Dr. Pachauri, in the current economic climate, people are very worried about their pocket-books. Do you think there could be a lack of political will to push through environment friendly measures in the short to medium term?

It's just a matter of time. As soon as things settle down a little, I'm sure the leadership all over the world is going to look at some of the fundamental flaws in the way we have been developing and growing. And lets face it: climate change is not going to go away. There is a great sense of urgency, and a greater awareness of what we have done to our planet. As your editor (Mr. Mahfuz Anam) rightly pointed out in his speech, every crisis is an opportunity. I think people are going to start looking more closely at the opportunities that this crisis is throwing up.

The Kyoto Protocol was not really successful in bringing down carbon emission because the developed nations didn't do their part, and the US in particular pulled out of it. Do you think that the new US administration will be more committed to reversing the effects of climate change?

I think so. The Kyoto Protocol is too late now. But there is a new one we are working on that will hopefully be finalised by the end of next year, and I believe the US will be an important part of it. The candidates for president have spoken about the need for renewable energy, and Mr. Obama in particular has set an ambitious target to reduce the dependence on fossil fuel. So, yes, I am hopeful.

Do you think its right to set the same kind of carbon emission limits for developed and developing nations alike?

Absolutely not. Look, the environmental problems we are facing are the result of cumulative emissions, as a result of which certain countries are enjoying a level of prosperity. How can you expect a country like Bangladesh, where a large number of people don't have electricity even, to forego those opportunities? We are not living on two different planets. People have to realise that the world must not be permanently divided between the haves and the have-nots. Of course, the developing nations shouldn't make the same mistakes the developed nations made, but this idea that the developing countries should forego economic opportunity is not only inequitable, it is also unethical.

So what should be the policy of developing countries?

Developing countries will do what they can, but it was clearly understood and laid down in the Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992 that the developed countries will take the first steps; frankly there has not been the kind of progress we would have liked. And that's really tragic.

> "The Nobel Peace Prize focused the attention of the world on the consequences of climate change. People saw that it was not just a scientific thing, but a threat to world peace and stability."

In your speech, you mentioned the practice of diverting crops for other purposes? What is your stance on biofuels?

Well, there are good biofuels and bad biofuels. Turning corn into ethanol is clearly a bad choice. But there are several generation biofuels grown on degraded land which even cattle wont eat. So that is clearly the way forward.

In your speech, you painted a grim picture of what lies in store for us. Are we really heading for disaster?

Look, we have a small window of opportunity only about seven years if we are to keep the rise of temperatures down to an average of 2 Celsius. Anything above that will bring serious consequences. I was recently with the leader of Kiribati, and his people have had to face the stark reality that by the end of this century their nation may have to vacate the island! Thankfully, people are beginning to see how serious the problem is. Forewarned is forearmed.

Do you think the Nobel Peace Prize really brought home the gravity of the situation to common people?

The Nobel Peace Prize was essentially taking into account the link between unmitigated climate change and the consequent threat to peace and security. And you are right; it focused the attention of the world on the consequences of climate change. People saw that it was not just a scientific thing, but a threat to world peace and stability.

So, the fight against climate change you are cautiously hopeful?

Oh, very much so. The kind of awareness that you have in the world today is unprecedented. Hopefully we can move forward really quickly to save our environment. There is simply no alternative. ■