**A gathering of hypocrites**

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The ruling elites of the world have gathered in the resort town of Sharm-el-Sheikh in Egypt to attend COP27. More than 100 heads of states and 45,000 delegates are attending the conference which is deliberating upon various aspects of environmental destruction around the world and attempting to come up with a solution that could alleviate the suffering of those affected by catastrophes caused by environmental degradation.

But many critics are terming the summit a gathering of hypocrites who are responsible for the environmental destruction in the first place. The highly industrialized nations that are attending this conference are the biggest contributors to carbon emissions but no lecture and recommendation on earth can prevent them from following the destructive path of their growth-led unplanned economies, that is playing havoc with the lives of billions of people across the world as well as causing unimaginable damage to nature and environment. They will make solemn promises and resort to fascinating rhetoric but do nothing at the end of the day to deal with this mortal crisis in an effective way.

The G7 countries, Russia, China and India are among the top polluters. Other industrialized countries and emerging economies are also following in the footsteps of these states in destroying nature. They all seem to have a gargantuan appetite for growth that leads to ruthless deforestation and reckless contamination of our air, seas, rivers and water sources. Their voracious greed for profit prompts them to churn out industrial and non-industrial products on an epic scale that not only gluts the global market but also leads to ruthless exploitation of man and nature both.

This unplanned economy is responsible for the wastage of more than one billion tons of food every year. It is also creating dumping grounds for deadly nuclear waste, lethal chemicals, dangerous scrap of iron and steel, hazardous plastic and poisonous used raw materials. This system of greed and profit has caused depletion of seas across the world where deep sea trawlers have recklessly been fishing for decades now.

But none of the leaders has enough moral courage to propose an economic system that talks about sustainable planning. They all seem to be fascinated by laissez faire that believes in reckless production for the maximization of profit of large national corporations and multinational companies. Ironically, the environmental issue has itself become a commodity that is sold across the world. Any conference or event on this issue is seen as an opportunity of investment and profit. For instance, take the current conference that will last until November 18 and will greatly boost the economy in the resort town, and probably also benefit fossil fuel industries, tourism, food outlets and other sections of the Egyptian and global economy.

Despite their tall claims of concerns regarding environmental destruction, all the heads of states flew into the resort town in their private or commercial jets. More than 45,000 delegates would also have used the same means while thousands of media persons and tens of thousands of organizers would also have pumped money into activities that themselves are contributing to carbon emission. Heads of states and members of delegations must have been staying at elite hotels or luxurious resort houses. They must have used tens of thousands of vehicles, emitting poisonous smoke. So, from their flights to their stay, there is not even a single action that is environmentally friendly.

If the UN is really interested in demonstrating that it cares about the environment, it should come up with a mechanism whereby tens of thousands of people do not have to fly to different destinations of the world for various conferences of the global body. By holding such events throughout the globe, the international organization itself contributes an immense amount of carbon. Many wonder why the international elite club called the United Nations can't arrange such conferences via video links. What is the point of arranging tons of food, thousands of vehicles and an unimaginable number of plastic bottles for these conferences and other UN events? These all in one way or another contribute to environmental degradation.

Although Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy briefly talked about the horrors of war and the damage that it causes to the environment, he directed his criticism towards one country only, ignoring other players who have a deep interest in promoting wars, conflicts and armament. Addressing the conference via a video link, he said, “There can be no effective climate policy without peace. The Russian war has brought about an energy crisis that has forced dozens of countries to resume coal-fired power generation in order to lower energy prices for their people, to lower prices that are shockingly rising due to deliberate Russian actions.”

He rightly pointed out that there could be no effective climate policy without peace. He is justified in explaining the agony that his people are going through because of the conflict but he should be mindful that it is not only the Ukrainian war that is playing havoc with the lives of people but all wars and all conflicts have a diabolic capacity to inflict an immense amount of misery on hapless masses across the world.

Grief-stricken Zelenskyy could only have talked about the plight of his people but what prevented other leaders, especially those from the developing world to talk about the more than 248 conflicts, wars and military collisions that the world has witnessed since 1945. Out of these the US was involved at least in 2011 conflicts. What prevented the leaders from speaking about the killing of around 2.5 million Iraqis, more than 500,000 Syrians and the tens of thousands of Libyans and other Africans who were butchered during wars and civil strife.

Why were the massacres in Afghanistan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, former Yugoslavia and other parts of the global south not mentioned? True that the Russian war has destroyed five million acres of land but what about millions of acres of land destroyed in Vietnam, Angola, Laos, Cambodia and other parts of the world during wars and conflict? Such horrifying plans of jingoistic mentality were thrusted upon the global south by the arm merchants and their collaborators sitting in the powder corridors of Western capitals.

It is difficult for the world’s leaders to agree on a single point but if they really want to make this conference effective then at least they should make a solemn pledge that they would not tolerate the use of force or the threat of force in matters of global politics. The US alone has spent more than $24 trillion since 1945 over wars, defence budgets and military expeditions. The global military budget is still over $1700 billion. The conference should at least hold out a firm assurance that it would divert these all resources towards the efforts aimed at mitigating the impacts of climate change.

The leaders of the global community should make a solemn pledge that they will not extract donations or funds from oil and all those companies that are responsible for environmental destruction. They should also ensure the prevention of lethal propaganda by the fossil fuel lobby that has been dismissing climate change as a conspiracy. Global leaders cannot serve the cause of the environment and appease large corporations simultaneously. They need to come up with a plan to immediately contain and eliminate the influence of these corporations that they exert pressure on lawmakers. If concrete actions are not agreed upon, then this conference will end up being nothing but a gathering of hypocrites.

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