HAMBURG, Germany, May 30 (IPS) - Developing countries led by China and India insist on "differentiated" commitments in any future arrangements to address climate change, arguing that the rich countries bear a "bigger responsibility" to make deeper cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

China and India tread a common line at the eighth Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) here Tuesday by arguing that they would oppose any move to shift the burden of reducing carbon emissions to them.

The two Asian giants, under attack as major polluters, said the industrialised countries have to provide resources and cleaner technologies by relaxing stringent intellectual property rights if they are to make any dent in addressing carbon emissions.

Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi called for "a proper balance between development and environmental objectives" to protect the planet, underscoring the need for sustainable development and transfer of "cleaner" technologies and resources.

At the closed-door meeting, the Indian foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee warned that "attempts to secure uncompensated GHG (greenhouse gases) abatement commitments from developing countries is not the way forward," and instead pressed for "a constructive response recognising common but differentiated responsibilities for the developed and developing countries."

He argued firmly that "the mitigation regime must not reduce the prospects for economic growth and poverty alleviation."

Attended by 45 foreign ministers from Asia and Europe, ASEM was largely focused on climate change, in addition to energy security and nuclear proliferation. Summing up the proceedings at the two-day meeting, German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier indicated that an understanding was reached that countries would launch post-Kyoto Protocol negotiations in December 2007 at the United Nations International Climate Conference to be held in Bali.

Steinmeier said, "Negotiations should be completed by 2009 at the latest, in order to avoid a gap between the first and second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol" of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which establishes targets for industrialised countries to reduce emissions by the period 2008-2012.

He argued if there is no agreement on the immediate threat posed by climate change there will be a "climate catastrophe", and he acknowledged the need for "common but differentiated responsibilities" in the post-2012 climate regime.

Over the last few weeks, differences within the G8 (Group of Eight most industrialised countries), especially the United States on one side and countries such as Germany, Britain, France and Japan on the other, have cropped up over the need to agree on deeper cuts in carbon emission levels. (The other G8 members are Canada, Italy and Russia.)

The United States, along with other developed countries, has insisted that China, said to be the world's second major polluter after the U.S., must undertake deeper emissions cuts, like the rich countries. The industrialised world is also calling on India, which is seeing rising levels of carbon emissions due to its recent auto boom, to agree to far-reaching cuts.

In the face of constant finger-pointing at China and India over their high greenhouse gas
emissions, the two countries struck a common chord by linking climate change to several developmental concerns of the developing countries at the Hamburg meeting.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, which the U.S. has refused to ratify, developing nations were exempted from any commitments to reduce the carbon emission levels. But with the feverish economic growth in many developing countries, the stress on resources and the environment has dramatically increased in recent years, analysts said.

The European Union's 27 members agreed recently to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20 percent from their 1990 level by 2020. The EU challenged the United States, China and India to sharp cuts in carbon emissions, after which the EU would take a much bolder plunge to curb emissions 30 percent. Though these targets pose problems to Poland and Slovakia, which depend heavily on coal for their energy needs, the EU said it is ready to enter into negotiations for an ambitious deal.

Germany wants next week's G8 meeting at its northern resort of Heiligendamm to issue a call for efforts to limit worldwide temperature rise this century to 2 degrees Celsius and cuts to global greenhouse emissions to 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

Although it is not clear what level of commitments developing countries will be expected to undertake, many of the foreign ministers feel that growth momentum would be hurt, as they lack resources and access to cleaner technologies.

"China is a developing country and its per capita emission of greenhouse gases is far less than any developed country," said Chinese minister Yang, adding that the majority of its people need further economic development if they are to escape poverty.

"Legally mandated measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions are likely to have significant adverse impacts on GDP (gross domestic product) growth of developing countries, including India," India's top environment official Pradipto Ghosh said on Tuesday.

Further, the developing countries are apprehensive about the conditions that would be attached to the transfer of technologies. Indian minister Mukherjee argued that "the IPR [intellectual property rights] regime should balance rewards for the innovators with the common good of humankind, and must ensure that the critical and most promising clean technologies become affordable for developing countries."

At issue is the onerous "royalties" demanded on the supply of new technologies by the companies -- mostly headquartered in the industrialised world.

"Investments in clean technologies based on the resource endowment of the developing countries could be advanced through programmes of collaborative R&D (research and development) between institutions in developed and developing countries, with specific arrangements to ensure that the resulting IPRs are available at low costs," said the Indian minister. (END/2007)