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## Summit Attempt

As the Copenhagen Summit gets underway, Lekha Menon and Geeta Desai get citizens to voice their hopes and fears

Lekha Menon and Geeta Desai ★★★★★

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Over 192 countries are at the negotiating table at Copenhagen, Denmark, to discuss climate change and the challenges therein.

Even before it took off on Monday, the meet has been marred by controversies, arguments and counter-arguments.

The idea is to seek a successor to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol but there is little agreement among world leaders over greenhouse gas emissions and carbon reduction.

Nations like **India** and China feel developed nations must take a lead in cutting carbon emissions, while the later believe the onus is squarely on the developing world.



Nevertheless with heads of state, journalists, activists, climate change experts and protestors attending the meet, Copenhagen is the hottest topic of debate this week.

Will the summit achieve what it seeks to? Or will it be just conference where the real issues get submerged amidst reams of documentation and legalities? Concerned citizens have their say.

### C Gangadharan Menon

Creative director, Octane Communications and Wildlife enthusiast



Do we really want to save the environment? Then make a pledge to consume less. The more you consume, the more harmful it is. Think twice before you consume something - do you really need to lug 10 bottles of mineral water if the place you are travelling to has potable water? Do you need to carry all that plastic? There is no point in making the right noises if you can't take simple steps.

Else, all the posturing will be meaningless - like the Copenhagen summit. Frankly, I have no hope from it. Sure, they are all saying the right things. But no developed country wants to give up what they have; they want the developing nations to cut down pollution. And developing nations are wary because it will affect their economy. It's a vicious roller coaster, which at the most, can only delay the death of the planet.

### Ramu Ramanathan

Theatre personality



Initiatives to safeguard the environment are welcome. But the problem is we are all part of a big lie since we don't have access to proper information. Governments, corporates, NGOs... all of whom, ultimately, defend their own turf.

**India** boasts of people's movements like Chipko and the Silent valley movement. Today, it is well nigh impossible for such initiatives.

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movement. Today, it is not high impossible for each individual

The issue is also about conflicts within our own country. One day, our environment minister makes a lengthy speech in Parliament. The next day, key negotiators walk out.

The same minister holds a fist of soil at Union Carbide and makes a distasteful comment about the tragedy in which no one has been prosecuted. It's easy to say that common citizens can make a difference but being Gandhian requires sacrifice and vigilance.

Else, we live out a scathing farce which I saw on the stage in which "air" becomes a marketable commodity. And every international company is having a grand mega sale for oxygen.

**Ishita Khanna**

Co-founder, Eco-sphere



Any step forward will always have a lot of hurdles; it's upto us to put aside differences and come up with solutions. I am positive the Copenhagen summit will come up with concrete resolutions. Having said that, conferences and summits throw up a lot of talking points and discussions, but all of it needs to be put into action too.

Often it is made to seem as if climate change, gas house emissions etc are beyond the control of the individual and that it's the government's problem.

But all these issues affect us and our lifestyle changes can make an impact. Over the last few years, I have seen awareness increasing.

At least people are talking about carbon reduction, carbon foot prints etc when even a few years back, these terms were Greek to most of us. But to ensure that they don't just remain high-sounding jargons, they need to be made the common man/woman's problems too.

**Nandita Shah**

Founder, Sharan (Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature)



I hope that the summit will make the connection between our health, that of the environment, nature and other living beings. I fear that the biggest cause of global warming, livestock, won't be addressed.

The 2006 UN-FAO report titled 'Livestock's Long Shadows' estimated that the livestock sector emits at least 18% of the world's green-house gases, 38% more than all vehicles, combined.

And that it is the biggest driver of deforestation - 70% of the deforested land in Amazon is used as cattle pastures, or to grow crops for animal feed.

Animal protein consumption has been linked to several diseases. Recently, World Watch has estimated that the livestock sector emits 51% of world's GHGs. It's time all these facts are taken into account.

Even if the summit results in naught, if the truth were reported widely enough everyone could participate in reducing global warming with every meal!

**Issac Kehimkar**

Director of programmes, BNHS



A lot of international politics is involved in the summit, especially with so much difference of opinion among nations. But on the flip side, thanks to the summit, at least environment is in focus. Of course, things are always not as simple as they seem, but there is no choice but to move forward.

For instance, companies have to do non-tariff compilations, which is welcome; they will hopefully be forced to go green. The question that needs to be asked is what are we, as individuals, doing for the environment? Take a look at the malls and the way they package products.

The consumer should take the lead in this regard and use as less number of bags as possible. Of late, there is a lot of awareness among people, but simple lifestyle steps like conserving water, electricity and fuel will itself go a long way.



The summit presents a great opportunity. While Kyoto was not enough, the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit should be made into an action plan which can be effectively implemented.

Even though the awareness about the high level of pollution exists, we are not attempting to reduce pollution. Unless there is a change in the attitude of people, nothing will change.

This is because we always try to justify ourselves in each situation which ultimately will only escalate the problems. From Copenhagen meet we must bring back with us the corrective steps which can be followed slowly but effectively.

**Farida Lambey**  
Founder, trustee of Pratham



Firstly without succumbing to pressures, we must look at the capacity of the burden we can take. Attending summits is of no use if there is no dissemination of crucial information in the right perspective. The inputs we receive from the summit should reach the larger population.

We have to take such information to the training sessions of social workers, teachers, social educators and make them as simplified and practical as possible.

As a first step, why not protect forest lands and greenery, harvest rainwater and use solar energy? Even the cleanliness around our own house, area, vicinity will help us go a long way.

**Dr. Sandip Rane**  
Interventional Cardiologist



Collective wisdom is always better. It is only when more and more nations take the initiative in bringing about a change that one can envisage a ray of hope.

However there is always a great gap between what is discussed within the precincts of the four walls and ground realities. Bridging this gap is what is going to make the difference.

Meanwhile we can take simple steps like improving the quality of air we breathe by improving the garbage disposal system. Even better roads will lead to better transportation and reducing the unnecessary emissions of fumes.

**Abha Narain Lambah**  
Heritage Conservationist



No country can claim that depleting ozone layer is not going to affect them. We need to do is put behind national boundaries and develop a common strategy.

On our part, we should encourage recycling buildings by conserving old ones. Building new towers, burning bricks, cement, reinforced concrete and the transportation involved itself causes pollution.

Instead if we conserve existing buildings, it will help the environment.

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