarm concern. However, trying to convince them with even more science is probably pointless too.

The sceptics and the apathetic will always be with us. There will never be full consensus on climate change. But if governments could act only when there was unanimity, no law would ever be passed.

The US invaded Iraq, bailed out banks and passed universal healthcare with much less consensus than exists over climate change. In short, the sceptics are not the block to action. Rather, the block is that the believers – including virtually all governments on earth – aren’t sufficiently willing to act. We could do something. But shouting at sceptics is easier. ■

Published on November 25 2011

– for understandable reasons. And the wealthy countries are saying, that’s not good enough – we need something more. My guess would be that we will see some form of agreement. The question is how meaningful that is going to be in terms of cutting emissions.

CC: I am now joined by Chris Giles, FT economics editor. From an economic point of view there is an argument that the world cannot afford this action against climate change. And there is a counter argument that action against climate change and alternative energy can stimulate growth. Where do you stand on those two positions?

Chris Giles: I think in the short term it is pretty clear that if action were taken to stem emissions

it would cost economies. Even though you might stimulate growth by spending money on green technology, that money could have been spent on something else. That said, if climate change gets out of control, then having more growth now and a non-green economy clearly has severely detrimental, and potentially catastrophic, effects on the global economy in the long term. But people don’t tend to look at the long term; they tend to look at the short term. This is why it gets so difficult to find an agreement.

CC: Pilita, how are the delegates in Durban handling this need to look at the long term? The science hasn’t changed, and since Kyoto the view that man-made activities are causing climate change has grown stronger.

PC: The talks are occurring against the backdrop of a number of reports showing that global temperatures are warming and greenhouse gas levels are reaching record levels. So, if it were merely up to the science, an agreement would have been reached some years ago. Clearly, it is not up to the science. There are powerful economic and political

forces here, and that is particularly so at a time of economic volatility we’re seeing now.

We are seeing China, Brazil and others saying that unless the wealthy countries sign up to a second round of Kyoto they are not going to permit the UN-backed carbon offset scheme – the world’s second biggest carbon market after the EU emissions trading scheme. There’s some legal ambiguity about whether, in fact, they can block it, but what is clear is that they will use this as a negotiating ploy through to the end of the talks.

The Green Climate Fund is another big area of contention here. We have seen delegates bickering over the design of the fund, with a lot of unhappiness from developing countries, which think the US effectively wants to run it through the World Bank. And the US is saying it has serious concerns about the design of it too.

The South Africans are going to have to try to have informal talks to sort it all out. So, again, there are very broad geopolitical disputes between developing and developed countries, which have permeated every negotiation, every discussion here. It does make it very difficult to see how there is going to be a meaningful outcome. ■



“Without fear and without favour”

Inconvenient truth persists

Support for climate change action has to be rebuilt

EVERY TIME SCIENTISTS REASSESS the evidence on global climate change, their prognosis worsens. So, too, for the political prospects of a global deal on carbon emissions. Since the fiasco in Copenhagen two years ago, no one has dared to expect much from the interminable process of international climate bargaining.

Time has all but run out to extend the Kyoto protocol, whose commitments on carbon reduction by rich countries expire next year. Even such an extension would fall far short of what is needed. The goal remains a global carbon price, supported by tradeable emissions quotas or carbon taxes.

It matters less by which route this is established – a spruced-up Kyoto protocol, a new globally binding deal to replace it, or voluntary but effective national commitments. But today, the sad fact is that all of these look politically unrealistic.

The reasons to worry are growing. This month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that greenhouse gas emissions were likely to cause more extreme heatwaves and coastal flooding. Yet the political support for action is waning. Rich world economies are stagnating. Fossil fuel dependence has been made more attractive by new technologies such as hydraulic fracturing. Clumsy US efforts at a climate change policy in 2009 now look like its high water mark.

The inconvenient truth is that the political argument for decisive action on climate change is in danger of being lost. As well as forging agreements between countries on how to act, leaders must fortify popular support for the solutions.

This is far from hopeless. Several countries are moving forward – the British commitment to a carbon price floor and Australia’s adoption of a carbon tax are two bright spots in a dark sky. On the side of technology, the collapse in the price of solar cells spells bankruptcy for many manufacturers but is a breakthrough for the commercial viability of solar energy.

The lesson is that market incentives work – and that once this is understood, policies that see these incentives right are also politically achievable. Setting the right carbon price and letting the market find the best way to reduce emissions hurts interests vested in the old carbon-intensive economy, but rewards those with the ingenuity to solve the problem. Voters will support climate policy if they see it as an opportunity and not an end to their way of life. Achieving this matters as much for our planet’s future as what is agreed – or not – in Durban. ■

Published on November 25 2011

World Weekly podcast: Bickering continues to dog Durban talks

This is an edited version of an podcast broadcast on December 1 2011. FT participants are Clive Cookson (CC), FT science editor; Pilita Clark (PC), FT environment correspondent; and Chris Giles (CG), FT economics editor

Clive Cookson: Hello and welcome to the FT World Weekly podcast. Pilita Clark has been in South Africa since the conference began. Pilita, can you tell us about the mood of the conference?

