**Only One Earth**

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The theme of this year’s World Environment Day is “Only One Earth,” which calls for steps to restore and heal our planet. “Only One Earth” was the motto for the 1972 Stockholm Conference, highlighting for the first time that the environment is a big challenge for humanity. This slogan is still applicable today even after 50 years, reminding us “planet is our only home, whose finite resources humanity must safeguard.”

Planet Earth is facing multiple threats in form of environmental problems. First of all, global warming is the greatest challenge which is the reason for disasters caused by climate change like glacier melting, famines, floods, and heatwaves. The current South Asian heatwaves, glacier melting in Gilgit Baltistan, and drought in the Thar region are the evidence that negative impacts of climate change are intensifying and accelerating in Pakistan. Pakistan is already been declared among the top ten countries the most affected by climate change’s negative impacts. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report 2022 also revealed that Pakistan would face greater consequences of climate change in the coming decades in rural and urban areas. Climate change-led disasters generate many socio-economic issues like food security, water shortage, infrastructure damages, and human migration & displacement

Air Pollution is another environmental problem faced by our planet. Pakistan is declared among the top ten the most polluted countries in the world, by World Population Review 2022. Many respiratory diseases and eye infections are caused by air pollution. Every year, Lahore city faces smog issues due to air pollution that disrupts everyday activities which include the closing of educational institutions, traffic accidents, health issues, and disturbing communication lines.

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Another important area that is a major environmental issue is deforestation. The main reasons for deforestation are human activities like agriculture, infrastructure, urbanization, and mining. Deforestation leads to more carbon emissions, loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, etc. According to WWF, the deforestation rate in Pakistan is the second highest in Asia which is a serious concern for all of us. Deforestation leads to heat waves and other climate change issues. Pakistan witnessed the hottest month of March since 1962, which is an alarming situation for the government of Pakistan.

The depletion of the Ozone layer is another challenge caused by the release of chlorofluorocarbons used in air conditioning, refrigerators, sprays, and solvents. The Ozone layer protects our planet from ultraviolet rays which are dangerous for the growth of plants and human health. Pakistan has signed the Montreal Protocol on Substances that deplete Ozone Layer which calls for phasing out the production and consumption of substances that deplete the Ozone Layer. Under the Montreal Protocol, Pakistan established the National Ozone Unit under the project entitled “Institutional Strengthening of Ozone Cell for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol.”

Similarly, the gap between waste generation and waste collection/recycling creates a huge environmental problem for Pakistan and the rest of the world. According to the World Bank, low-income countries collect about 48 per cent of waste in cities, but only 26 per cent in rural areas, and only four per cent is recycled. Overall, 13.5 per cent of global waste is recycled and 5.5 per cent is composted. Factories and hospital discharge huge quantities of poisonous chemical wastes into water bodies that contaminate the water and becomes life-threatening for aquatic life. Human beings also use this water for drinking and domestic consumption which generates many health issues.

Under the waste management problem, plastic waste is a major challenge that is being faced by the whole world including Pakistan. According to WWF-Pakistan, 250 million tons of garbage in Pakistan primarily consists of plastic bags, pet bottles, and food scraps. It takes 1000 years for plastic bags to degrade. These plastic bags are not only life-threatening to marine life but also block sewerage lines and tarnish nature. The pandemic also increased the use of plastic materials in form of hospital-generated materials. According to a research paper “Plastic waste release caused by COVID-19 and its fate in the global ocean,” eight million tons of pandemic-associated plastic waste have been generated globally, with more than 25,000 tons entering the global ocean.”

Loss of biodiversity is another greatest threat to the healthy ecosystem of the planet. Pakistan is home to some rare species, which are endangered due to deforestation, climate change, soil erosion, urbanization, and water pollution. Many species of Pakistan are endangered like Markhor, Snow Leopard, Indus River Dolphin, and Ibex.

Our planet is in a critical situation due to the above-mentioned wounds given by mankind. It’s high time for governments to prioritize policies that promote a sustainable lifestyle. Strict laws and punishments should be implemented in case of environmental degradation. We need to create mass awareness that we are bulldozing our homes slowly as a result of our greed to extract maximum natural resources.

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