

SOUTH ASIAN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE

All uplift plans to factor the issue: PM

Asim Yasin & Muhammad Qasim
Islamabad

Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani Tuesday said the government realises the serious implications of climate change on environment and the economy.

"I would like to reiterate that climate change is one of the top priorities of the government and all development plans will factor the issue in their planning and implementation," he said while inaugurating the regional conference on 'Climate Change: Challenges & Opportunities for South Asia' here Tuesday.

Ministry of Environment is organizing the conference in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) with the objectives of having assistance in policy planning for the sectors most susceptible to climate change and to facilitate a dialogue on climate change between Pakistan and other countries.

The prime minister said the government has started addressing the issue at both policy and implementation level, and a high-powered Prime Minister's Committee on Climate Change has been constituted, chaired by himself, to review policies and monitor progress on climate change initiatives in the country. The prime minister said an intensive, objective-led plan is being chalked out to celebrate 2009 as the Year of Environment.

He said the geographical landscape of Pakistan is unique and diverse, comprising of 11 cli-

matic zones with which comes a heightened vulnerability to natural hazards and calamities," he added.

Although, an insignificant contributor to global carbon emissions, the prime minister said Pakistan would nevertheless work towards further reducing its emissions. "We are also promoting project activities under the Clean Development Mechanism, so as to further reduce our carbon footprint," he added.

He said Pakistan might not be a significant contributor to greenhouse gases but the country's low carbon emission status provides no safety from the adverse effects of climate change, thus resulting in higher glacial melt, prolonged droughts, flash floods, cyclones, hot winters and early summers.

The prime minister said it is alarming to learn that in a recent vulnerability index published by a group of researchers, Pakistan is rated 12th on the list of countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The prime minister said, "I am delighted to note that we have among us today a renowned scientist, Dr Rajendra Kumar Pachauri, who has been awarded several international awards in honour of his tremendous contribution, including the shared Nobel Peace Prize, for his efforts to assess information relevant to understanding climate change. We share his concerns regarding the implications of climate change for the world's poor and developing nations and highly regard his



Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani addressing a conference in Islamabad.

tremendous contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)," he added.

Earlier, Federal Minister for Environment Hameed Ullah Jan Afridi, in his welcome address, said that one-and-a-half billion people and large-scale vegetation in the South Asian region face major threats of climatic changes and global warming.

"Scientists have warned that 80 per cent of bio-diversity will be at an increased risk. The average temperature is likely to increase by 1.5-2.0 degree Celsius in next 50 years and the region

might face more frequent droughts and floods, desertification, and reduction in the size of major glaciers," said the minister adding the adverse effects are results of unbridled activities in the northern latitude.

He maintained that if earth's temperature further rises by two to six degree Celsius, in the next 100 years, the sea level would increase by four to six centimetres. There is also threat of losing some precious vegetation and it might become endangered in years to come.

Afridi said that the conse-

quences of environmental changes in Pakistan and the other South Asian countries would negatively impact food, water, energy and health securities, and achievement of sustainable development goals.

The federal minister said that the regional conference has been arranged as one of the major event of the National Year of Environment. He expressed the hope that the eminent scientists and experts gathered at the conference will deliberate on the climate change challenges and opportunities available to the South

Asian region to develop a shared vision for a comprehensive plan of action.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Dr R K Pachauri said that Climatic changes are likely to intensify the environmental stresses that lead to land degradation, shortfalls in food production, rural poverty and urban unrest.

He said that global warming was 'unequivocal'. There was no scope for scientific questioning. Describing the effects of climate change in many parts of the world, he went on to explain the impact that such changes are likely to have impact on a country like Pakistan and on the lives of its people.

He said that Pakistan is today witnessing severe pressure on natural resources and the environment, and climatic changes are likely to exacerbate this trend. Water supply, already a serious concern in many parts of the country, will decline dramatically, affecting food production.

Given the enormity of the impact, Dr Pachauri stressed that adaptation and mitigation measures are critically important. Although most societies have a long history of adapting to the impacts of weather and climate, Dr Pachauri warned that climate change as we are experiencing it today poses new risks that will require new investments in adaptive responses. "But adaptation alone is not sufficient, stabilization and mitigation strategies are also required," he said and added

stabilization could be achieved by turning to renewable energy technologies that are either currently available or expected to be commercialised in coming decades. "In this area, Pakistan is ideally placed since there exists substantial potential in this county to develop renewable energy sources. The most promising of these are hydropower, solar, wind and biomass."

