

Poor Outcome at Doha Climate Talks Worrisome

Lack of fresh commitments from the industrialized countries including China, in the two week long talks of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), concluded at Doha for reducing the Carbon Dioxide and other greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, causing global warming, is a serious cause of concern. Temperatures have already risen by about 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit (0.8 Celsius), above the pre-industrial times and are now on the track to rise by 4 degree Fahrenheit (2 ° Celsius) in the next 40 years, and by up to 7.2 ° Fahrenheit (4 ° Celsius) by 2100. The growing temperatures are bound to cause severe food crisis, due to premature ripening of crops, floods and melting of glaciers along with the polar ice and submerging of island nations with many coastal regions. The Himalayan glaciers have already begun to melt, which might turn river Ganga into a seasonal river from the perennial one. These (Himalayan) glaciers feed the major South Asian rivers viz. the Indus, the Brahmaputra and the Ganga which provide water to 20 percent of the world's population.

The field data of last 30 years, satellite images and weather records reveal retreat of 82 glaciers, area reduction of 7,090 glaciers, and mass-balance change - the difference between the accumulation and loss of ice of 15 glaciers in the seven larger regions of the Himalayas, the Tibetan Plateau and the Pamir Mountains. Several Studies have indicated that the Himalayan glaciers, which are fed by the Indian monsoons, and are perennial source of water for the Ganga and Brahmaputra are shrinking more rapidly than those in the Pamir Mountains, which were influenced by the westerlies, the prevailing winds. Rainfall records also indicate that the Indian monsoon is getting weaker while the westerlies are strengthening. Under the present warming conditions, glacier shrinkage might further accelerate in the Himalayas, whereas glaciers might advance in the eastern Pamir regions. It would cause drought and water crisis in the north India.

Coming to Africa we find that in the East Africa as well, the rising temperatures have begun to cause the melting of ice caps of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Mt. Kenya, the Rwenzori Mountains and the Aka Mountains of the Moon, over an accelerated cycle of droughts and floods to the spread of malaria into the previously immune highlands, spurred by warmer climate which allows the anopheles mosquitoes to now flourish at higher altitudes, too. The glaciers on Mt. Kenya have been reported to have shrunk by more than half, over the past 30 years. The famous Kilimanjaro ice cap, now is a mere shadow of olden days, and the glacier caps of the Rwenzoris have receded by several kilometers. It is threatening food production and water sources for tens of millions of people, condemning them to gloom and doom if no major changes take place in the way the world is dealing with climate change right now.

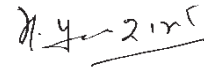
Persistent rise in global temperatures due to global warming from emission of GHGs is expected to cause rise in sea levels, inundation of low lying coastal belts and submerging of many smaller islands. Even the entire country Maldives and large parts of Bangladesh might submerge to go under water.

Many of the islands are threatened from rising sea levels, and some have already disappeared. **Lohachara and Suparibhanga islands** of India, inhabited by more than 10,000 people have already disappeared into the Bay of Bengal, due to global warming. **Bermeja Island** near the Gulf of Mexico has also disappeared into the ocean, which featured prominently till the mid 19th centuries. **Carteret Islands**, located in the South Pacific are apprehended to submerge by 2015. **Maldives**, an island nation in the Indian Ocean with its high point only 8 feet might disappear if the ocean level rises further. **Vanuatu Island**, also called as Republic of Vanuatu is another island nation in the South Pacific is also apprehended to submerge due to rising ocean level. **Tuvalu Island**, located between Australia and Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean with its high point at 15 feet inhabited by 11,000 people is experiencing that the waterline is moving closer inhabited area. They have already started evacuating as the New Zealand has agreed to grant refuge to 75 Tuvaluans every year and It is estimated that this island might disappear in 50 years from now. **Kiribati Island**, officially called as the Republic of Kiribati is located in the central tropical Pacific Ocean and **Marshall Islands** called as Republic of Marshall Islands, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean may become the victims of rising ocean levels. **Tonga Island** known as the Kingdom of Tonga, located in the South Pacific Ocean is also threatened. There are many more uninhabited islands as well, which are facing disappearance and would thereby cause damage to many plant and animal species.

In the Africa, the Seychelles, another country is facing threat to its survival has already made it a centerpiece in its foreign policy to form a coalition of equally-threatened small island nations to promote more significant measures to combat climate change. Hence, the coalition of those most affected has demanded that the developed world, seen as the primary polluter and cause of climate change, and also the newly-emerging mega polluters like China, and Russia, should make financial contributions to Africa and small island nations.

Yet, it is most worrisome that, inspite of such severe threats to the nature and mankind, nothing new could be achieved even after the two week-long exhaustive talks from November 26 to December 7, the 194 nations, have just agreed on a deal to extend the Kyoto Protocol for an eight-year period to be implemented by 2020. But the deal has left most people disappointed as it failed to deliver urgent issues: deep cuts in emissions by rich countries and China (the largest polluter of the day); finance for helping poor countries cope with the impacts of climate change; and climate-induced loss and damage.

This aforesaid extension of Kyoto Protocol too could be adopted by this U.N. climate conference at Doha, after hard-fought sessions and despite objections from Russia. The package of decisions also included vague promises of financing to help poor countries cope with climate change, and an affirmation of a previous decision to adopt a new global climate pact by 2015. But it is of no avail without a time bound action plan. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which controls the emissions of rich countries, is considered the main achievement of the negotiations, even though the U.S. rejected it because it didn't impose any binding commitments on China, which emits highest quantum of green houses gases. Hence Only 15 percent of the emissions are covered by the deal. Kyoto was due to expire this year, so failing to agree on an extension would have been a much deplorable setback for the talks. Despite objections from Russia, which opposed rules limiting its use of carbon credits, the accord was extended through 2020 to fill the gap until a wider global treaty comes to take effect. It would require strong pressure from the public opinion as well, along with all possible efforts. So a meaningful deal on climate change is signed at least by the next conference in 2015.



(Prof. Bhagwati Prakash Sharma)