



## Climate Change Monster: Calamitous Situation in South Asia Demands Urgent Action

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**Special  
Feature**

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The collective throat of South Asia is firmly in the grip of climate change, primarily a manmade monster. The regional governments have so far shown very little signs of full understanding of the situation they are in.

The issue of climate change and global warming came to the notice in 1990 when UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its first report.

Global warming is the outcome of climate change and not a single country of the world is immune to its lethal and disastrous effects. Global warming is resulting in an increase in the frequency, unpredictability, intensity and extent of floods, erratic torrential rains, heat waves and droughts worldwide.

According to UNEP, between 1970 and 2004, global greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions increased by 70%, and carbon dioxide by 80%.

However, the occurrence of global warming will vary from country to country and region to region. Nearly 20 to 30 % of known species are likely to be at increased risk of extinction if increases in global average warming exceed 1.5 to 2.5 degrees C.

In Africa, by 2020, between 75 and 250 million people are likely to be exposed to water stress owing to climate change. Yields from rain fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50% in some countries of Africa and Asia.

South Asia as bracketed with Africa and Southeast Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions of the world to face the ugliness and cruel clutches of climate change. The sensitivity of matter can be measured by the preamble of Sir Nicholson Report that “from the Himalayas, which feed water to a billion people, to the coastal areas of Bangladesh, South Asian countries must prepare for the effects of global warming, even as they work to combat the human causes of climate change“.

According to Climate Change Vulnerability Index of the 28 nations deemed at “extreme risk”, 22 are in Africa.

Among the South Asian states, Maldives, Bangladesh and India happen to be the most apparent victims of climate change in the next fifty years if the current emission rate of GHGs and carbon dioxide remain unabated.

In December of 2007, Dr. Rajendra K Pachauri, chairman of IPCC revealed in a press conference in Delhi “South Asia could be displaced by global warming by the end of the 21st century. Coastal Mumbai and Kolkata are already showing signs of strains on their drainage systems and infrastructure”

.Maldives, a tiny economy and an atoll cluster may be swallowed up by the ever rising level of Indian Ocean. Some of its areas are already being submerged by the sea intrusion at a visible pace. In June 2009 similar views were expressed by Professor Mohan Munasinghe, vice chairman of the IPCC that climate change in Sri Lanka will have grim consequences on agriculture, water, health and the coastline. By 2025 these concerns will assume serious proportions in Sri Lanka. According to AFP (2009) among the four BRIC economies - Brazil, Russia, India, and China - only India is in the “high risk” group owing to its population density, security risks and resource scarcity.

According to Dayal Ashvin of Oxfam (2008) the floods of 2007 affected over 30 million in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. South Asia loses up to 6% of its GDP to disasters annually. Climate change is messing the situation when two thirds of South Asians disasters are climate prone.

The third report of IPCC was released in 2001. It warned the world that if there were “zero emissions afresh” what already exists in the atmosphere would cause global warming and impact mostly on tropical countries”. Poor people either from the developing or developed countries are the most hit by the climatic vagaries and disturbances. It was witnessed in 2004 when the Hurricane Katrina displaced and killed poor coastal communities in USA.

In Sri Lankan case, it is reported that sea temperature will rise in next two decades by 6-7 C, making dry areas drier and wet areas wetter . Some areas will be inundated with floods and some will suffer from droughts. Another study prepared by the Metrological Department of Sri Lanka shows that in the same time span, the output of paddy crop will go down by 20-30% in the face of high temperatures and less water.

Bangladesh is already under some climatic stress. Its financial capitals like Dhaka and Chittagong are being rated as high risk. Bangladesh is estimated to lose a tenth of its rice crop and one third of its wheat output over the next 50 years.

India, with the largest population in South Asia, may be the most seriously affected by the scantier rainfall and glacier thaw in the Himalayas that supply the river system on which its agriculture depends heavily. Glacier melt can reverberate in China as well.

