**Dealing with Climate Change**

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The subtropical semi-arid climate of Azerbaijan is known for its dry summers and cool winters. Strong winds keep the weather, particularly in the capital city, most uncertain throughout the year. Around forty-five thousand official, semi-official and private delegates from all over the world are getting together in Baku soon for the 29th Conference of Parties (COP-29). The event takes place in a precarious geopolitical and geoeconomic environment. Over and above the dismal state of economies in the global South, wars, hurricanes and droughts have increased concerns for all and sundry. Indeed, it is a good time to talk about Climate Change.

A cursory look at the outcome of the previous 28 COPs will reveal certain hard facts that make the outcome of the 29th COP quite predictable. The journey through several agreements and treaties speaks volumes about the world’s expressed commitment to addressing the hazards of climate change. The seriousness of the international community over the subject could also be measured by the goals it sets in any COP and the follow-up actions taken towards implementation. It took the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer twenty-one years to complete the process - from signing to ratification – even when the Convention never required countries to take any control action. The process that started with the Rio Earth Summit and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) is still evolving. However, the legally binding Paris Agreement (2015) was able to chart ‘a new course in the global effort to combat climate change.’ Even here, the Managers would be seen adjusting their sails continually to keep it on track mainly due to insufficient investment.

The Paris Agreement requires countries to follow the structured plan for climate action to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. For this purpose and to protect over three billion highly vulnerable people of the world, all countries are required to make mutually supportive Adaptation Policies. Setting a Global Goal on Adaptation, the Paris Agreement also aims to limit the rise of global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius. As this Global Goal seems beyond reach now, the Baku gathering might ponder over setting the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCGB). Why? This is because, since 2009, developed countries have only been able to honor the pledge of $100 billion once. Looking at the target-achieving record, behavioral & capacity issues of the developing world, and reluctance of the developed world on important areas such as transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy, the world is forced to revise the Goal to make it realistic.

At the heart of ongoing Climate Change discussion lie four fundamental issues that make any COP congregation look rather helpless. The already set goals keep changing due to various economic and political reasons. The change of goalpost every now and then not only creates confusion but also deters countries from staying on course. Secondly, the developing countries keep their expectations high only about contributions from the developed world, resulting in false hopes. On the other hand, they tend to forget their own part of the deal. That omission is not without reason. For instance, if developing countries are required to invest a whopping $2.4 trillion annually in climate change by 2030, how would a country like Pakistan manage its economy and make its contribution available for Climate Change endeavors at the same time? More importantly, why would the developed world spend almost $1 trillion on implementing the National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) of the developing world?

The Loss and Damage Fund has added another enigmatic dimension to the cause. The Fund has been established and operationalized to assist developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effect of Climate Change. However, the names of the generous contributors, deserving recipients, and disbursable amounts are not yet known. Nor does anyone know the reasons for the delay in obtaining the World Bank’s nod on it. There is little hope that queries of the developing world on the Fund will be answered by the ‘elusive’ elite group any time soon. Hence, the focus of COP 29 will be more on the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the respective Adaptation Policies rather than having carbon emissions reduced drastically by the real ‘culprits’.

Thirdly, the inherently contradictory subject of transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy poses serious economic and political issues for the major ‘culprits’ including the oil-producing partners. During the last COP, their reluctance to even engage on the subject was obvious. Hence, Baku must not hope for any progress on this issue. However, one may expect them to turn the billions into trillions and make mutually convenient mutations in the targets for the distant future.

Meanwhile, back home, Islamabad may seriously focus on establishing an institutional framework for Climate Change. To begin with, a Federal Secretary may be posted to the Line Ministry. Secondly, it may be realized that governance issues cannot be addressed through carefully drafted speeches or quoting favorable figures. Being one of the top ten most vulnerable countries in the world, therefore, may not be used as a bargaining chip. Such statements only depict our level of understanding of the dynamics of Climate Change.

Moreover, instead of expecting to get funds ‘immediately’ and without presenting corresponding proposals and projects, a reality-based plan of action may be devised to mitigate the effects of domestic calamities while relying more on indigenous resources. In the main speech for Baku, a reference to the 26th Amendment and the inclusion of a clause in the Constitution to provide ‘a clean, healthy and sustainable environment to every citizen of Pakistan’ may be avoided. This clause makes a claim that only the Scandinavian countries could manage and that too with great difficulty.

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