DURBAN SUMMIT AND CLIMATE CHANGE CRISIS

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Abstract

Climate change is the biggest issue and challenge for the human civilization irrespective of rich and poor. Unfortunately, both rich countries and poor countries or developed or developing economies are not serious to the problem and challenge. Any real breakthrough has not been made out during the different vital summits that have taken place. Latest example is Durban summit which proved a disaster. This is because the proposed cuts in the emissions rates at the Durban are too little. If such trends and situation remain there the future of human civilization is uncertain and in doldrums and the globe would not afford destruction of human population and property. The present paper explores whether the Durban Summit is a myth or could prove to be a reality.

Key words: emission, disaster; Copenhagen meet; green house gas; Kyoto protocol; economic crisis.

Introduction:

The concept of ‘development’ versus ‘environment’ appears interminable even as the developing countries are being asked to shoulder greater and equal responsibilities with developed economies despite the developed economies past profligate practices. This is there because the rational for such co-sharing of burden by both the developed and developing economies is predicated on the larger requirement for ensuring sustainability of higher growth with planetary protection so that generation to come should not feel short-charged for the acts of omission and commission by the present generation.[1]

A year and a half ago the United Nations Secretary General constituted a high level panel on global sustainability. The expert panel report was released at an International Conference. [2] The report did not make any noticeable recommendation on asserting that the continuation of the existing path of development would put population and the planet alike at “greatly heightened risk”. Therefore, adhering on more sustainable path would lead to an increase in human welfare and further world justice, strengthen gender equity and preserve the Earth’s life-support system for future generations.[3]

The most vital and strategic challenges to sustainable growth and environment comprise of, among others, unsustainable lifestyle, output and consumptions patterns and the impact of population growth. Hence, as the world population increases from 7 billion to
an noticeable level of 9 billion by 2040 and the number of middle-class buyers (major
crack of global population) grows by 3 billion during the same period, the demand for
resources would increase exceptionally. On the other side of it, by the end of 2030, the
globe would require 50 per cent rise in food; 45 per cent increase in energy and 30 per
cent in water—all at a time when environmental boundaries are throwing up new limits to
supply.
Sustainability and environment; the two faces of same coin is basically depending upon a
model namely—“grow now and protect now” rather then “grow now and pay late.” The
report is consensus document and not a negotiators’ document. It is a guide for future
on challenges which are in the area of sustainable development. This document is
not in regard to climate change per se, not with regard to bio-diversity per se.
Every nation has to look at the vulnerabilities of planetary boundaries or planetary
thresholds in several areas and in which climate change is certainly one. Every country
has to look at constraints that confront globe collectively that also demand a collective
response. The response has to be at different levels namely—international community;
individual Governments; communities and above all through markets.

**Carbon Credit:**
Carbon credit is one of the most vital components of global worming or climate change.
Its prices, that have crashed to Euro 5 per unit currently, way below the psychological
Euro 10 per unit level, are under revival at least on one horizon; the continuation of
Kyoto Protocol for another five years, hence, securing the long term fundamentals of
green house gas (GHG) emission reduction market.
Whereas the uncertainty on the extension of Kyoto Protocol was causing much concern, a
key factor which led to a fall in the prices of carbon credits was the Euro zone crisis that
continues to bog the business of environment. A positive and constructive out come at the
Durban climate summit, an announcement in regard to extension of the Kyoto
Protocol from 2013 to 2017 has, however put to rest speculation surrounding the
future of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects. Environmental experts
are of the opinion that prices of carbon credits could rise to the Euro 8-10 range in
9-12 months. By 2013, these may even more appreciate to Euro 12-15 per unit. [4]
However, there is no immediate reaction of the Durban out come on carbon credit prices
that continue to rule low.
Carbon credits that are also known as Certified Emission Reductions (CER), are offsets
of international emission trading scheme implemented to mitigate global warming.
ACER is a type of emission reduction unit issued by the CDM under the Kyoto Protocol
to projects which mitigate GHG emissions. One CER is issued per tone of carbon dioxide
(CO₂) mitigated by a project. At present, there is no uncertainty in regard to Kyoto
Protocol’s continuation. The nations are investing into technologies that would help the
projects reduce GHG emissions.
**DURBAN AND GLOBAL WARMING:**
Durban summit was the globe last chance to make world green house gas (GHG)
emissions peak by 2020, and breathe new life into the globe sole legally binding climate
agreement popularly known as Kyoto Protocol beyond 2012, when its first phase would
end. It is an undisputed fact that unless developed nations of the North continent
reduce their 1990 level emissions by 40 to 45 per cent by 2020, and emissions start
falling rapidly after that, irreversible, catastrophic climate change would become
certain. Unfortunately, Durban Summit had decided to defer any significant and
strategic global warming action or strategy till after 2020 then it would be too late.

