Leaders deliberate on saving the earth

Talk about good governance, ensuring energy, water and food security

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NEW DELHI: Years from now, Quebec's Minister of International Relations Jean-Francois Lisee would like to tell his children: "We did everything we could. We tried to lead by example and if anyone should be blamed it should be someone else."

Speaking at the 12th Delhi Sustainable Development Summit on Thursday, Mr. Lisee was referring to the efforts made by the province of Quebec to hold on to its status of a ‘green province’—which has so far checked the emission standards of cars, launched a carbon trading system and in future hopes to electrify its transport system.

Quebec is a positive example in the North American region that is largely perceived to be lacking in political will concerning issues surrounding climate change and has instead exhibited an aggressive strategy to reduce emissions even more than the targets set by the Kyoto protocol. The province is also an example of what Quebec's former Premier Jean Charest said: “Increasing importance of local, regional and sub-national governments in driving action on climate change mitigation and adaptation,” as expressed in a later session.

Thursday's summit saw ministers from Maldives, Norway, Quebec and the United Arab Emirates come together to discuss the importance of good governance and ensure the availability of energy, water and food security. The theme of the session prompted UAE Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber to ask: "What are we seriously doing which is action oriented?" He pointed to the close relationship between the three elements without access to which poverty and conflict will continue to be prevalent.

Along the theme of good governance, Norway's Deputy Minister for International Development Arvin Kjelstad Gaddi also said it was also important to have fairness and "look at how the world is developing today, I am part of the growing middle-class and those who tend to nature are far away from me," he said, stressing that there was a disconnect between theory and practice when it comes to implementing environmental policies. He highlighted Norway's "tax for development model" as a policy for distribution.

With "Western interests" dominating discussions on climate change, as expressed by former Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Lord John Prescott, the inputs from Maldives' Minister of Environment and Energy Dr. Mariyam Shakeela put things in perspective. "It is wrong to assume that climate change does not affect a country because of its geographical location or its economic status," she said, adding that the actions of larger and more industrialised countries affect the living conditions of a country such as Maldives. Emphasising on strong leadership and political commitment, she said: "We are all in the same sinking boat together."

The 12th Delhi Sustainable Development Summit is organised by The Energy and Resources Institute. The Hindu is the media partner.