



THE City of Light has garnered its fair share of news space recently, be it because of the terrorist attacks or the upcoming United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Paris will be the site of furious negotiations when the 21st edition of the Conference of Parties kicks off from 30 November. More than 100 Heads of State will be stationed there till 11 December at a time when scientists say the world is facing one of its worst man-made crises with things spiralling towards a "dark future." In this context, a public consultation of civil society organisations in Kolkata was held in the Conference Hall at the Academy of Fine Arts, which was organised by *Sabuj Mancha* (Green Platform) to discuss global climate agendas and their local relevance.

Climate watchers predict that a rise in temperatures by more than two degrees Celsius will be inevitable unless developed countries take significant steps towards reducing green house gas emissions. According to statistics, India is responsible for less than 3 per cent of such emissions whereas industrialised countries like the USA account for around 21 per cent of the same. Yet former President of the USA, George W Bush, had once said, "it is not possible for Americans to change their lifestyle" even as the country refused to sign a treaty, which spelt out binding targets for reigning in emissions. With a view to addressing the issues, Asish Ghosh, the director of the Centre for Environmental Development, stressed on the need for a "common but differentiated responsibility", which meant that "historical emitters" like the USA, UK and a host of other developed countries have a bigger role to play those that were industrialised barely half a century ago.



Even as the world gears up for the Paris conference, which begins tomorrow, climate change watchers in Kolkata sound a warning bell, write shreyosi chakraborty and shraman banerjee

When asked whether nuclear or solar energy was the answer for quenching the energy needs of the future, Purnendu Bose, a professor at the University of Calcutta said, "Right now we should concentrate on solar energy as India receives a seemingly endless share of the sun's rays thanks to its geographical location." He also said, "The infrastructure required to harvest solar energy is much more readily available than that for nuclear energy. Additionally the former also has no safety hazards."

Ghosh highlighted the vulnerability of the Sundarbans, which is the world's largest delta. Ironically, the inhabitants of the area are the last people on Earth who are responsible for the dramatic change in climate. The small group of 54 islands that 4.5 million people call home will bear the

brunt of global climate change even though there's no smoke-belching factory there of note. The catastrophic fall out of Cyclone Aila is a sobering reminder of the havoc that can be wreaked on the fragile living conditions of the area—water levels rose from two to seven metres and all sources of drinking water were salinised. The tidal surge had killed 97 people and caused over 8,000 to go missing. According to sources, more than one million people were affected, directly or indirectly, by the cyclone. With 60,000 environmental migrants still fighting for survival, their fate hangs in the balance.

Well, the damage has been done, it seems. Ghosh said, "Islands have gone below the sea level and there's been an increase in the rate of coastal migrations but has any measure been taken

for mitigating the situation?" He stressed on the need to focus on the issue of climate-induced human migration and urged that the Paris meet should at least provide support for such environmental refugees across the world. Ghosh also focused on a five-year-long project undertaken jointly by the UK, India, Bangladesh and Ghana on the deltas in their countries, which has highlighted the need for international financial support to address the issues of adaptation and migration.

Sugata Hazra, director, school of oceanography at Jadavpur University, talked on coastal migration and questioned the ruling dispensation on the lack of any state-aided skill development programmes, which would have led to jobs for such migrants. He also made one aware that ground water



levels are decreasing and leading to contamination. The climactic revolution has actually changed. With ocean temperatures rising more from 1970, the onset of monsoon is erratic and often delayed by 15-20 days. And in a country that depends on rainfall for agriculture, that's dire news.

Ghosh said that although various adaptation and mitigation programmes were announced earlier, both under the national and state-level Climate Action Plan, hardly a couple have been implemented. Energy efficient systems, ultra mega solar power projects and solar parks are going to be set up as part of India's Intended National Contribution to achieve a 35 per cent cut in carbon emissions by 2030. The significance of the Paris conference cannot be stressed enough as the world looks towards its leaders to take a stand. Things have reached a head and if steps are not taken fast, then the planet may be facing a point of no return.

the writers are students of the statesman print journalism school