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SOLID SOLUTIONS TO LIQUID PROBLEMS



Respectful: Crown Prince Naruhito and Prime Minister Fukuda at the opening session Monday

By Alejandro Kirk

The Asia-Pacific Water Summit kicked off yesterday with both royal protocol and a sense of urgency: 700 hundred million people in the region do not have access to drinking water and two billion lack basic sanitation. Yet, most of those same people are in danger of losing their homes and lives due to heavy rains and floods.

Such figures were quoted by all speakers, prompting

Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, chairman of the U.N. Secretary General Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, to underline this as an unprecedented and positive fact.

Other speakers in the morning plenary session were Yoshiro Mori, the chair of the summit's steering committee, Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito and Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, Tommy Koh, head of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum (APWF), and U.N. Secretary General Ban

Ki-moon (on a video-taped message). The absence of women among the main speakers was conspicuous.

Prince Naruhito recalled that the Asia-Pacific region "is home to about 60 percent of the world's population (but) possesses only about 40 percent of the world's water resources."

"Another critical problem is the frequency and magnitude of natural disasters caused by water, and 80 percent of all fatalities in these disasters occur in the Asia-Pacific region," he stressed.

One example, Prince Naruhito said, is the recent cyclone that hit Bangladesh where some 3,000 people died. Experts have noted that while floods are a recurrent phenomenon in Bangladesh, this is the first time that water seized virtually the entire country.

The Beppu Summit is taking place simultaneously with the U.N. World Conference on Climate Change in Bali, Indonesia, which has attracted most of the media attention.

Prime Minister Fukuda, told delegates that his country has committed itself to reduce CO₂ emissions, the leading cause of climate change, by 50 percent by 2050. He also stressed Japan's disposition to participate in a "financial mechanism" to help developing countries cope with emission reduction targets without hampering economic growth.

Koh reported to the conference that an investment of just 8 billion dollars a year would suffice to halve the number of people lacking drinking water and basic sanitation, thus complying with Target 10 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by the 2015 deadline.

Issues such as financing, capacity development, public outreach or integrated management, rather than

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'WE'RE ALL WORKING TOWARDS THE SAME END'

Ravi Narayanan, vice chair of the Asia-Pacific Water Forum, explains to TerraViva's Richel Langit-Dursin why the water summit complements the climate change conference in Bali.

Q: Why is it that few heads of states are attending the summit?

A: The number does not matter. The important thing is to raise the interests of the conference and we hope that the work itself, the documents that we produce, the projects that are currently under progress, will show the way and I think there is now a growing recognition of the importance of issues of water. This summit is a big push in that direction and we were very encouraged by the reception that we got this morning.

Q: Is there any conflict in schedule between this summit and the climate change conference in Bali?

A: This summit and the Bali conference are complementary. There was reference made that the issues of water pertaining to climate change are important and need to be discussed. I'm sure they will be discussed. So there is a powerful message going after this summit and the Bali conference.

Q: Did the holding of the Bali conference spoil this summit, because this forum initially wanted the heads of state to be present but they are not here?

A: I don't think so. We're all working towards the same end. It's for the problems of the region and how best can we tackle them. I think all aspects have to be explored. I don't think one should set it up as a competition. That is not a very helpful way of looking at it.

Q: What do you intend to achieve in this summit?

A: We hope and we think that we'll be successful in achieving a higher recognition of the many issues of water with regard to health, well-being, and livelihood of people, particularly the poor. And I think we'll succeed.

Q: How do you assess the response of political leaders to water-related problems?

A: The response will be evident in their own national plans, not only of governments, but of all the stakeholders in each of the countries. As Asia-Pacific Water Forum Governing Council chair Tommy Koh said, this conference is a platform which is bringing together not just governments, but international organisations, civil society groups, academia and others. The success will depend on how in each country and across the countries they can cooperate and work together for common terms.

Q: Why is it that many countries are not on track in meeting Target 10 of the Millennium Development Goals?

A: We think it is important for everyone to pay attention to the issues of water so that we can all work together to meet Target 10 and all the other issues connected to water.

