

This article is related to General Studies Paper -III (Environment & Ecology)

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"The politics of the climate crisis needs a radical transformation — people's movements are a spark of hope."

A recent paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A. shows that global warming during the past half century has contributed to a differential change in income across countries. Already wealthy countries have become wealthier and developing countries have been made poorer in relative terms during this time. India's GDP growth penalty between 1961 and 2010 is in the order of 31% for the period, whereas Norway gained about 34% on a per capita basis. More recently, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services has reported that, worldwide, the abundance of species has reduced by at least one-fifth, about a million species are under threat of extinction in the next few decades and 85% of wetlands have been lost.

None of these stunning scientific findings made banner headlines. The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister did not hold an emergency meeting to discuss the loss of economic output because of climate change or the effects from loss of biodiversity in India. The manifestos of the political parties contesting the Indian general election barely took note of questions relating to climate and environment. Instead, it is "business as usual" or "life as usual" in the familiar news cycles of bickering and politics.

Instances of collusion

What we have, moreover, are numerous instances of elite networks that are taking advantage of the situation to consolidate their control. These networks often involve governments actively or quiescently colluding with fossil fuel companies, agro-industrial elites, financial elites and other big businesses that are ignoring climate change and making a fast buck often even from the growing disasters. The International Monetary Fund estimates in a recent working paper that fossil fuel subsidies were \$4.7 trillion in 2015 and estimated to be \$5.2 trillion in 2017. It goes on to say that efficient fossil fuel pricing would have reduced global carbon emissions by 28%.

The Arctic is melting rapidly and the tenor of the recent discussions among Arctic countries suggests that even as increasing glacier melt is responsible for opening up shipping in the area, superpowers are angling to access wealth from the oil, gas, uranium and precious metals in the region.

Mozambique recently had two successive intense cyclones, Idai and Kenneth, with widespread devastation. In an article in The Nation, Dipti Bhatnagar, a local activist, describes how big oil and energy companies have been eager to tap into Mozambique's liquid natural gas, with large banks from many countries involved in the

financing. In 2013, bank loans for \$2 billion were guaranteed by the Mozambican government. When the government defaulted on its loans and the currency plummeted, it left behind a trail of woes. The story in Mozambique is of how “corrupt local elites collude with plundering foreign elites” and enrich themselves and their partners, while the people are left to bear the burden of debt.

While this kind of corruption may not be new, various versions of this are played out in other countries. Governments’ corporate cronies and plundering elites, of course, need not be foreign. Environmental laws can be broken by old boys’ networks with impunity as penalties are cancelled by a party in control. It is the poorest and those without access to power who become victims of the fallout from these situations. Another recent example is the draft Indian Forest Act of 2019, which enhances the political and police power of the forest department and curtails the rights of millions of forest dwellers.

Ear to the ground

Policies and commitments make it clear that most governments and businesses are not interested in dealing with the climate and ecological crises. They will certainly not give these the central attention they deserve in these times of an emergency; they barely even acknowledge them. Luckily, what we are witnessing is a large-scale movement for “planet emergency”, climate and ecology. Greta Thunberg has been leading this among school-going children, and Extinction Rebellion has been organising “die-ins” in many parts of Europe and now in Asia. Their non-violent civil disobedience is just what is needed and it is indeed inspiring to see children and grandparents protest together. People’s movements, whether made up of students or adults, cannot be ignored for long and governments will have to pay attention.

The atmosphere now has concentrations of over 415 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide, compared to 280 ppm in pre-industrial times. But then, fossil fuel companies and politicians have known about climate change for at least 30 years. They have funded misinformation regarding climate directly, taking lessons from tobacco companies that propagated lies for decades about cigarettes being safe. The documentary film Merchants of Doubt describes how a handful of scientists have obscured the truth on global warming so that business profits can continue to flow. The fossil fuel industry has also funded politicians, so their words and laws are already bought.

About a major overhaul

The only solutions that governments and business are looking for are those that enable them to carry on as before. But the planet is well past that point where small fixes can help take us on a long path to zero carbon earth. We are now at a stage where we need major overhaul of our lifestyles and patterns of consumption. The U.K. Parliament became the first recently to declare a climate emergency. It remains to be seen if appropriate actions will follow this declaration. When a 16-year-old speaks with far greater clarity and conviction than the thousands of dithering policy wonks who have been debating for over three decades, we know the politics of the climate crisis must undergo a radical transformation.

Climate emergency

Why in the discussion?

- Recently the UK Parliament has declared an emergency in relation to environment and climate change. Britain has become the first country in the world to do so.
- This proposal was presented on behalf of the opposition.
- Activists of a group demanding declaration of emergency on climate change began protests in central London.
- The demonstrators stopped the streets of the city in the protest for 11 days. Now this movement has spread in Germany and other European countries too.
- In addition, the Parliament of Ireland has declared a climate emergency on 09 May 2019. The Irish Parliament announced a revision in a parliamentary report. In this way, Ireland has become the second country to take such a step.

What is it?

- There is no exact definition of climate emergency. But this move has been linked with important measures on climate and environment.
- The UK government has made a legal decision that by the year 2050, it will reduce carbon emissions up to 80 percent.
- Even before the British Parliament declared a climate emergency, dozens of towns and cities of the UK had declared a climate emergency.
- They want to be carbon neutral by 2030. That is, the same carbon emitted that can be adjusted naturally.

What is climate change?

- Since the Industrial Revolution, the average temperature of Earth is increasing year after year. The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report warned it for the first time. The adverse effects of climate change have started to emerge.
- Summers are becoming longer and winters are shorter. The frequency and tendency of natural disasters has increased. This is due to the emissions of greenhouse gases.

- Scientists are constantly warning about the dangers of climate change and in the context of climate change, anthropogenic activity that is affecting the climate.
- Evidence of climate change is available from a variety of sources which can be used for explanation of the ancient monsoon conditions.

Why the need?

- The United Nations says that we have only twelve years to avoid the catastrophic climate change.
- If the problem is not resolved quickly, the earth will be devastated.
- What is the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)?
- The IPCC is an international organization created to assess climate change.
- It was established by the United Nations Environment Program and the World Meteorological Organization in 1988. Its headquarters is located in Geneva, Switzerland.
- At present, 195 countries of the world are its members. In this, groups of scientists from different countries of the world work, they regularly assess climate change.
- Every 5-6 years, the IPCC presents a comprehensive report on climate change.

What is the Greenhouse Effect?

- Greenhouse effect is a natural process by which some gases present in a planet or satellite environment help to make the temperature of the atmosphere relatively high.
- These greenhouse gases include carbon dioxide, water-vapor, methane etc. If there were no greenhouse effect then there would hardly be life on earth.
- If the greenhouse effect was not there, the average temperature of the earth would be -18°C and not 15°C .
- There are many factors affecting the atmosphere of the Earth, in which the greenhouse effect is a factor.

Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

1. Consider the following statements-

1. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties - COP-24 summit was organised in Katowice, Poland.
2. Britain became the first nation to declare climate change as an emergency.
3. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is headquartered at Geneva, Switzerland.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2
- (b) Only 2
- (c) 2 and 3
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

- Q. 'Where on one side climate change has harmed biodiversity on the other hand it has also hindered economic development in developing countries like-India.' Analyse.**

(250Words)

Note: Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 14 May. is 1 (b)

