

Is India doing enough to combat climate change?

PARLEY

The challenges in tackling a problem that requires a global collective effort

In the run-up to the UN Climate Action Summit in New York in September, in a discussion moderated by G. Ananthkrishnan, T. Jayaraman and Navroz Dubash talk about the fairness of the global climate regime, and what India could do to green its growth. Edited excerpts:

How serious is climate change as an issue today?

T. Jayaraman: Climate change is certainly the most serious global environmental crisis that we face. It is not the only environmental problem, but it is unique in its multi-scalar characteristic, from the global to the local. And in many ways, it is arguably the most immediate. But there is also a substantial section of the world that does not see it in the same terms. That is perhaps one of the most serious aspects of dealing with this problem.

Navroz Dubash: I think climate change has been with us for 25 years at least. At one level, for many people climate change has become an existential problem that risks undermining the conditions for productive life and therefore a problem that does not override but certainly permeates all kinds of other issues. For many others, it is a distant problem that is overwhelmed by more immediate issues. But this ignores the linkage between current issues and climate change. We don't have the option in India of thinking about anything that is innocent of climate change any more.

Global warming has touched about 1°C above pre-industrial levels. India is not responsible for the stock of CO2 in the atmosphere, but can it afford to wait for developed countries to make their move or should it aggressively pursue its own measures?

TJ: I don't think there is an either/or about this. We must recognise climate change as a global collective action problem. If one country cuts its emissions to the bone, that is going to be of little use if the others do not follow suit. That country will suffer the consequences of climate

change despite the extent of its sacrifice. Equally, waiting for others to do something and not doing something oneself is also not an option, especially in terms of adaptation.

If India does more mitigation, that doesn't reduce the risk in India. It is not a local exchange. We have to have good intent, show it in action, but on the other hand, we must do far more than we are doing today to call the developed countries to account. They are nowhere near meeting their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) targets. And some countries we don't even have on board, like the U.S. We need to move climate change to the top of our foreign policy agenda. This is a critical move we need to make.

ND: I agree that the performance of the developed world has been very poor compared to their capacities, wealth and promises.

The extent to which we have to turn around globally is dramatic. Rapidly emerging countries are part of the story, but that does not mean countries that have already emitted a lot and have built their infrastructure shouldn't actually be creating space for countries like India. So where does that leave India? It is a bit of a dilemma. We are also one of the most vulnerable countries.

I view it in the following way. One, there are a number of things that India could do that will bring development gains and also lead to mitigation benefits. For example, how we design our cities: we want more sustainable cities, cities with less congestion and with more public transport because we want cities that are more liveable. Those kinds of cities will also be low carbon cities. Two, more mitigation in India does not mean India gets to keep those benefits. Because at the end of the day, we are only 6% or 7% of global emissions. But what we are recognising is that the global carbon system is an interlocked system. So, what we have to think about is the global transition to low carbon systems and there are spillover effects there, from changes in one economy to changes in another economy, changes in politics in one place to changes in politics in another place.

TJ: The very form of your question is problematic. You can do whatever you want with your NDC. It doesn't matter. The question is, as a developing country, in the matrix of all other NDCs, where does India fit and what are other NDCs like? In the scheme of things as they are, what are we doing? I think within that we are doing pretty well. I think the problem for India is hedging its future, not simply what we consume now or what we expect to gain in immediate terms. What is it that we want as our long-term future and how much of it in terms of carbon space do we need to hedge? But I repeat, with our NDC, though our performance is good, we cannot respond with more commitments in our NDC until we see serious action at the international level.

ND: The Paris Agreement basically said, every country, please tell us what you can feasibly do within your country. It was always therefore going to be a relatively low set of pledges, and in that context India's doesn't push the envelope very



In its Paris Agreement commitments, India had pledged to reduce its intensity of GDP emissions by 33-35% over 2005 levels by 2030, and at Copenhagen, by 20-25% by 2020. Are we in sync with what is needed from us? With the goal of keeping temperature rise to 2°C or below 2°C or 1.5°C, how does India's NDC fit in?

TJ: The very form of your question is problematic. You can do whatever you want with your NDC. It doesn't matter. The question is, as a developing country, in the matrix of all other NDCs, where does India fit and what are other NDCs like? In the scheme of things as they are, what are we doing? I think within that we are doing pretty well. I think the problem for India is hedging its future, not simply what we consume now or what we expect to gain in immediate terms. What is it that we want as our long-term future and how much of it in terms of carbon space do we need to hedge? But I repeat, with our NDC, though our performance is good, we cannot respond with more commitments in our NDC until we see serious action at the international level.

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far, doesn't do minimal stuff. So, how do we know whether the pledge is ambitious or not? There's no good way to know.

The idea of the Paris Agreement is to get countries moving towards a low carbon economy, with the idea that each country will see that it is not too costly and not so hard and there are developmental benefits.

