[**Climate of change**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1648462/climate-of-change)

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WORLD leaders gathered in New York this week for the UN General Assembly meeting coinciding with the 20th Climate Week. These two major events come at a critical moment for climate action as a last-ditch effort to create momentum prior to the global climate summit in Glasgow in six weeks.

The General Assembly and Climate Week cater for two distinct constituencies. They compete and inform each other. Inside the UN halls, the delegates negotiate deals, create consensus and set the direction of their journeys, all this while reiterating their known or predictable positions. On the streets, diverse stakeholders, activists and interest groups raise alternative ideas and propositions. They come together to shape and influence the formal negotiations for speedy climate actions.

This process has grown in importance and outreach since it started in 2009. It has become a marketplace for ideas. This year alone there are over 535 planned events involving scientists, think tanks, CEOs, mayors, parliamentarians, governors, students and delegates from several countries. While for the delegates, planetary or climate considerations are subservient to national interests, the marchers bring disruptive propositions to the table for transformational change. They have been successful in changing the discourse as well as defining the role of civil society and the private sector vis-à-vis the Paris Agreement that has set global climate targets. Hundreds of entities — communities, corporations, universities, city governments and states — have set voluntary targets for their carbon neutrality or transition to net zero emissions.

In the UN halls, however, the dominant economies and the Global South are deeply divided, perhaps irreconcilably. The Western economies have so far focused mostly on mitigation and reducing carbon emissions and it is only now that climate-induced extreme weather events have begun to visit them and give them wake-up calls. Their ideas are persuasive, particularly since they hold the key to financial and technology flows, and host scientific and research institutions.

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The Global South, struggling with governance and economic issues is, on the other hand, at the forefront of climate vulnerability, frequently battered by the compound impact of the drivers of climate change. They are seeking international climate finance for adaptation measures as well as resources on account of loss and damage, or irreversible economic and non-economic losses.

The North-South climate divide however is deeper and more complex. The North often sees climate change more as an opportunity than a threat. It is recognised as the ultimate market failure. The Western economies have an element of faith that solutions have to be market-driven and instigated by incentivising technological changes rather than revisiting their consumption or production systems. This has led to increased investments in technologies for renewable energy, mobility, urban transportation, fuel, infrastructure and building material and standards.

These investments are reflected in accelerated economic growth rates and delinking of development from energy intensity or emissions reductions, waste generation, and the use of natural capital. Entire societies are in the process of reinventing themselves and redesigning community spaces, modes of transportation and ways of doing businesses. This has accelerated economic growth and boosted trade with new products and services. While the Global South seeks international finance and technology transfer, economic and trade relations have undergone profound changes. The urge­ncy for collective action on a planetary scale is being missed by both the North and the Global South.

The world faces an emergency as the toll on people’s lives and livelihoods keeps growing. According to a recent report by the World Meteorological Organisation, the past decade was the hottest on record. Yet, carbon emissions from fossil fuels and forest fires are 62 per cent higher than in 1990 and reached an all-time high in 2019, threatening all gains on climate change. Wildfires alone during the last one year in the US, Canada, Russia and the Arctic, for example, emitted more CO2 than India’s total annual emissions — and India is the world’s third largest emitter after China and the US. UN Secretary General António Guterres rightly labelled these trends as “code red for humanity”.

Some critical areas are worth watching for signs of progress leading up to the climate summit in Glasgow:

National Climate Plans: Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs, are a barometer of countries’ commitment to climate action. Carbon emissions from the world’s 20 biggest economies are still rising. None of the G20 countries have presented plans that will put them on track to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Some estimates suggest that the frontloading of emissions reduction by them can help limit global temperature rise to 1.7°C.

Climate Finance Deficit: Addressing the climate finance gap is vital for COP26’s success and for climate, particularly adaptation actions. The rich countries need to meet their overdue commitment made in Paris of $100 billion a year for developing nations. This amount is only a fraction of what the Global South actually needs to decarbonise and build resilience to climate impacts. Developed countries need to also commit an additional $500 billion for the 2020-2024 period, and to establish a more ambitious and transparent target to be agreed on prior to 2025.

Coal Moratoriums: China, South Korea and Japan have announced stopping international finance for coal. The G7 summit has already agreed to stop international finance for coal by the end of 2021 and to phase out fossil fuel subsidies by 2025. Altogether 44 countries have committed to no new coal, including Pakistan, but a complete exit and switch to renewables will require international financing.

Fossil Fuel Subsidies: Governments extend more than $500bn on subsidies for production and consumption to fossil fuels that contribute to climate high emissions, making renewables less competitive. For the decarbonisation goals of the Paris Agreement, subsidies need to be phased out, starting with G20, on a faster pace for the transition away from fossil fuels.

As the climate discourse in New York captures our imagination, there is an increasing pressure to act. Progress in four key areas is essential to reach an ambitious and just outcome at the COP26 climate summit: enhanced ambition, scaled-up climate fin­a­nce, enhanced tracking and support for adaptation, and support for loss and damage. This is a defining moment in history. It must not be wasted.

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