Q: How can countries overcome the difficulties they face in meeting Target 10?

A: We'll overcome them not in the short term. We'll overcome them through concerted, cooperative work of the different stakeholders – governments, civil society, academia, local governments working together – and the exchange of information across countries so that the good examples in this region become available to everybody and people can learn from each other.

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technology, are the main obstacles, Koh said, and those depend on a political decision to give water and sanitation "a higher priority in national, regional and international agendas."

Integrated Water Resources Management is crucial, Prince Willem-Alexander said, recalling that 2008 is the U.N. World Sanitation Year. While good governance and transparent water services are a basic requirement, it is also necessary to have a substantial increase in funding from donors, particularly for capacity-building in

developing countries, as stated in his panel's Hashimoto Action Plan adopted in 2006.

In a "memorial speech," Prince Naruhito recalled Japan's centuries-old efforts to command and make sustainable use of its water resources. Embankments to control surplus water and prevent floods were already built in the 5th century, he said, and a yearly Festival of Fire and Water has taken place without interruption for 1,000 years.

Outside the convention centre, meanwhile, a small group protested against the use of water as a market commodity rather than a human right: "Water is not for Sale," a banner read.

COMMITMENTS GIVEN, BUT FUNDS NEEDED

By Richel Langit-Dursin

Leaders of developing states in the Pacific found common ground at the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit. The heads of Palau, Nauru, Bhutan, Kiribati, Kyrgyz, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Niue, Tajikistan and Tuvalu pledged their political commitments but also stressed their need for financial and technical support from donor and development agencies to address water problems in their countries.

“While it seems to rain a lot in Palau, we simply cannot count on freshwater literally falling from the sky and solving our water management problems,” said Palau President Tommy Remengesau Jr.

“We want to learn and participate, and we want to take an active role in fashioning the solutions for our region, as well as for each of our countries,” he said. But Palau lacks financial, technical, and human resources in the government and civil society to address water-related issues, he pointed out.

Nauru President Ludwig Scotty said his government is fully committed to improving the country’s water management systems. In fact, he said, its 10,000 citizens all have access to safe water. But water is becoming more scarce due to the increased and prolonged drought in the Pacific. Adding to this problem is the fact that Nauru has no dams or catchment areas for collecting water, which is why the country is dependent on storage tanks for its water supply.

“This lack of storage capacity poses serious health and safety concerns for the people of Nauru and threatens our long-term security and survival,” Scotty said. “Without a secure storage of water, the island of Nauru is more susceptible to outbreaks of cholera, typhoid and other diseases that will place additional and unaffordable financial and operational pressures on our health budget, which I can readily admit, is already stretched to the limit.”

Micronesian President Emmanuel Mori said water is one of his government’s main priorities. “Water scarcity takes on an urgent call for national action as well as close collaboration with our development partners,” Mori said.

He said one of the main problems of Micronesia is saltwater intrusion. “Sea-level rise and tidal surges often trigger intrusion of saltwater which negatively impacts on agricultural crops and ground water sources,” he said. “Given the problem of saltwater intrusion, many people rely on water catchments, and the minimal amount of water collected is used for drinking, food preparation and other

household activities.”

In extreme events such as droughts, the water collected in tanks is only sufficient for about four days of supply for each household.

“To build resilience to these impacts, we call on our development partners to provide the necessary means and tools,” Mori said. “For the small island atolls, these efforts should require transfer of technology in the areas of desalination, renewable energy and other new and innovative technology appropriate for the island settings.”

Like the other leaders, Tuvalu Prime Minister Apisai Ielemia asked for financial help to guarantee water security in his country.

“With growing population and increasing development, Tuvalu’s water resources are under stress due to the insufficient financial support, water management tools, institutional instruments and infrastructure support to properly conserve, protect and manage our water resources,” said Ielemia, whose speech was interspersed with calls for funding assistance.

Although Tuvalu has an annual rainfall of 3,500 millimetres, the country is facing water shortage due to insufficient water storage facilities.

Ielemia said that ground water wells, mainly on the capital island of Funafuti, have been abandoned as the water became more salty as a result of sea-level rise and contamination from human activities.