The pledges in an ideal world are setting the floor not the ceiling – countries will fulfil and hopefully exceed those pledges. And in India's case, we will probably exceed the pledges, because for reasons like urban congestion and air pollution, we will want to move in the direction of low carbon anyway, quite apart from climate change.

Now, in terms of what the politics of it are, we can try and arm-twist the rich countries. They have definitely been recalcitrant, they have dropped their responsibilities. But at the end of the day, India is a deeply vulnerable country. What we have learned in the last 20 years is that countries don't move further because of international pressure. Certainly not the rich and industrial countries. They move further because they found ways, in their enlightened self-interest, to do so.

If you look at the manifestos of the two national parties, climate change ekes in a small mention at the end, but it is really not thought through. In my informal conversa-

tions, they are still stuck in the language of saying we still need to have a lot more fossil fuels for more growth, when that is an open question in an era when the price of solar power is coming down and the price of storage is coming down. It is not a settled debate by any means, but we need to engage in that debate much more vigorously.

TJ: With regard to NDCs, I think we are risking a great deal if we take the current numbers in India in terms of consumption, energy as the benchmark for what we need. India still has huge development deficits. Unfortunately, the intersection between erasing development deficits and genuine adaptation has been poorly explored. So, every time there is a drought, some go around chanting 'climate change' when indeed it is regular climate variability. And we have always left our farmers at the mercy of the drought.

So, I think in adaptation, our focus should be understanding what our development deficits are. At the same time, a whole new diversionary argument is emerging. There is this recent paper from the U.S. that has appeared saying that India lost 31% of its potential GDP growth due to global warming between the 1960s and 2011. I don't buy that. Without accounting most importantly for institutions, if you simply examine temperature and GDP, you will get all kinds of correlations.

What we really need to invest in is our conceptual agenda. Take electric vehicle mobility. Everybody says electric mobility is a good thing, and cheaper than conventional transport, by factoring in the cost of fossil fuels in terms of health, etc., using the Disability-Adjusted Life Years concept. But what that does is to make the users of public transport pay for the well-being of all the people still driving cars. So, arguing that electric mobility is cheaper really does not fly. Electric mobility is actually more expensive, in immediate terms, in terms of cost per vehicle kilometre.

ND: I agree that the entry point for this conversation should be the development deficits. For example, to say that we need to find a way for cleaner transportation shouldn't actually lead to a conclusion that it should lead to more electric vehicles – the first priority has to be im-

proved, more accessible public transport.

What could be the feasible climate diplomacy or politics for India under the UN framework or outside?

ND: The climate game has now firmly moved to a series of multiple national conversations. The Paris Agreement process is an iterative process where countries put something on the table, they try to implement it, they see if they could do it more easily than they thought, and they come back to the global level. It is a two-level game but the driving force is at the national level. Countries are not going to be arm-twisted by international pressure. We can try, but what will drive them is enlightened self-interest. Where the global role is going to be important is in technological cooperation, in spill-over effects. One of the big success stories is the fall in renewable energy prices, driven by Germany's domestic programme that supported global prices for renewables.

India has to play a role diplomatically, but our diplomatic game has to construct a development model that takes into account all our needs, including climate change, and keeps the pressure on the West on issues like finance and technology.

TJ: All that we do domestically should be framed in the context of development deficits. Within that context, whatever we can explore or do, we should. For instance, how do we ensure that we double the productivity of our main food crops? If we do something that is concrete, we will see the nexus between agricultural productivity and climate and climate variability, and learn something for the future.

My great disappointment is with the Indian private sector. They are willing to donate, willing to tell farmers how to be sustainable, invest in such kinds of activities outside their firms. But making their own firms models of sustainability, sustainability within the plant boundary, drivers of innovation, they still have to measure up. I think part of the reason for our not-so-coherent engagement with the international process is perhaps that we are not defining our own local priorities as clearly as we could and should have.



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SINGLE FILE

Priyanka's U-turn in U.P.

Keeping her out of the Varanasi contest has sent the message that the only challenger to the BJP is the gathbandhan

SANJAY KUMAR



There is no doubt that by declaring that Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will not be contesting against Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency, the Congress has lost this round of public perception to the BJP. There is hardly any doubt that this has demoralised the party's local leaders, workers, and supporters. While this decision of the Congress might be viewed as the party fleeing from a "serious" race in Uttar Pradesh, it has nevertheless made the BJP's task slightly more difficult in the State now. Keeping Ms. Gandhi out of the contest has sent a silent message – that the only challenger to the BJP in U.P. is the gathbandhan (SP-BSP alliance), not the Congress. This might help consolidate the anti-BJP votes behind the gathbandhan candidates.