Regional Director, IUCN-Asia Aban Marker Kabraji set the context for the conference, explaining why climate change should not be viewed simply as an environmental threat. Advisor Science and Technology, and Minister of State for Planning Commission, Dr Ishfaq Ahmad, spelled out climate change concerns specific to the Pakistani context and said that research on the subject was in a nascent stage in Pakistan. Regional Councillor, IUCN Javed Jabbar also spoke on the occasion, pointing out that the poorest members of society are always the ones most affected by the impact of climate change.

Senior politicians and members of government, prominent representatives from the development sector, major donors, eminent scientists and technical experts from Pakistan and South Asia attended the inaugural session of the conference.

During technical session, scientists and experts from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka described responses to climate change in their own countries.

FOUNDED BY QUAID-I-AZAM MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAH

DAWN

<http://DAWN.com> Vol. LXIII No. 13 Islamabad, Muharram 16, 1430 Wednesday, January 14, 2009 24 PAGES Rs 15.00

Climate change effects to hit Pakistan hard: IPCC chief

By Jamal Shahid

ISLAMABAD, Jan 13: Pakistan is among the countries which will be hit hardest by effects of climate change even though it contributes only a fraction to global warming.

This and other worrying findings were revealed at the 'Regional conference on climate change: challenges and opportunities for South Asia' here on Tuesday.

Addressing the conference, Dr Rajendra Kumar Pachauri, chairman of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said Pakistan was witnessing severe pressures on natural resources and environment.

He said: "Climatic changes are likely to exacerbate this trend. Water supply, already a serious concern in many parts of the country, will decline dramatically, affecting food production. Export in-

dustries such as fisheries will also be affected, while coastal areas risk being inundated, flooding the homes of millions of people living in low-lying areas."

The two-day conference has brought together experts from the South Asia region to share knowledge and explore measures to combat the threat posed by the climate change.

The conference has been organised by the Ministry of Environment and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Pakistan, and supported by the UK Department for International Development and the Norwegian Embassy.

Droughts in 1999 and 2000 are one example that caused sharp declines in water tables and dried up wetlands, severely degrading ecosystems.

Although Pakistan contributes least

to global warming—one 35th of the world's average of carbon dioxide emissions—temperatures in the country's coastal areas have risen since the early 1900s from 0.6 to 1 degree centigrade.

Precipitation has decreased 10 to 15 per cent in the coastal belt and hyper arid plains over the last 40 years while there is an increase in summer and winter rains in northern Pakistan.

Although Pakistan produces minimal chlorofluorocarbons and a little sulphur dioxide emissions, thus making a negligible contribution to ozone depletion and acid rain, it will suffer disproportionately from climate change and other global environmental problems.

"The fact that global warming was unequivocal and there is no scope for scientific questioning, Pakistan faces potential environmental catastrophe,"

said Dr Pachauri, who has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (on behalf of the IPCC) along with former US vice-president Al Gore.

Describing the effects of climate change in many parts of the world, Dr Pachauri, discussed the impact such changes were likely to have on a country like Pakistan and on the lives of its people.

He said that health of millions would also be affected with diarrhoeal diseases associated with floods and drought becoming more prevalent.

Intensifying rural poverty is likely to increase internal migration as well as migration to other countries. Given the enormity of the impact, adaptation and mitigation measures are critically important.

"Although most societies have a long

history of adapting to the impacts of weather and climate, climate change as we are experiencing it today poses new risks that will require new investments in adaptive responses," Dr Pachauri warned.

Alarmed by a recent report that described Pakistan as the 12th most vulnerable country, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who attended the Tuesday's session of the conference as chief guest, appeared disturbed by the fact that environmental degradation would cost five per cent of the GDP every year.

"Climate change is an economic and developmental problem as well as environmental. The government will make concerted efforts to achieve desired outcome to mitigate climate change," the prime minister said.

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بدھ 14 جنوری 2009ء، 16 محرم الحرام 1430ھ، 30 پوہ، 2065 ب، جلد نمبر 2، شمارہ نمبر 158، صفحات 12، قیمت 9 روپے



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