

India pushes for tech transfer at Durban climate talks

Environment minister says that sharing intellectual property is vital for tackling global warming.

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India has proposed that the climate talks in Durban next week should be refocused onto technology transfer, equity and trade barriers.

The move comes amidst concerns over the sidelining of these issues because of increasingly heated political debates on climate change between developing and developed countries, India's environment minister, Jayanthi Natarajan, said last week (17 November) at a media briefing.

According to the Delhi-based nongovernmental organisation Centre for Science and Environment, proposals were made at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 16), in Cancun, Mexico, last year, to set up a technology executive committee and a climate technology centre and network.

But the final agreement does not mention intellectual property rights (IPR), "which means patented technologies cannot be accessed", the centre's director, Sunita Narain, told a different media briefing also held last week (16 November).

"Our effort is to restore the issues in Durban," Natarajan said. She added that the country was in talks with the developing country group 'G77 and China' to speak "with one voice" on the issues at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 17), in Durban, South Africa, next week (28 November–9 December).

Natarajan said that these issues "were not discussed" properly in "the rush to reach a decision" at the Cancun climate talks in 2010, which followed the dramatic collapse of climate talks in Copenhagen in 2009.

She said that India wanted a global Intellectual Property Rights regime that can accelerate access to critical mitigation and adaptation technologies for developing countries at a reasonable cost.

But Natarajan added that "the prospects of achieving the goals at Durban are much slimmer if we are caught in the vortex of competitive politics of what developed countries and developing countries are doing".

Natarajan's statements follow a meeting of environment ministers from four emerging economies — Brazil, China, India and South Africa (BASIC) — in Beijing, China, earlier this month.



Mark Karrass/Corbis

The seventeenth meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change begins on 28 November in Durban, South Africa.

Their joint statement "underlined the importance of the Indian proposal" to a comprehensive and balanced outcome at Durban. They also highlighted the need to address IPR and an early operation of the technology mechanisms proposed in Cancun in order to advance climate-friendly technology transfer to developing countries.

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The Beijing talks also emphasised that the extension of the Kyoto Protocol — a framework agreement reached in 1997, when 37 countries pledged to cut emissions of greenhouse and other related gases by five per cent between 1990 and 2012 — would be a key issue to address in Durban, alongside adaptation financing.

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Natarajan said BASIC countries "have walked the extra mile" since Cancun, by agreeing to transparency in their domestic mitigation and adaptation action, through international consultation and analysis.

But they and other developing countries say they are dismayed over recent unilateral trade measures, such as a new carbon tax on the aviation sector announced by the European Union.

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