Major Issues Decided:
United Nations climate change negotiations at Durban agreed a package of measures that are forcing global polluters to take legally binding action to slow the pace of world warming. The measures are as under:

a) After the collapse of Copenhagen negotiations during 2009 to come up with a new; internationally binding deal, and only incremental progress a year later in Cancun, a partial legal vacuum had loomed as drafting a new U.N. treaty is extremely time-consuming. **Durban deal extended Kyoto Protocol, whose first phase on emissions cuts run from 2008 to the end of 2012. The second commitment period would run from January 1, 2012 till the end of December 2017.**

b) Negotiators agreed to start deliberations for a new legally binding treaty which would be decided by 2015 and to be enforced by 2020. The process for doing this, called the **Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (DPEA)** will develop a new protocol, another legal instrument or agreed outcome with legal force which would be applicable to all countries to the U.N. climate convention under a working group.

c) At the request of the European Union (EU) and Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the negotiators agreed upon to initiate a work plan to explore and identify options for **closing the “ambition gap” between nations’ present emissions reduction pledges from 2020 and the goal of keeping world warming below 2°C.**

d) The Durban package bring into operation new arrangements for making more transparent the actions taken by both developed and developing economies to tackle their emissions. This is the most vital and strategic step for building the missing trust between parties.

e) The Durban Summit also made a progress by agreeing the design and structure of **Green Climate Fund (GCF)** to channel up to US $ 100 billion a year by 2020 to poorer economies, but achieved little on establishing where the money would come from to meet the targets of US $ 100 billion.

f) The negotiators had also agreed upon to define new market mechanism under a successor treaty to the Kyoto Protocol, but pushed forward a decision to bring up rules for them in 2012. **Nations would work for a new mechanism over the next 12 months with a view to making recommendations at a summit in Qatar at the end of 2012.**

It is evident from the above, that the global economies set their sights on anew all-encompassing pact on global warming that is marked a break with the past and would also be grueling to attain. For the first time, the Durban package has brought all greenhouse gas users into a common legal regime under the United Nations umbrella in the aim of cranking the carbon combat into higher gear. Under Durban Summit, the deal is to be finalized in 2012 to have same standards for developed and developing countries. Voraciously burning coal to power its economic growth, China has come up as the global No. 1 greenhouse gas emitter. **The other countries who are at the top of this are India, Brazil and Indonesia.** As a result, carbon emissions are now setting the globe on course for possibility 4 degrees Celsius, 2°C goal enshrined by UNFCCC parties. Developed nations that were leading emitters back in 1997-when the Kyoto Protocol was signed as a framework accord- are now the minority emitters. This is what makes the Durban Summit deal special.
The broad agreement reached at the marathon negotiations under the UNFCCC takes a hammer to the north-versus-south paradigm. If goes well, a new accord would wrap up in 2015 and take effect in 2020, placing developed and developing nations under common legal constraints. That is the goal, but reaching it would be arduous.

**Another Perception on Durban Summit:**
Worse, the roadmap agreed upon four years ago at Bali, which erected a firewall between the North’s obligations and the South’s voluntary measures, would be abandoned next year. The Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action, constituted at Bali to strengthen the convention’s implementation, would be terminated. A new process would begin, considerable dilution of the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) principle, that maintains that while all nations share a duty to protect climate, their respective obligations are unequal; the North must do more than the South because it is responsible for nearly three-fourths of all GHGs accumulated in the atmosphere.[6]

Durban Summit is being considered as a disaster for world’s climate protection. This is because another addition of four –degree warming would cause devastation, and threaten the very survival of a majority of the global population, including poor and vulnerable people of least developed nations. Under the major out come, the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action; nations would negotiate by 2015, a protocol, another legal instrument or another agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all nations. This may result into a shift climate responsibility from the North to the South. Hence, Durban Summit has sealed climate apartheid, under which developed polluters or rich polluters evade the responsibilities, but under privileged countries and people would face the worst effects of global warming for which they are least responsible.