Sanitation is another problem because the island state has been forced to use technologies that were made to suit elsewhere. “Water sealed latrines and flush septic systems consume a large sum of freshwater, and contribute to the pollution of our groundwater and marine systems,” Ielemia said.

Bhutan’s Prime Minister Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji talked about the effects of climate change on his country. “Our glaciers are rapidly receding, thereby posing grave threats to human settlements in the downstream valleys caused by events such as glacial lake outbursts and flash floods,” he said.



Niue’s Premier Young Vivian urged countries that have not yet ratified the Kyoto Protocol to do so because “it is the only means that is currently in place to address the adverse impacts of climate change particularly on the small island states and low-lying coastal areas of most developing countries.”

“Already we have approximately 655 million people in the Asia-Pacific region that have no access to safe drinking water. To add more to that number as a result of the adverse impacts of climate change will pose a very difficult challenge for our governments,” he said.

The heads of states conveyed their commitments during a session attended by Asia-Pacific Water Forum chair and former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori. Also present in the meeting were APWF chair Tommy Koh, and APWF vice chairs Erna Witoelar and Ravi Narayanan.

The leaders thanked the Japanese government for providing financial assistance to their delegation. They also described the city of Beppu as lovely, friendly and beautiful.

The rest of the delegates who attended the session could only grin as each of the leaders appealed for funds.

COUNTRIES LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER



Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, chairman of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, talks to Terra Viva's Sahana Singh about the importance of water summits.

Q: Do you think water summits like this advance the cause of water management and sanitation?

A: I think summits like this do help in gathering the political will needed for solving water problems. Leaders of governments and finance ministers responsible for making decisions about water get together. Also, people who are not aware about these issues, who do not deal with this sector begin to get involved.

I am aware about the criticism levelled against conferences like these. They do not help a single person to get one extra connection of water.

Having said this I would still say that summits such as this one have an important role in putting water items on the agenda. They help countries to learn from one another. I have seen interesting examples of how people from say Latin America or Africa got interested in something that's happening in India, which in turn led to new projects.

Q: How do you perceive the role of Japan in the water sector?

A: Japan is one of the biggest donors in the water sector. Not just Asia, but even Africa has benefited from Japan's contributions. My predecessor (from Japan) Hashimoto did a lot of work in the fields of water management, flood control, disaster management. Japan can play a bigger regional role and help to promote political will in countries in the field of sanitation, which is of utmost importance at the moment, not just water.

Q: In your opinion, what are the challenges faced by Asian countries in achieving the sanitation goals?

A: 2.6 billion of the world's population do not have access to even the most basic of sanitation. Even if you provide for a few millions, there are still many millions left! Most of the unserved numbers are in Asia. It is staggering. However, many countries are working towards achieving the MDGs. China is trying to achieve the sanitation goal before 2015. If India and China, two of the world's most populated countries succeed in expanding sanitation coverage substantially, we would have already achieved the MDGs. Of course, this is not the only consideration.

Until recently, the developed countries were not affected by the lack of sanitation in the developing world; this was not even a decent subject for discussion, but things have changed.

Q: How should the problem of sanitation be countered?

A: We need to look at sanitation from a holistic perspective. For example, a child suffering from diarrhoea is just given medicines and he goes back to play near the same gutter, because there is no sanitation in the first place. He would then probably contract another disease like AIDS in the future.

For basic health, it is extremely important to have not just good water but good sanitation in place. Inventing new medicines in a test-tube is not going to help if the problem is of basic sanitation. We have to put sanitation high on the political agenda in order to achieve the goals of health.

Q: How do you see the role of the Netherlands in solving the world's water problems?

A: The Netherlands, as you know is surrounded by water. The country

has considerable experience in water management and flood control, which it is sharing with other countries. We have institutions specialising in water management where students come from all over the world. So we are contributing to capacity building.

In addition, the Netherlands has taken upon itself the goal of providing 50 million people with water.

Q: What about your personal role in the field of water?

A: As chairman of United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, I am fully involved with the subject. Our main thrust is to get better financing for water infrastructure.

