**Change in the air?**

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IT has begun. Thousands of scientists, activists, politicians and business folk yesterday began buzzing around Glasgow, brainstorming how to save the world. The hype around this year`s UN Climate Change Conference COP26 almost masks the fact that this may be our last chance to prevent our planet from becoming uninhabitable.

Greta Thunberg, the Swedish environmental activist, describes such gatherings as `blah blah blah`. Our own Malik Amin Aslam, the prime minister`s adviser on climate change, has complained about the `hot air` that permeates the COP process. But if politicians cannot find a way to see beyond narrow national interests then hot air may be only one of humanity`s many pressing concerns.

The UK as summit host has prioritised the goal of keeping the 1.5 degrees Celsius warming target within reach through 2030. This means that countries would commit to actions that would limit global warming to 1.5 degrees hotter than pre-industrial times (the planet is already around 1.1 degrees warmer than it was in the late 19th century).

This is the right priority. If countries stick to the emissions targets for 2030 that they have announced going into COP26, then global warming would be limited to 2.62.7°C, according to the UN Emissions Gap report. In other words, we need global climate commitments to be at least seven times more ambitious to be anywhere near the 1.5°C mark.

Missing the 1.5°C target is not an option.

The UNIntergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) in August issued a `code red` report highlighting the differences between a world with 1.5 degree versus two degree warming. The latter scenario means more floods, heatwaves, drought, wildfires, landslides, and less food, water and security. In a two-degree world, rice will be less nutritious, the oceans would transform into dead zones incapable of supporting aquatic life, and vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue would be widespread. Around 50 per cent more people would face climate changeinduced water stress than if we limit warming to 1.5°C.

Think about Karachi as you read the following stats from the IPCC report. Sixty-one million more people in cities would be exposed to severe drought in a two-degree world as opposed to a 1.5°C scenario. And more than 70pc of the planet`s coastlines will see greater than 0.2 metre sea-level rises at two degrees, resulting in intense flooding, beach erosion, and salinisation of water supplies. Could our megapolis survive such devastation and drought? What conflict may ensue from such climate disasters? And allthis in your and your children`s lifetimes if you`re middle-aged.

Yet, at COP26, we are still debating the fundamentals. Who should tackle climate change? How will we pay for it? The `who` is a charged question. The UK has called for all countries to strive for netzero emissions by 2050. But emerging economies have pushed back, arguing that developed economies that historically contributed to greenhouse gas emissions should aim to decarbonise faster. This position is reflected in Pakistan`s refusal to commit to net-zero emissions and completely give up coal (the plan is to cease new coal power station development as well as coal imports, though continue using domestic coal in existing plants).

This logic endures until you recall that while Pakistan contributes less than 1pc of global emissions, it ranks among the top 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change.

Why should others protect our interests if we won`t protect our own? Then there`s the more urgent question of who will pay for the green transition.Developed countries in 2015 committed to mobilising $100 billion per year from 2020 onward to support emerging economies with adaptation and mitigationefforts. Just under $80bn was mobilised in 2019, and pandemic-hit economies are now trying to further fudge their commitments.

Countries like Pakistan have set ambitious climate targets but made clear these are dependent on global climate finance support.

Islamabad has repeatedly called for `debt-fornature` swaps, entailing debt easing in exchange for green policy implementation.

At the Middle East Green Initiative Summit, Imran Khan talked of green and blue bonds, implicitly suggesting that climate targets would be aspirations until climate cash flows.

There is less talk of how we might domestically mobilise funds to save Pakistani lives and livelihoods from climate events.

Before COP26, governments scrambled to protect their interests by watering down the IPCC report`s findings. Leaked documents show that oil-producing Saudi Arabia sought to slow the transition from fossil fuels, while coal-exporting Australia defended coal plants and beef-producing Brazil tried to decouple meat consumption and climate change. If the next 12 days are defined by similar solipsistic politicking, there is little hope. But let`s hope anyway. The writer is a political and integrity risk analyst.

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