

Food for Thought

WITH HALF THE COUNTRY BEING declared drought-hit, India is going to face severe food crisis in the coming days. It was food that brought in PL-480 and American influence in internal politics as well. Drought is a natural phenomenon but it is intricately related to climate change. The way they are destroying ecological balance in the name of reckless industrialisation and development has created a situation in which the adverse impact of climate change seems irreversible. Drought means soaring prices of essential food items and anyway prices are soaring defying all government palliatives.

Nowhere in the world are as many people affected by climate change as in South Asia. Unless proactive measures are taken immediately, the risks to livelihoods, health and welfare of the people will be tremendous.

Climate change means drought and floods as well. Urban populations in river delta cities such as Kolkata (India), Yangon (Myanmar) and Hai Phong (Vietnam) are already experiencing a high risk of flooding as a result of global warming, and they will be joined by port cities in the region in the coming years, according to a UN Habitat report.

In Bangladesh, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that climate change is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of cyclones in the area, as well as alter the depth and spatial extent of flooding in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basins.

Drylands of the Himalayas, Central and West Asia and southern India are likely to experience changes in rainfall raising concerns about agricultural production and food security, according to the ADB (Asian Development Bank). Globally, climatic changes are expected to cause major disruptions in the food system, putting millions at risk of starvation and others becoming climate refugees, forced to abandon their lands and search for food elsewhere in the coming decades.

The low-lying islands of the Pacific, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean are also highly vulnerable to storms, storm surge, floods, and sea-level rise, and their capacity to respond is often hampered by their isolation and weak infrastructure.

Water scarcity is predicted to increase as a result of climate change in regions already subject to periodic drought. And it is nowhere so bone-chilling as in central and south India.

Climate change will cause more intense typhoons, droughts, heat waves, landslides, and natural hazards in a region which already suffers from more natural disasters than any other in the world. For the last decade, Bangladesh, India, the Philippines, and Vietnam have topped the list of countries facing serious climate risks, and cumulative losses as a result of natural phenomena have averaged nearly US\$20 billion over the same period. Future warming will also cause increasing sea-level rise, warmer ocean temperatures, and rising ocean water acidity, leading to greater coastal erosion and threatening the health of marine ecosystems—a major source of nutrition and livelihood in Asia and the Pacific.

The ruling marxists of Bengal commemorated the 50th anniversary of the historic food movement of 1959 on August 31. This time they are on the otherside of the table and people have no option but to launch a food movement against their anti-people policies that may create a near-famine situation not in the distant future.

Meanwhile, receding glaciers in the Himalayas could lead to less water in the country's drought prone parts. The Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change said South Asia might experience a 30 percent drop in agricultural production by 2050, and the slide is already evident. Unless there is a country-wide sustained food movement things are likely to change for the worse. □□□