Q: Do you support the privatisation of water supplies?

A: It really does not matter how a connection of water is financed as long as it is sustainable and affordable. Water supplies need cost-recovery otherwise maintenance and upgrades would not be possible. We have seen in the past how water was given free as a part of election promises. The utilities were then left to face the brunt of all the problems. It is not that the poor do not want to pay. In many cases, the poor are saying: give us a connection, we don't care if it is public or private.

Q: Do you see an impact of climate change on water and sanitation?

A: On water, yes, but on sanitation, well not really; sanitation is a health issue. We do not want mix up sanitation with climate change, but we'd rather put it as a separate agenda point.

On water resources, the impact of climate change is quite obvious. Higher temperatures, glacial melting, flooding of rivers, saline intrusion of ground waters – there would be a tremendous impact on the world's water



HIMALAYAN GLACIERS ARE MELTING

By Zofeen T. Ebrahim

To many people glofs may seem Greek, but to the Nepalese mountain people, it conjures up images of fear, death and certain annihilation. Glofs is no monster but short for glacial lakes outburst floods, an unprecedented water disaster that can cause entire communities and tribes to be vanquished. It is caused by melting of glaciers due to global warming.

The earth has warmed by 0.74 degrees Celsius over the last hundred years. Around 0.4 degrees Celsius of this warming has occurred since the 1970s. Scientists have blamed carbon dioxide emissions from industrialisation for raising average global temperatures. India and China are among the biggest contributors to the rise in Asia. However, both have refused to budge from their position and sign any climate change treaty that would slow the pace of their development.

While nature has an innate power to recover, the melting of glaciers is a graphic indicator of what is happening to the earth's climate. Time is running out and there is an urgent call for everyone to wake up to the impending disaster unleashed by climate change whose real victims will be the 1.5 billion habitants living in the watershed and water basin of the nine rivers (four of which are trans border rivers) originating from the Himalayas.

With mountains and glaciers as barometers of our planet's health, and the Himalayan region containing the biggest body of ice outside the polar region (thus the name the Third Pole), climate experts urged heads of states of the

region to take robust action and aggressively pursue a discourse on climate change, glaciers and water resources in the Himalayan region.

The United Nations Development Programme's latest Human Development Report reminds the leaders of the 10-year period left to reverse the effects of climate change or about 2.6 billion of the world's poor will be hit by catastrophes.

According to Andreas Schild, director general of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Beppu, a hot springs resort, provided a perfect example of how water can be used positively for energy and pleasure. This venue of the summit also seemed to cool temperatures inside the conference area as unlike past talks on climate change, which were bogged down by arguments and playing the blame game, this discussion called for regional cooperation to fight the war on climate change.

"Global warming is not only causing glofs but making mountaineering extremely dangerous, more fatal than avalanches," said Ken Noguchi, the 34-year old alpinist turned environmental activist who has carried out numerous mountain cleaning expeditions.

"But I hope the discourse does not end in this room, but formulates into concrete action," appealed Noguchi, referring to a plethora of summits and fora that are usually long on rhetoric and short on action. He had been travelling around the region, meeting leaders in Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and India trying to raise awareness of the consequences of the melting of glaciers.

The melting of glaciers caused by emissions of greenhouse gases in the North is not an isolated phenomenon and even a slight drop in temperature has a ripple effect, triggering a whole set of incredibly freaky weather conditions including erratic monsoon rains, sleet on the Everest instead of snow and seas rising to alarming levels. More natural disasters have taken place in Asia with the recent cyclone hitting Bangladesh last month killing thousands of people. Scientists have blamed these disasters on to climate change.

Not only will this bout of climate change undo decades of painfully slow social and economic progress across Asia, causing extinction of species and loss of biodiversity, but also at the human level causing enormous loss of life, livestock leading to increased poverty levels.

The experts also called for pragmatic adaptation strategies to environmental and climate change and importantly, towards protecting the mountain people, for the very existence of the region depended on their sustenance.

"The resilience of these mountain people in the Himalayas is in the interest of all of us," said Schild.

