

climate-change arena. Too often the United States and Europe are portrayed as the main players on climate issues, while Asian countries feature mainly when others excuse their alleged inaction by pointing fingers at the booming economies of China and India, who under the Kyoto Protocol on climate change are not bound to reduce their emissions. But China is moving ahead on its own — President Hu Jintao has regularly spoken about the importance of climate change as a global issue, and last week his country announced plans to get 15% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020.

Political changes in some of the countries holding out on climate change may help facilitate Asian action. Howard is expected to call elections for this winter, and he is running far behind his opposition in the polls. George W. Bush will be out as of January 2009, and nearly all of the leading presidential candidates could provide the US leadership on climate change that has been so sorely lacking.

So what next? Yet more meetings. Earlier this week a number of the Asian players, including Australia, China, Indonesia and India, joined the 'Gleneagles dialogue' in Berlin, in which energy and environment

ministers discuss clean-energy goals. This is but a minor step on the path to a real emissions policy; another such sidestep will come at the end of this month, when Bush launches discussions in Washington DC on what to do about climate-change targets when the Kyoto agreement expires in 2012. As the United States has not ratified Kyoto, this is likely to be something of a distraction.

Stakeholders should instead focus their efforts on the talks in early December in Bali, Indonesia, which will include all the parties to Kyoto. This meeting, run by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, embodies the de facto international framework for discussing climate change, and as such is the outlet best suited for constructing emissions commitments.

International negotiators must work together towards a clear and consistent discussion at all these meetings. Representatives from the Asian bloc should continue to keep climate change as a high priority, and make more aggressive moves towards implementing real targets for emissions cuts at the Bali meeting. Asia has both the economic clout and the incentive to be a world leader in climate change. ■

Turkey's transformation

A European vision and a commitment to openness will foster good science.

Turkish scientists have never had it so good, thanks to their country's efforts to align its laws and policies to those required for membership of the European Union (EU). In a bid to create a science and higher-education landscape that matches the EU norm, Turkey has more than doubled its research spending in the past five years, and is half way to its goal of spending 2% of its gross domestic product on research by 2010. It has refined its peer-review procedures for research grants to improve fairness and transparency, and is actively promoting research in industry. The country's best scientists say that for the first time it is now possible to get grants of a decent size — even up to hundreds of thousands of dollars — for a strong basic-research project.

To be able to spend the new money as wisely as possible, Turkey needs to expand, and rejuvenate, its relatively small community of scientists. Plans are in motion, thanks again to the country's westward focus. Nineteen new universities will be founded in the next few years. Special grants to allow young scientists to set up independent research labs in universities have been established. And with so much more money available for research, Turkish scientists are now starting to come home from abroad.

To encourage individual scientists to become more active, Tubitak, the main research agency — and sometimes the universities themselves — top up the personal salaries of grant-winners and offer financial incentives for publication in international journals. This has helped push Turkey up from 27 to 19 in the world rank of science publication rates since 1997.

But impact, as measured by citations per paper, has increased only slightly in that time. And Turkey's commitment wavered last year after its scientists won few grants from the sixth EU Framework programme

(2002–06) — the first to which it contributed funds. It was persuaded only with difficulty to join the seventh programme. Finally accepting that its scientists would only improve in the short term through continued close contact and competition with their EU colleagues, the Turkish government signed on the dotted line in June.

All seems to be set fair for scientific growth — provided Turkish politics remain stable. This seems likely, despite alarm bells being sounded by many inside and outside the country following the recent re-election of a mildly Islamic government, headed by a new religiously minded president. The old-guard academic elite, in particular, foresee dire consequences arising from the almost certain relaxation of rules that ban headscarves in government-funded institutions, including universities. What they fear most is an 'Islamization' of politics, and the discarding of the secular constitution written by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk when he founded the Republic of Turkey in 1923. The headscarf is a powerful symbol of the tensions between ardent secularists and the religious — tensions that are evident in all areas of public life.

But more scientists are coming to accept that the right to wear a headscarf in an educational establishment may not, after all, be the thin end of an extremist wedge. Secularism's deep roots won't be overturned so easily in a country where the majority of the electorate, who happen to be religious, are becoming materially wealthier under Western aspirations. There is no room for complacency, however. Frictions closer to the country's eastern border with Iran — where a university rector recently fell foul of religious groups and ended up in jail — are less easy to control. Nationalism is also a threat to stability; an insidious law criminalizing 'insulting Turkishness', which has been used on occasion to silence public opposition, needs to be repealed.

Science was the first focus of negotiations in Turkey's bid for EU membership — and had been so well prepared that the chapter could be closed in only nine months. The nation's European ambitions are also likely to provide an incentive for repeal of the nationalist law. Whether or not Turkey will become the EU's first Muslim member state is hard to predict, but the benefits of that ambition for science and more are clear. ■