The real truth is that the developed or rich economies, led by the European Union (EU), and has got success in cornering the BASICS namely-Brazil, South Africa, India; and China an emerging economic group which came into being in 2009. [7]

The most depressing thing that has been the out come of the Durban Summit is that there is a shift in goalposts and the same is because of the increasing internal climate pessimism amidst a massive economic and debt crisis. The developing nations further split, with the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the least developed nations (LDCs). The most astonishing thing is that some of these countries had shown reservation and did not endorse BASIC’s insistence on the “right to develop”.

There has been a divergence of opinion between BASIC groups. Brazil and South Africa were willing to accept binding commitments, but India and China were against it. South Africa, the host of the conference had shown a keen interest and accordingly sided with European led block. On the other side of it, China expressed a flexibility by accepting binding commitments with certain riders namely- Kyoto extension that is covering all Northern emitters, higher ambition and immediate activation of the promised US $ 100 billion Green Climate Fund for developing nations. Under the present trends and situation, the above mentioned riders remained unfulfilled and the created fund would remain as an empty shell.

While United Nations and most of the countries hailed the deal took place at Durban as a breakthrough, getting a treaty under which all nations sign up to will be intensely complicated. It is believed that many political agreements put off the difficult actions for
the next regime and that appears to be the reality for the Durban Summit. No one should underestimate the difficulty of arriving at a legal treaty between developed or rich and developing nations, let alone one that for the first time includes, China, India, Europe and US. The Durban Summit provides an anodyne set of words, with much of the detail yet to be agreed and the teeth not really coming for the eight years. The scale of the task was daunting, as G-20 nations would need to cut their carbon intensity by 5 per cent a year to 2050. France’s vas nuclear power program of the decade of 1980s delivered a 4 per cent per year cut for 10 years. Similarly, UK’s ‘dash for gas’ to replace coal based power stations in the decade of 1990s only produced cuts of 3 per cent a year for a decade.[8] Any new Government would come down to targets meaning there by how far each nation would have to cut its emissions. The motivation to enhance ambitions could come from several sources, including people power. By the end of 2015, the world’s young people in particular can be expected to demand greater action as the evidence of future damage becomes clear. [9] There is also an ambition of China for next five years, due in 2015, and demands from investors’ fro stronger, clearer policies as vital and strategic. The United Kingdom would have a simpler motivation. It will be people’s wallets. If energy bills continue to increase as they have, people would eventually start to manage their demand much more efficiently than now. People are left a bit cold by the climate negotiations but energy bills impact them directly. This could also be true in case of other developed and developing economies of the world. A rise of two degree Celsius in temperature above pre-industrial levels is projected at the limit beyond which climate change becomes catastrophic and irreversible. In order to have even a 50:50 chance of staying within the that limit, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) calculates that emissions must peak by 202 at the latest and fall rapidly thereafter, Carbon production must be roughly halved by mid-century compared with 1990. In the coming year of 2014, the IPCC would release its 5th assessment report. The overwhelming majority of climate research indicates the situation is growing more serious, with rising evidence that human activity is harming the climate and a clearer picture of what the consequences, impact and implications would be. This may means Governments could have to raise their targets even further. If life is simple, it might be possible to work out a formula for dividing up the cuts required among nations, according to emissions per head of population, perhaps also taking into account emissions per unit of economic out put. **Conclusion:**

From the foregoing analysis it is evident that climate change has become the most serious issue for all people and countries. Any indifferent attitude to this would result into catastrophic and irreversible damage to human civilization and property. For the last 20 years many summit have been taken place. But real breakthrough has not been attained. Durban Summit has also gone in the same way. There are more promises but reality is that the promises have not been met. There has been divergence of opinion among developed, developing and emerging economies. Unless all nations come together, nothing could be possible and the earth or planet would face more warming.
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