

Climate change congress at Copenhagen*

Repercussions of human interventions on the environment have been burning issues of debate for the last few decades all over the world; not only among the scientists and politicians, but also among the public at large. The climate change is the foremost among such issues, for its very implications on the livelihood as well as on the survival of a large proportion of humankind. It was way back in 1896 that Svante August Arrhenius raised the issue of warming due to carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. It took almost a century for the world to be seriously concerned and to deliberate upon the increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other gases of high global warming potential in the atmosphere and their consequences on life on earth. This has also brought to the forefront the issue of the development paradigm embraced by almost all nations across the world. Kyoto was a landmark in the course of these changes.

Subsequent to the Kyoto meet, an apparent change has happened in the world's view on global climate change. Although the resolutions of the Kyoto meet were consistently dishonoured by a few countries, of which a conspicuous one is USA, the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, local climatic changes were being looked upon earnestly in various parts of the globe largely during the post-Kyoto period. The concern for the global climate change has been high among intelligentsia of various occupations; scientists, economists and decision-makers to examine and cross-examine the necessary strategies for combating climate change. There have been several international meetings, deliberations and diplomatic moves to take progressive steps and occasionally face-saving compromises and commitments that mostly remain alive only in conventions and treaties. Promises, concessions and benefits to the

underprivileged and suffering people, who are least responsible for the global climate changes, remain largely unrealized or practically pushed to the back-burner. Nevertheless, international summits and Conference of Parties (COP) remain the only means to arrive at strategies for the sustenance of humankind in particular and the biosphere at large. The COP-15 scheduled to be held in Copenhagen during December 2009 (<http://climate-congress.ku.dk>), is another such exercise purposing negotiations among the nations around the globe.

Perhaps as a prelude to the approaching COP-15, an international congress on climate change was organized in Denmark. Eminent scientists, journalists and decision-makers from 89 countries took part in the congress conducted in 53 sessions. The main objective of the congress was to assimilate the findings on climate change from various corners of the globe and make them available for decision-makers participating in COP-15.

The congress proceedings were collated as six key messages that will form the chief content of a report to be produced in June 2009 (<http://climate-congress.ku.dk>). During the concluding session, the congress handed over key messages to the Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. The messages caution the world about the consequences and highlight the need for taking urgent mitigating measures in response to the climate problems without further delay. They forewarn about the vulnerability of human civilizations, especially those residing in under-developed and developing countries in coping with the predicted rise in temperature (of about 2°C).

The talks on climate change bring out fundamentally two schools of thought, notably divergent in their understanding. One school is convinced on the changes, causes and implications, while the other vehemently questions the very role of humankind in climate change. The scientific fraternity at large, warns about the unwished-for future scenario by extrapolating information on the past and present. A number of journalists, decision-makers, politicians and public are also convinced of the rationale and the argu-

ments; subscribe fully to the views and think about means of managing the unwanted changes. On the other hand, the opposing group considers the other version as trivial, manipulated and 'scientific fiction', rather than a reality to be addressed, solved or managed. Certain deniers of climate change call the changes and extreme events as 'lies, damned lies and statistics', and a hoax. There are people who believe the changes as very natural in which humans do not have much to do. There are also people who find business opportunities in climate change. Katherine Richardson (University of Copenhagen) stressed on the incongruity of this view and stressed on the need of a mutual understanding. To her, melting ice caps must not be visualized in the perspective of economics of 'opening a new shipping route to China'. Stefan Rahmstorf (Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research) during one of the plenary sessions, discussed the existing predicament in the media on sea-level rise. Lesser developed countries are still not aware of most of the climate-change problems and there are several poor countries that believe contaminating the environment is their right, since the rich have done it in the past; a totally misguided conception. Of course, one has right to ask the polluters to pay for their deeds. Balgis Osman Elasha (Sudan) in her speech discussed the climate-change crisis in the African continent.

The climate change conference urged the need for overcoming the challenges, reducing inertia in the social and economic systems, building up public desire to act on climate change by reducing vested interests among nations or parties, and enabling shifts from ineffective governance and weak institutions to innovative leadership that promotes sustainability of humankind and the biosphere as its goals.

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