While scientists, hydrologists and environmentalists all agree that climate change poses the biggest challenge of the 21st century to human security, its impact remains unrecognised and not quite understood. The world's attention is still not riveted.

Part of the problem, according to Professor Saifuddin Soz, Indian minister of water resources, was lack of exhaustive study and reliable data. "We need authoritative date that is unassailable to

mitigate efforts towards climate change."

Along with fresh data, the experts called for a need for ground verification. "There is a complete lack of real cooperation on the international rivers of this region, and very little scientific cooperation and data sharing on Himalayan research," said Jamal Saghir of the World Bank.

"The alternative is dispute and ultimately conflict," he warned. "The risks and costs of non-cooperation can be very high."

"Climate change in the Himalayas is a common challenge for the countries of the region and requires a platform for dialogue on the costs and benefits of cooperation in a safe environment, building confidence and relationships and laying the foundations of trust that will enable specific dialogue on cooperation," said Saghir. He, however, reiterated that while on the one hand, regional responsibility was imperative, on the other, global commitment should also come forth.

What is also lacking, said Dr Kuniyoshi Takeuchi, director of the newly established International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management, is monitoring and observation for early warning and preparation for evacuation since the disasters have increased in size and scale.

However, all is not bleak. According to Schild, ICIMOD had now enough experience about glacier melting, knowledge, technology and expertise available. What it lacked was resources for real time observation. "We can also customise our technology and methodology to suit the regions."

CLIMATE CHANGE: LATIN AMERICA WANTS RICH NATIONS TO FOOT THE BILL



By Mario Osava*

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (Tierramérica)

Latin American governments will call for greater commitments from industrialised countries to curb climate change and to provide financial support for developing countries to deal with its effects.

That is the plan Latin America will bring to the 13th Conference of Parties (COP13) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, from Dec. 3-14 in Bali, Indonesia. The meeting coincides with the 1st Asia-Pacific Water Summit on Dec. 3-4 in Beppu, Japan, where leaders and representatives from 49 countries were expected to address the water problems in the region.

José Domingos Miguez, secretary of Brazil's Interministerial Commission on Climate Change, complained that industrialised

nations promised to contribute to a special fund for climate change adaptation measures, but "nothing has been given so far."

It was agreed that the fund would reach the equivalent of 2 percent of the resources negotiated in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), but there are differences about which body would be in charge of managing those resources. The CDM is one of the instruments defined in the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change to help industrialised countries meet obligations in reducing greenhouse gases by investing in "clean" projects in the developing world.

Because rich countries are the "most responsible" for global warming, they have "the moral obligation to finance the adaptation plans and actions in developing countries," especially the most vulnerable such as the small island nations, said Omar Rivera, expert with Cuba's Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment.

The financing and support for confronting the negative effects of climate change are "a priority" that will be defended by Peru, "a highly vulnerable country," according to Vanesa Vereau of the United by Climate Change Association.

The implementation of the principle of "shared but differentiated responsibilities" agreed under the Convention is a position shared by government officials in the region that Tierramérica interviewed.

It is in this context that Brazil, which is among the five leading emitters due to deforestation in the Amazon region, refuses to set goals for reducing its greenhouse gas emissions. A pending bill in Brazil's Parliament would require a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2012 to 4 percent less than they were in 1990. That target is less than the 5.2 percent set by the Kyoto Protocol for industrialised countries.

"Brazil should set some goals, but voluntary ones," according to José Marengo, meteorologist at the National Institute of Space Research and a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The dramatic reports released by the IPCC since February – highlighting the tragedies

the world will suffer if strong measures are not adopted to reduce emissions – awakened hopes that the Bali conference will firm up a plan that will lead to a better future for humanity.

But the expectations are "out of proportion" because there will be no progress without the participation of the United States in the Kyoto Protocol, said Raúl Estrada Oyuela, who used to work with the Argentine Foreign Ministry's environmental affairs department.

Furthermore, COP13 will not take up "substantive" matters because it is focused on defining the process, agenda and timeline of the negotiations to take place over the next two years for a "second phase of Kyoto," according to Brazil's Miguez.

The industrialised world must comply with new, obligatory goals, "with the developing countries helping through CDMs," Miguez said.

