

Copenhagen, Cochabamba, Cancun

Partition Refugees, War Refugees and now Climate Refugees. For nearly 25 percent of India's population living along the coast, global warming is a question of immediate survival rather than 'Copenhagen theatre'. Millions of people in India live just within 50 km of the coast. This vast area otherwise scientifically known as 'low elevation coastal zone' comprises coastal regions that are 10 metres above the mean sea level. And there are precisely the areas that will submerge first affecting nine states and two island groups. In truth it is South Asia that will witness the bone-chilling catastrophe. Around 120 million people are likely to be rendered homeless and destitutes by 2100 in Bangladesh and India. Climate change is going to lead to bigger human migration than what the subcontinent has ever seen before. Whether the persons in authority minimise the danger or ignore the warning bells, this trans-border migration will surpass the partition related human tragedy of 1947. A 1-metre rise in sea level could result in nearly 6,000 sq km of India being flooded and sea levels in India are expected to rise at the rate of 2.5 mm a year, in 2050 the total increase will be 38 cm, projecting a harrowing scenario. The ocean has warmed up to a depth of at least 3000 metres and has been absorbing more than 80 percent of heat added to the climate system. This causes water to expand and sea levels to rise. Also, melting glaciers add to rising levels, simply making the cycle of disaster irreversible. That the abnormal increase in salinity of ground water in the Sunderbans and surface water in coastal areas would be a fact of life was admitted not very long ago by no less a person than R K Pachauri, Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Despite describing reports pouring in from different quarters, it is business as usual when it is the question of tackling global warming. After the chaotic ending of the Copenhagen Conference last December negotiations started again at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) last month in Bonn (9-11 April) while discussing very little and hoping, somewhat against hope, to complete the all important talks by this December, at the next conference of the UNFCCC in Cancun, Mexico. But a comprehensive deal is unlikely to get materialised at Cancun because major players—America and its climate allies look reluctant to make the Cancun summit successful. Obama is more concerned about adopting a domestic health bill and his Congress has no time to consider a climate-related bill. America is more interested in officially finalising the Copenhagen accord which was rejected by most third world countries, while advocating minor adjustments here and there. America continues to insist on making the Copenhagen accord as the basis for the future text to be adopted at Cancun. But the Accord, a three-page document, was the result of a side meeting between about 25 political leaders and it was not binding on any member. And the accord was possible because India, Brazil and China obliged Obama not to go home empty-handed. Whether India, Brazil and China are going to save the Obama blueprint at Cancun, at their own expense, remains to be seen. After the Copenhagen Accord, America and its European allies pledged to reduce their emissions by only 13-17 percent by 2020 from 1990

levels, when what is required is a cut of over 40 percent. For all practical purposes 'Cancun' may be another exercise in escapism unless big polluters concede demands made by most developing countries.

Meanwhile the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (CMPCC) ended on April 22—the International Day of Mother Earth—in Cocha-bamba, Bolivia, with a resolve to fight against the climate tyrants. After the failure of the Copenhagen conclave, the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia called on the peoples of the world, social movements and Mother Earth's defenders, and invited scientists, academics, lawyers and pro-people governments in Third World to the alternative conference with a view to replacing the Copenhagen accord with a reasonable one with popular objectives to offer at Cancun. Evo Morales Ayma, President of Plurinational State of Bolivia, was the moving spirit behind the Cochabamba conference and one of the objectives he formulated was to define strategies for action and mobilisation to defend life from climate change and to defend Mother Earth's Rights. America will push what it's going to push but Cochabamba definitely offers a positive proposal. It remains to be seen whether it can act as a counter-balance at Cancun. □□□