Pilita Clark: The mood is one of extreme tension interspersed with an enormous amount of talking that doesn’t seem to be achieving very much. This is normal in the first week of these conferences, as it is not until the ministers get here that we really start to see decisions being taken. Fundamentally, the test for the conference is whether they are able to get any sort of agreement on a new comprehensive – dare I say legally binding – treaty to tackle climate change.

The deadline creeping ever closer is that, by the end of next year, the first commitment period of the Kyoto protocol runs out. This means there is going to be no legally binding means by which

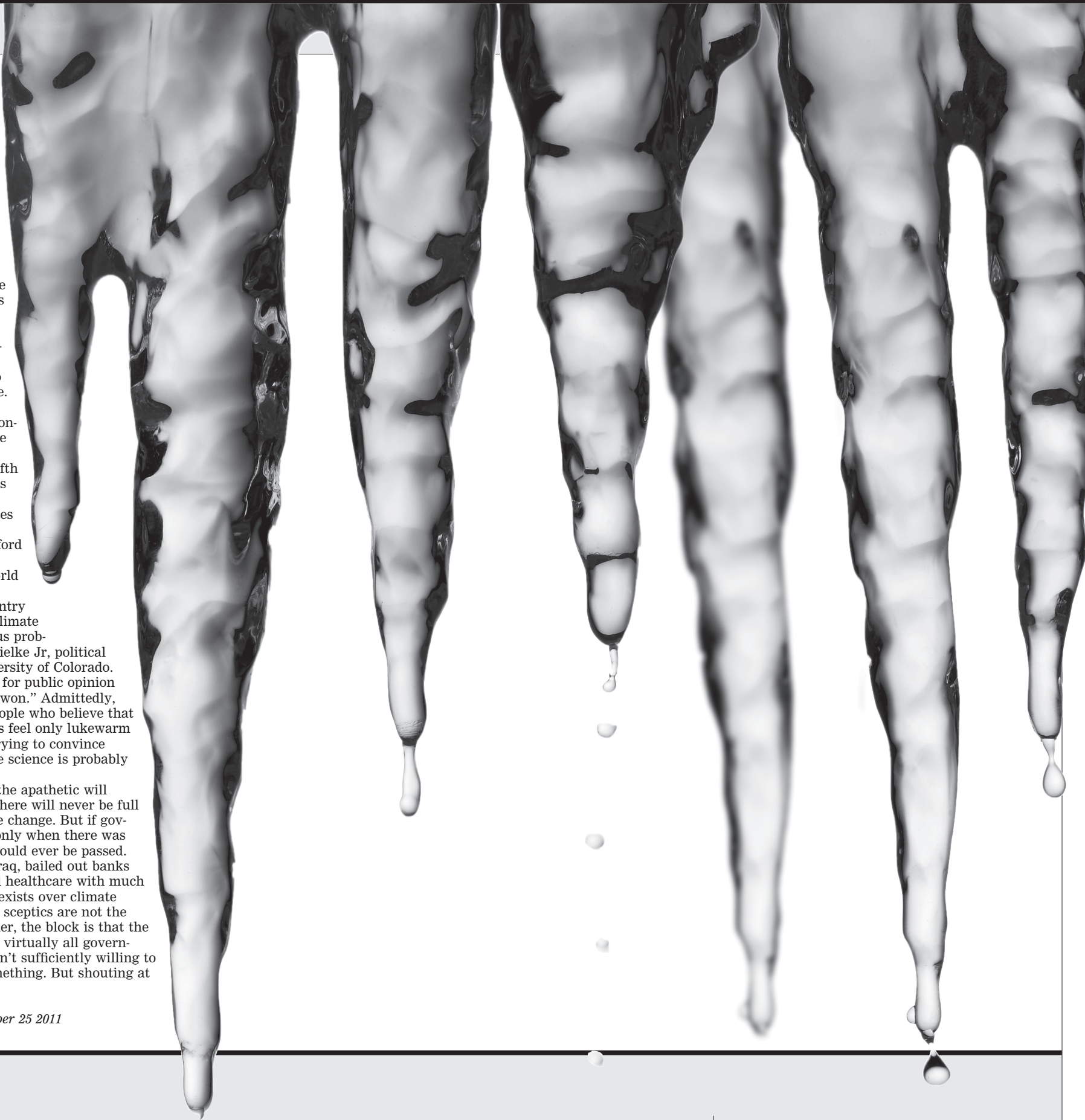
countries will be obliged to cut their carbon emissions. The danger for hosts South Africa is that they will come to be seen as the country where the Kyoto protocol died – that is something they would like to avoid at all costs.

The South Africans have walked into the jaws of the lion here and have gone for a resolution on this incredibly difficult issue: the second commitment period of the Kyoto protocol as well as trying to get some sort of legally binding comprehensive agreement that would bring in every country. The problem is that we have got the industrialised world trying to draw in the big emerging economies – China, Brazil, India, South Africa – and saying to them: “You are much bigger than you were in 1997, when the Kyoto protocol was drawn up. Things have changed since then.”

To which China inevitably replies that the US never ratified Kyoto, so why should we do anything when the US is doing nothing? It has been this dynamic that has dogged these talks pretty much since the protocol was signed. It is impossible to see how it can be overcome because China, Brazil and India are absolutely clinging to their status as developing countries in this context

People don’t tend to look at the long term. This is why it gets so difficult to find an agreement

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