Brazil's proposals focus on the creation of mechanisms "in the context of the Convention," not of the Protocol, that provide public policy incentives to reduce emissions, such as fighting deforestation and developing bioenergy, and a voluntary fund to reward countries that halt the loss of forests.

Despite the negative attitudes of the United States and other countries, including Japan, Australia and Canada, which want to replace the Kyoto treaty, Miguez is optimistic about defining a negotiating process before 2009.

Argentina's Estrada Oyuela is somewhat hopeful because China and India, the world's major emitters, "are a little more receptive to making changes."

Suzana Kahn, a Brazilian expert in energy and transportation, said "no effort will be effective" without Brazil, China and India. These countries "must play an active role in international negotiations," she said.

(*With reporting by Marcela Valente in Buenos Aires, Patricia Grogg in Havana, and Milagros Salazar in Lima. Originally published by Latin American newspapers that are part of the Tierramérica network. Tierramérica is a specialised news service produced by IPS with the backing of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Environment Programme.)



CEOs: GOOD ACTIONS MEANS GOOD BUSINESS

By Alejandro Kirk

The prevailing thinking among business, academic and public sector representatives meeting here yesterday is that without the private sector actively involved in providing management and technology, there is no solution to the shortage of drinking water and sanitation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Unlike other international gatherings, there were no dissenting voices from civil society this time claiming that as a basic human right, water, like fresh air, cannot be subject to the supply-and-demand market rules. On the contrary, speakers coincided in underlining the importance of people's commitment, but in the form of accepting the fact that water is a product in which there is a value-added input.

That activists were not present contributed a great deal to the chairwoman's objective of keeping the meeting within the scarce 90 minutes available, which included 20 presentations. Charmine Koda, Director of the U.N. Information Centre in Japan, even managed to leave five minutes for a debate that did not take place. While activists tend to overstretch their statements, business executives seem to have less time for discussions.

Frederick Dubee, senior advisor to the U.N. Global Compact set by former Secretary General Kofi Annan to involve business in meeting the challenges of global sustainable development, proposed that all those attending could form a new network, given the "tremendous

contributions" they were able to provide in their three-minute presentations.

Of them, "I like the concept of private-public people," he said. "If each person saved one drop of water a day, that is six billion drops a day," he reflected, temporarily forgetting that one of the figures most quoted in the Summit is the 700 million human beings in this region who lack access to drinking water and therefore cannot afford to save – or waste – any drop.

Sherisa Nuesa, of the Manila Water Company, highlighted the tremendous success achieved after the privatisation of water services in the Philippine capital, which permitted a jump from 26 to 98 percent coverage just by recovering losses. This process, she said, took into account the needs of low-income communities, with which formed partnerships, proving true that "doing good is good business."

Masaru Kurihara, of Toray Industries, explained the advantages of purchasing his company's membrane water treatment, for example to desalinise water, which has helped achieve an impressive 80 percent recovery of water by Japanese manufacturers. Toray membranes now cost one-tenth of their market value in 1970 and are 90 percent more efficient.

Margaret Catley-Carlson, head of the Global Water Partnership, said "the business world is waking up to the reality of water," which requires what business does best – managing – because "we can't create new water."

Water has become a problem, she said, for three reasons: population growth,

prosperity and pollution. "In managing water, technology and science are only part of the solution. Perhaps the easier part. The other part is about attitudes. For example if Malaysians don't like paying for water, if they were induced to think that water is not something you pay to have, then it is an issue, no matter how good science and technology are," she said.

Japanese protestors, a very tiny group though, were saying just that earlier on outside the Summit: "Water is not for sale." But by all means to this meeting, it looks like they are wrong and water is or should be for sale so that things can be managed.

On who is responsible for pollution, it was generally mentioned that manufacturing industries are the main water users. There was no blaming storm session, but rather a focus on solutions that take into account the contributions of industry and the citizen's commitment, said Tetsuro Tsujimoto of Nagoya University in Japan's Chubu region, the heartland of the country's legendary automotive industry.