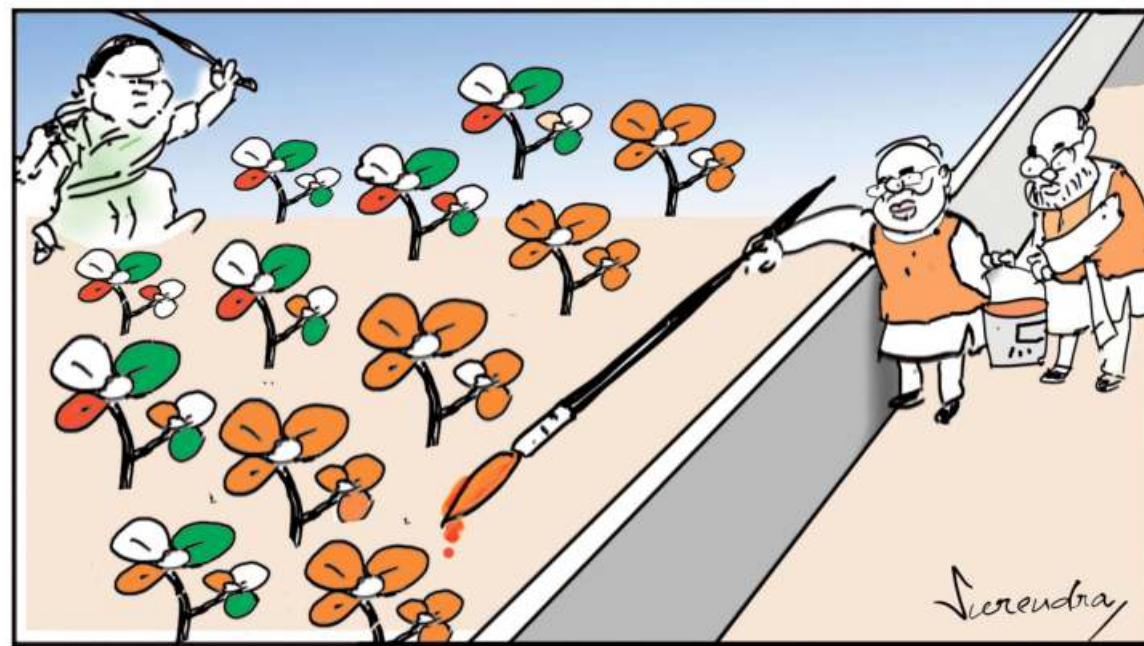
After it failed to form an alliance with the SP and the BSP, the Congress's decision to contest elections alone raised speculation on how much it could damage the electoral prospects of the BJP by cutting into its upper caste – mainly Brahmin – support base. There was also speculation on what impact it might have on the prospects of the SP-BSP alliance, especially if there is a shift amongst the Muslim voters towards the Congress.

In many constituencies, Muslims would like to vote for candidates who are best placed to defeat the BJP, but the complexities of making this strategy succeed are sure to result in the split of the Muslim votes between the Congress candidates and gathbandhan candidates. Studies conducted when the campaign had just begun indicated a significant possibility of a split in the Muslim vote, while they also indicated the Congress' inability to make inroads into the Brahmin vote. The Congress's announcement has given a clear signal to the Muslim voters: the real contest in U.P. is between the BJP and the gathbandhan. This will help consolidate the Muslim vote in favour of the gathbandhan.

Half of U.P. has already voted, but there are still numerous constituencies that head to the polls in the remaining phases, where Muslim votes matter. In constituencies such as Amethi, Lucknow, Barabanki, Faizabad, Sitapur, Bahraich, Kaiserganj, Shravasti, Gonda, Domariaganj, Sant Kabir Nagar, Maharaganj, Kushinagar, Varanasi and Ghosi, Muslims constitute more than 20% of the total voters. Their consolidation behind the gathbandhan candidate could pose considerable challenges to the BJP.

Further, there was no way Ms. Vadra could have defeated Mr. Modi in Varanasi, even if her candidature against him might have enthused the Congress workers. Nevertheless there are enough signals that the weeks of suspense and hype around her candidature may have anyway helped generate an atmosphere favouring the Congress in the constituencies going to polls in the coming phases.

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NOTEBOOK

Reconnecting with a messenger's messenger in Bihar

Pushpraj has many causes to fight for but few platforms to articulate them

VARGHESE K. GEORGE

In the nearly 16 years since I met him last, nothing much has changed about Pushpraj. His beard is now salt and pepper and his *jhola* has now been replaced with a backpack. He now has a motorbike to move around, a sign of some marginal material improvement. Pushpraj lives between Begusarai and Patna in Bihar, and travels all around the country to any place where he finds a sub-altern political cause to fight for.

I first met him in 2003 when I was the only reporter for Bihar for a national newspaper, and he, a man for all seasons. He introduced me to some intricacies of Bihar's rural politics, and became a companion in many of my travels around the State during my two-year stint there then. If journalists are messengers, Pushpraj is a messenger's messenger.

