

Changing Climate: Changing Ourselves

One of the serious problems facing the humanity is that of climatic change which is always compromising and affecting the quality of life for the human civilisation. The provisioning of better hygiene and sanitation, health services, basic education and safe potable drinking water are among other important goals which are intricately intertwined with the problem of climate change. The comity of nations is trying every possible way to equip itself better to face this problem confidently including coordinated dialogues.

But herein lies the nub of the problem. Notwithstanding the fact that there has been a series of dialogues to discuss the various aspects of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the developed North and the developing South are still to reach a consensus about the various modalities appertaining the ways to deal with the crisis. While the developing countries including India argue (quite rightly) that since it is the West which has caused the problem, hence, it is the West which should share the major burden of meeting the challenge. They believe that the West must clean the Augean Stables it has left behind in its rush to reach to the top of the pecking order.

To further curb emission of GHG, there is not only a need to check unbridled consumerism, but there is also a need for increasing production and consumption efficiencies across the board. Our water and energy consumption need to become more efficient. It is widely felt that people should be encouraged to use public transportation more than ever, but before that there shall be a need to make the same more efficient and more people-friendly.

There are recommendations for the impositions of high fuel and car taxes to discourage private car ownership. Tougher energy standards and high user (utility) prices are being suggested for everything to make the consumption more efficient across the board to reduce the 'Consumption Overload' on Mother Nature. There is also a need for an intensified education and awareness programme to conscientise our people and to make them appreciate the challenge at hand. Our day-to-day behaviour and consumption patterns also need to be adapted to bring the same in sync with the demands of our environment.

Our buildings need to become more energy efficient. The concept of 'smart homes' is required to be adopted in keeping with the changing times. All new constructions need to meet climate vulnerability norms. Our town planning and infrastructural constructions need to integrate the climate change concerns. There shall also be a need to build our infrastructures above the apprehended sea levels. In fact, many countries like Netherlands are already building defences against the expected sea-level rise. Our weather forecasts shall accordingly be required to become more precise to safeguard the population from the vagaries of nature.

Besides, we need to undertake massive exercises for greening the globe to roll back the damages wrought to the Mother Nature. Hence, there shall be an urgent need to undertake afforestation at a massive scale as part of the humongous geo-engineering which might be needed for the purpose. The concepts of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and the Emission Trading System under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) can be suitably brought into service.

CDM means carbon offsets offered to rich country firms and institutions in exchange for the financing of emission reduction projects in the developing countries. And emission trading means sale of one's quota of emission in exchange for financial or other assistance to those who need higher emission caps. There is also a need to build more biological sinks, give requisite tax incentives for adoption of costly but eco-friendly technologies, discovery of clean energy sources, putting in place a system of emission credits, ensuring better energy efficiency and to discourage carbon-intensive energy infrastructures.

Furthermore, we need to give deserved attention to our agriculture. As far as India is concerned, there is a crying need for a second Green Revolution in this country. Still about two-thirds of our net cropped area is under dry land farming and is rain-fed, accounting for about 42 per cent of the total food produce. An effort should be made by all to reduce our dependency on weather by expanding our irrigation network and bringing more areas into it.

We need to strengthen our irrigation capacity further to ward against an erratic monsoon. The proposed river linking project could go a long way towards an improved food security for our country provided the same could be made cost-effective and scientifically more practicable. The related R and D and agricultural extension services need to be suitably attended and undertaken. Climatic stress proof seedlings and saplings need to be discovered and popularised to ensure an undisturbed supply of food grains for us all. Genetically modified food, even though not universally acceptable, can show a way forward provided popular apprehensions could be suitably taken care of.

It is felt that we need more of 'Rurbanism', i.e., keeping a balance between the development of rural and urban areas. Even though we already have a National Action Plan on Climate Change in place, we need to see to it that the same is implemented with all seriousness. There is a greater need for building practical partnerships among countries of the world, NGOs, INGOs, United Nations, businesses and all concerned to better face the climate change challenge.

Transfer of technologies from the West to the East is one of the many proposed solutions. Eco-friendly technologies for coal gasification, carbon capture and carbon sequestration apart from creation of an efficient carbon storage mechanism, discovery of low carbon fuels and

expedited development of renewable energy sources shall be required to better face the global warming problem. We also need to find and invest in alternative energy sources. There shall be a need to make huge investment in research and development (R&D) efforts for the purpose.

There shall be a need to introduce suitable changes in WTO's (World Trade Organisation) trade related intellectual property rights (TRIPS) regime to encourage transfer of eco-friendly technologies from the North to the South. There shall also be a need for enough escape clauses in the UNFCCC to allow the developing countries to be able to strike a balance between the demands for development and the concerns of climate changes. Today, initiatives like International Carbon Sequestration Technology Forum (ICSTF) need to be encouraged more.

Burden-sharing among members of the Comity of Nations is one of the principal solutions doing rounds. A major portion of the same has to be borne by the developed countries because it is rightly felt that it is reckless consumerism and unsustainable life style of the West which has been chiefly responsible for the present climatic conditions. The North need to take a lead in this because of their better endowment in terms of resources and share the same with the developing South as the advantages or disadvantages emanating from a ruined ecology shall unfailingly come to all.

A healthy and better educated human resource can better cope with the problem at hand. After all, poverty is known to be one of the biggest reasons for pollution and global warming. And all round development is supposed to be the best antidote of this Mother of all problems. Famous social scientist John Rawls rightly says that 'justice consists in maximising the welfare of the worst off individuals'. The countries of the world shall need to work out a better synergy to face this problem when they meet next to discuss the threats from the climate change.

Salient Points

- Developed North and the developing South are still to reach a consensus about ways to deal with the Climate change crises.
- There is a need to
 - o check unbridled consumerism and increasing production and consumption efficiencies.
 - o An intensified education and awareness programme to conscientise our people.
 - o Concept of 'smart homes' is required to be adopted by maximising efficiency in resources consumption.
 - o Undertake afforestation at a massive scale as part of the humongous geo-engineering.
 - o Adoption of eco-friendly technologies, discovery of clean energy.
 - o Rurbanism', i.e., keeping a balance between the development of rural and urban areas.
 - o Climatic stress proof seedlings and saplings need to be discovered.
- Need for a second Green Revolution in India where still about two-thirds of our net cropped area is under dry land farming.
- Proposed river linking project could go a long way towards an improved food security for our country.
- Build practical partnerships among countries of the world, NGOs, INGOs, United Nations, businesses and all concerned to better face the climate change challenge.
- A need to introduce suitable changes in WTO's TRIPS regime to Transfer of technologies from the West to the East.
- "All round development" is supposed to be the best antidote of this Mother of all problems.

Glossary

Nub: heart of something