Pakistan’s contribution in the global GHGs emission is negligible but being a predominantly agricultural economy it may face worst climatic disorders at the cost of millions of poor people especially those living in the weak ecosystems. Food, water and energy insecurity will be immense. Stagflation may tear at to its social fabric. UNDP (2008) Human Development Report suggests that in Pakistan climate models kindle agricultural yield losses of 6-9% with just 1 centigrade increase in temperature. Extreme weather patterns can be seen by the fact that 9 June 2007 was registered as the hottest day in Pakistan in 78 years.

The specialized UN agency on food security (IFAD) brought to the picture that the regional studies state that a loss of \$1.7 billion in total costs in the water resource sector is associated to projected 2 C temperature increase, and an increase by 7-924 million of the number of poor rural people experiencing water stress associated to 2-4 C of temperature.

Representing the president of Pakistan in the UN Headquarter New York in 2007, the then Environment Minister of Pakistan, Faisal Saleh Hayat said, “Agricultural productivity in Pakistan was affected by the changes in land and water regimes. Dry land areas in arid and semi-arid regions were most vulnerable and affected agriculture productivity, putting the country’s food security at risk”. He affirmed government’s action plan to develop water management systems, change crop patterns and creating mass awareness.

According to Tauqeer Ali Sheikh of LEAD (CEO) Pakistan, the government of Pakistan will have to determine its priority areas for investment and action in order to cope with the menace of climate change in the shortest possible time. Water security, food security, forest conservation and cultivation, and energy security should be included in the next five year development plan by making institutional rules and regulations aligned with national spirit to face climate change. The lack of coherence and coordination among various government organizations should be overcome.

DFID (2009) noted that the glaciers of the greater Himalaya region (China and South Asia) are melting faster than those of the north and south poles. By 2050 floods and droughts will affect more than 60 million people each year in Bangladesh whereas 30 m are already affected in India.

Germanwatch and Climate Action Network Europe maintain Climate Change Performance Index annually by assigning 50% weightage to emissions trend, 30% emissions level and 20% climate policy of the top 10 polluters. China, United States, Russia and India contribute more than 50% of the emission of CO<sub>2</sub> in the global atmospheric system.

The World Bank (2009), by realizing the gravity of the matter, has adopted a seven-point agenda which goes as follow:

1. Mainstream adaptation and mitigation into its core development work
2. Provide innovative and concessional financing
3. Pioneer and advance new market mechanisms
4. Link private sector financing to environmental initiatives
5. Support technology development and adaptation in developing countries
6. Support applied research on climate change economics in developing countries
7. Contribute to an international regime based on areas above mentioned.

Adaptation and mitigation approach have been given high priority in the agenda. In July 2008 the Board of Directors approved the creation of two climate investment funds aimed to provide interim and scaled-up financing to developing countries for shouldering their burden in overcoming climatic disturbances. The tools like Climate Investment Funds (CIFs) and Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) can be benefit the developing countries.

With the publication of first Assessment Report of IPCC in 1990, the issue of global warming was galvanized worldwide by the United Nations Environment Programme. In the follow up, World Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Immediately, UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) was agreed upon.

In a series of follow up sessions, the Kyoto Protocol was finally produced in 1997 for signing and ratification. Kyoto Protocol makes mandatory a clear cut reduction in GHGs by the industrialized countries. It enshrines technology transfer and financing from developed countries to the developing world. It has been ratified by all the major world powers and blocks except USA and Australia.

Pakistan, being the head of G-77 in 2007, played a pivotal role in gathering world community in Bali for maturing a road map to be agreed upon in Copenhagen in 2009. The Bali Declaration was signed in 2007 by more than 200 scientists hailing from all over the world including USA, based on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Article 2 that committed signatories to the "stabilization of

greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”.

