**Dismal Response to Climate Change**

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Notwithstanding the fact that climate change is viewed as the biggest and the most formidable challenge for the dwellers of the earth and the conclusion of international protocols, nothing substantive seems to have been done to tackle the challenge in the desired manner. The climate change phenomenon has already started having a devastating impact globally and Pakistan is among the top 10 countries, which have been bearing the brunt of this climatic onslaught during the last twenty years.

Regrettably, some countries, including the major pollutants, are even showing reluctance to cut down on green-house emissions preferring industrial growth over it. While it is acknowledged that fossil fuels are the real cause of climate change, new funding for fossil fuel exploration and production infrastructure continues unabated. According to scientists we are already perilously close to hitting the 1.5°C limit which is the maximum level of warming to avoid the worst climate impacts. To keep 1.5 alive, we must reduce emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by mid-century. Lack of national commitments will lead to an increase of almost 14 per cent during this decade. That would spell catastrophe.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has been expressing his concern about the permeating situation from all available platforms. In the latest article published in the media, he categorically said “Fossil fuels are not the answer, nor will they ever be. We can see the damage we are doing to the planet and our Societies. It is in the news every day and no one is immune. Renewable energy is the answer – to limit climate disruption and boost energy security. Had we invested earlier and massively in renewable energy, we would not find ourselves once again at the mercy of unstable fossil fuel markets. Renewables are the peace plan of the 21st century. But the battle for a rapid and just energy transition is not being fought on a level field. Investors are still backing fossil fuels, and governments still hand out billions in subsidies for coal, oil and gas – some US $11 million every minute. As the fallout of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine ripples across the globe, the response of some nations to the growing energy crisis has been to double down on fossil fuels – pouring billions more dollars into the coal, oil and gas that are driving our deepening climate emergency. There is a world for favouring short-term relief over long-term well-being. We are still addicted to fossil fuels. For the health of our societies and planet, we need to quit now. The only true path to energy security, stable power prices, prosperity and a livable planet lies in abandoning polluting fossil fuels and accelerating the renewables-based energy transition.”

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The recipe suggested by the Secretary-General will undoubtedly go a long way in tackling the catastrophic challenge supported by other nature-based solutions such as reversing deforestation and land degradation. So too are efforts to promote energy efficiency. But rapid and renewable energy transition must be our ambition. Transitioning to renewable energy besides dealing with climate change also has other enormous advantages. The switch-over will reduce energy prices and make them more predictable besides contributing in a big way to food and economic security.

The UN Secretary-General has called on G20 governments to dismantle coal infrastructure, with a full phase-out by 2030 for OECD countries and 2040 for all others and also proposed a five-point plan of action they must act upon to boost renewable energy around the world. The plan envisages making energy technology a global public good, including removing intellectual property barriers to technology transfer; Improving global access to supply chains for renewable energy technologies components and raw materials; Removing shipping bottlenecks and supply-chain constraints; Cutting the red tape that holds up solar and wind projects and fast-track approvals and more effort to modernize electricity grids; Shifting energy subsidies from fossil fuels to protect vulnerable people from energy shocks and invest in a just transition to sustainable future; Tripling investments in renewables also participated by multilateral development banks and development finance institutions, as well as commercial banks.

Surely the major responsibility lies on the major polluters who also have the technology to deal with the phenomenon which they need to share with other countries to make it a truly global effort to save the planet. The developing and third world countries would also require financial resources to implement projects designed to check climate change. The unfortunate reality is that while climate change has almost affected the entire world but the developing countries are suffering the most. Nevertheless, they also have the onus of fighting climate change within the given global framework supplemented by homegrown solutions.

The impact of the problem can be greatly reduced by bringing more and more areas under forest. According to accepted international standards, nearly 25 per cent of the land of a country must be under forests. The data about Pakistan shows that four to five per cent of the area is covered by forests. That indicates the enormity of the challenge. We will have to make sustained efforts to reverse the situation. Planting more and more trees wherever it is possible is another solution to minimize the impact of climate change. The PTI government rightly launched the initiative to plant 10 billion trees, a conceptually was a very bold and imaginative initiative which also won universal acclaim. But the problem is the actual implementation of the plan. Growing more and more trees is an inescapable responsibility not only of the government but also of the people.

We are also losing agricultural lands to mushrooming housing societies owned and run by well-organized and well-connected mafias which is a thriving business at the moment. Many of the politicians in the government and the opposition are also directly or indirectly connected with this anti-national agenda. It will surely lead to undermining food security in the country besides adding to the climate change phenomenon. There is an imperative need to look into this racket.

In regards to tiding over the energy crisis gripping the country at the moment, the best solution lies in switching over to solar energy. All the government buildings must immediately be energized by solar energy. The government must also encourage all households to shift to solar energy. Obviously, many people do not have the money or resources to have the system installed. Therefore the government must ask the banks to advance loans to people on personal surety on easy instalments. That provides the best solution to the energy crisis. The growing demand for solar energy will lead to the expansion of the solar energy industry also creating multiple jobs.

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