He would land up at my office quite often with some lead to a story. Though not a full-time journalist, he has been a writer-activist, getting a national perspective on all issues while sitting in a village in Begusarai.

When I dialled his old number, Pushpraj was predictably campaigning for Kanhaiya Kumar, former JNU Students Union president and CPI candidate for Begusarai. Pushpraj does not have a surname – his grandfather, a freedom fighter who burned his sacred thread and gave up his caste surname, bequeathed that legacy to the grandson. Pushpraj's revolutionary quest has taken him to Narmada Valley, Bhatta Parsaul, Nandigram and, in recent times, the JNU student agitation and the protests triggered by PhD student Rohit Vemula's death.

Pushpraj says he has no material ambitions, and his

life is witness to that. He has been offered a golden handshake to back off from the several agitations that he has taken part in Bihar. His book, *Nandigram Diary*, was published by Penguin. He has a few acres of ancestral land, which he wishes to sell to fund a Che Guevara centre. "There is no centre for Che in India," he says. That could be a fast route to martyrdom, I warn him, among his land-loving Bhumihar brethren. He is always there to help journalists from all over who land in Bihar any time, but rues the fact that most Hindi publications, which until recent years were keen to publish stories of local struggles, are no longer doing so. Pushpraj is an unsung hero, and I was happy to connect with him after many years.

Patna gave me the best bottom-up perspective on capitalist democracy during the first two years of my career, and my recent stint

for *The Hindu* in Washington, DC for three years gave me the best top-down perspective of it. Hence, returning to Patna after several years was an opportunity to refresh memories that I could process in a more holistic fashion.

It is not only that Pushpraj now has fewer platforms to publish his ground reports; even the building that used to house several outstation newspaper offices in Patna – Ojha's Mansion – now wears a deserted look. Most newspapers have shut down their Patna offices due to the severe business pressure on the media industry. Pushpraj used to be a regular visitor to Ojha's Mansion, recounting stories from the hinterland that he had come across and providing story ideas.

He has not run out of causes to fight for, but the platforms to articulate those causes have sadly shrunk.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 3, 1969

P.M. invites 15 Telangana leaders for talks

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, has invited Mr. A. Madan Mohan, Chairman of the Telangana Praja Samithi, Mr. S. Venkatarama Reddi, Secretary, and 13 others to meet her in New Delhi on May 6 for discussions on the Telangana issue. The invitations were conveyed to them through the Andhra Pradesh Government. The Prime Minister had already completed a round of talks with the Telangana leaders in pursuance of her statement to the Lok Sabha. The 13 others who have been invited to meet the Prime Minister are: Messrs. S.B. Giri, Hind Mazdoor Sabha leader, K. Achuta Reddy, M.L.A. (Congress), Badri Vishal Pitti, M.L.A. (S.S.P.), Purushottam Rao, M.L.A. (Ind.), Ch. Venkateswara Rao, Sreedhar Reddy, Pulla Reddy, Mallikarjuna, Gopal and Wazahat Qadri, student leaders, P. Venkateswara Rao and Raghuvver Rao, journalists and G. Narayan Rao, advocate. Complete hartal was observed today [May 2] in Hyderabad and Secunderabad in response to the call given by the Praja Samithi to protest against the Police firing and "police excesses" in the city yesterday and to mourn the death of those who died in yesterday's Police firing.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 3, 1919.

'Independent' Security Case.

In connection with Rs. 2000 security demanded from the 'Independent', the Hon'ble Pandit Motilal Nehru, who represented Pandit Shamlal Nehru, keeper accompanied by Mr. Syed Hussain, editor, attended the court of the District Magistrate [in Allahabad] and presented a petition praying for the withdrawal of the order. The Hon'ble Pandit argued at length that the Court had no jurisdiction to pass the order. The Magistrate in rejecting the application said: If we turn to the plain meaning of the words of the section there is not the slightest reason for supposing that the words "may from time to time vary any order under section" refer only to the orders calling for security and not the orders dispensing for special reasons with security.

POLL CALL

Lottery

What happens when two candidates in a constituency poll the same number of votes? According to Section 102 of the Representation of the People Act, if there is equality of votes and if one additional vote would entitle either of them to win, and if no decision has been made by the Returning Officer under the provisions of the Act, then the High Court decides by a lot. The candidate who wins the lottery wins the election. In 2017, for instance, in the election to ward number 220 of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, Shiv Sena's Surendra Bagalkar and the BJP's Atul Shah got the same number of votes. The result was decided by lottery, and Mr. Shah won.

MORE ON THE WEB

Denisovans lived in Tibetan Plateau, fossil evidence shows

<http://bit.ly/DenisovansVideo>