The UN Summit on climate change was convened by the UNSG Ban Ki-moon on 22 September 2009 in New York to mobilize political will and strengthen momentum for a fair, effective, and ambitious climate deal in Copenhagen this December 2009. He welcomed guests and unfolded the purpose of calling the gathering of scientists, government representatives and NGOs with these words “The objective of the Summit on Climate Change, which I am convening on 22 September, is to mobilize the political will and vision needed to reach an ambitious agreed outcome based on science at the UN climate talks in Copenhagen”. He warned as he was predicting the failure of one of the mega events on climate change, going to be scheduled after three months in Denmark, “Failure to reach broad agreement in Copenhagen would be morally inexcusable, economically short-sighted and politically unwise. Now is the moment to act in common cause.”

Dr R K Pachauri emphasized the mitigation of emissions forcefully. He informed the audience that to limit average temperature increase at 2.0 degrees C, the cost of mitigation by 2030 would not exceed 3% of the global GDP. He enlightened that mitigation carries many co-benefits like lower levels of air pollution and associated health benefits, higher energy security, more employment opportunities, stable agricultural production and greater food security. Addressing the heads of states including the USA, he advocated, “If those in this august gathering do not act on time, all of us would become leaders and citizens of failed states, because we would be failing in our sacred duty to protect this planet, which gives life to all species. Science leaves us with no space for inaction now.”

Many hopes had been glued to the Copenhagen marathon to seal a deal on climate change but it failed to unite the participants to an accord. It was tasked to ensure binding commitments on GHGs emission and transfer of technology from rich industrialized to the poor countries. On both counts it failed and left several vague platitudes like creation of fund worth \$100 billion. UNSG Ban Ki-moon had to intervene by saying “finally we sealed a deal. The “Copenhagen Accord” may not be everything everyone had hoped for but this is an important beginning”. Perhaps he was being forgetful of what he had dreamed some three months ago. Mr. Yvo de Boer, head of the UN Climate Change Secretariat is still pinning hopes on the next round of climate change talks scheduled for November 2010 in Mexico.

Pakistan, still to announce its national climate policy, was represented by the Foreign Minister saying, “Pakistan depends on Himalayan glaciers in the north for freshwaters. These glaciers are melting fast. Pakistan will soon be a water stressed country. In the south, the Indus delta is facing ecological disasters due to intrusion of seawater in fertile lands”. In the Copenhagen conference Pakistan supported china, India and South African version which will not be enough for matching national enthusiasm and aspirations.

Scientists warn that to avoid the ravages of climate change, the world needs to decrease its emissions by 30-40 percent (below 1990 levels) in the coming decades till 2050. Much depends on the attitude of USA, Australia and, Canada to determine the fate of Mexico round in 2010. According to Jonathan Freedland of the Guardian, who quoted the latest survey conducted by the BBC, just 45% of the Americans consider climate change a “very serious issue”. The trio reflects Leo Tolstoy “everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself”

Pakistan needs a national climate change policy based on long term understanding of national environment. Initially, empirical data is needed. Both China and India can be taken on board with the realization that Pakistan’s climatic scenario is decaying, flipped by neighbouring emissions of GHGs.

Bhutan is also a victim of external emissions of GHGs. Its constitution guarantees 60% of its land mass reserved for forests. China and India are Asia’s largest polluters. With the assistance of Chinese expertise and equipment, Pakistan can establish a think tank on the pattern of Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany. Even its affiliation for sharing knowledge can be requested.

The experience of Pakistan with International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has been remarkable for evolving and implementing the Pakistan Environment Programme and National Conservation Strategy.

Pakistan can utilize valuable expertise of the UNEP by converting its prospective malls and mega buildings on PV Panels based on climate neutrality. UNEP is projecting its headquarters in Nairobi as “green lung” to be emulated by others. Usage of recycled papers is being done very successfully by the World Bank and UNEP. Till the expiry of Kyoto protocol in 2013, Pakistan should encash its Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Deregulation (REDD) and Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

In CDM Pakistan’s share compared with India, Brazil, Thailand and Indonesia is negligible. Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) of Pakistan has taken some pragmatic strides by establishing a full-fledged directorate of environment. Its strategy of “BUILD BACK BETTER” has won plaudits for being environment-friendly from the environmentalists.

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