He said that industrial waste had ruined the region's water supplies but "we have overcome that" through cooperation among the different stakeholders. The lesson of Chubu, he said, is that industry must be a partner of the public sector from the planning phases.

Anne Wu, a renowned businesswoman from Hong Kong, said she was speaking on her personal capacity to defend the role of the public sector in handling her city's water needs. In the 1960s, she said, the British colonial rulers were forced to ask mainland China for supplies as the city was running dry and water was rationed to the bare minimum, causing some social disturbances. Without that help Hong Kong would have never grown as it did, she said, but now the situation has changed because industry shifted from Hong Kong to the mainland and pollution is less of a problem in the former colony.

The CEOs panel



IMPROVED MONITORING OF INVESTMENTS AND RESULTS



Le-Huu Ti, Chief, Sustainable Development and Water Resources Section



Rae Kwon Chung, Director UNESCAP

By Sahana Singh

Various experiences in the region have indicated that there is an urgent need to improve policies for monitoring investments and results in the water and sanitation sector. It was found in a series of studies conducted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) as well as a Regional Workshop on Monitoring of Investment and Results of Water Resources Management, held in Kuala Lumpur in October 2007, that there is no proper system in place for the same.

"This is reflected in the gaps of effective linkage of monitoring data to socio-economic decision making, gaps in linking water resources management monitoring to decentralisation, gaps in the legal framework for effective monitoring, and gaps in effective resources allocation," said Le-Huu Ti, chief of Sustainable Development and Water Resources Section, UNESCAP. He was speaking at a session held to discuss the key recommendations adopted by the South-East Asian Ministerial Meeting on Water Resources held last October.

"These gaps have led to difficulties in embarking on major improvement in software for water resources management," he revealed.

So far, most of the issues of water resources management and actions taken to deal with

them have been at the local level. Apparently, the regional efforts faced a stumbling block in the form of getting countries to come together, unless they aimed at common goals such as meeting MDGs.

"Further regional efforts should be made to link findings of national efforts on monitoring of investments and results in water resources management to priority issues of the region, such as water and climate change, water and food security as well as water and nature," said Ti.

The session had many speakers from various organisations such as Food and Agriculture Organisation, World Water Assessment Programme, Global Water partnership, South-East Asia Water Partnership, Japan Bank for International Cooperation and representatives of selected countries such as Nepal. It was moderated by Rae Kwon Chung, director of UNESCAP. A panel discussion was held with all the speakers asked to articulate their views about how to improve monitoring of investments and results in Asian countries.

"To get optimum and sustainable results from a limited water resource, under the constraint of limited finance, we need a strategic plan," said Lee Jin, vice chairman of Malaysian Water Partnership.

"Strategic plans for countries will be different in different water sectors, depending on

priorities, development objectives, governance, institutions and culture," he explained.

Mr Lee emphasised that both sectoral and integrated water resource management (IWRM) objectives were important but there was a tendency to focus only on meeting sectoral objectives.

"Success in each sector is like winning a battle but success in IWRM is like winning a war," he analysed.

Olcay Unver from World Water Assessment Programme pointed out that it is often difficult to monitor investments because many projects have

multipurpose ramifications. "For example, it is difficult to monitor IWRM results in sector-wise fashion," he said.

It was highlighted by the representative from WHO that ministerial conferences had greatly helped to raise sanitation on the agenda of countries such as Bangladesh.

"Conferences such as SACOSAN and EASAN can stimulate the commitment of ministers and help to provide inputs to higher forums," he said. "A number of ministers said that they became aware of certain issues for the first time at the conferences."

At the end of the session, a number of key messages were proposed to be adopted such as creating knowledge hubs in water supply systems, ecosystem management, irrigation moderation and water-related disaster management.

"The First Asia Pacific Water Summit has noted the keen interest among countries of South Asia, East Asia and South-East Asia in creating a regional framework for regular consultation at the ministerial level," said Rae.

"In view of this fact, the initiative to expand the existing frameworks of sub-regional Ministerial Conference on Water towards the development of a Council of Ministers on Water Resources for Asia and the Pacific is therefore firmly founded in the ongoing regional efforts," he said.