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LEADER ARTICLE | Let's Get Going
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Every success is embedded with failure. A sharp decline in crude prices has undoubtedly dampened inflationary pressures. In most countries it has also given more fiscal space for governments to pursue contra-cyclical measures to boost growth. One unwanted consequence is the encouragement of excessive use of fossil fuel and recalcitrance of governments to commit money for research and development on renewable forms of energy. In the United States, hybrid fuel vehicle sales in November shrank 53 per cent compared to a year ago. This is not surprising considering that petrol prices, which had climbed to \$4 a gallon last spring now average at about \$1.6.

This is equally true of India where prices of petrol and diesel are progressively coming down. Will this mean a slackening of effort and commitment on climate change? Market forces are no doubt pulling in the opposite direction. Any let-up in our efforts would have disastrous consequences for the future of the planet. Lower crude and food prices may be transient but the damage to the planet will be permanent and irreversible. Preventing this slide back needs concerted action in several directions.

First and foremost, there is a need for heightened awareness. The message that there is now incontrovertible scientific evidence that global temperatures are rising and that the atmospheric overload of carbon is blocking radiation which affects life as we have led needs wider dissemination. Further, it must be said loud and clear that this change is anthropogenic in nature, rising out of increased human activity which is perhaps 100 times more than what it was at the start of the industrial era. Jeffrey Sachs, in his book *Common Wealth-Economics for a Crowded Planet* attributes this to a vastly increased commandeering of the Earth's physical resources for human consumption. In fact, over 50 per cent of the Earth's photosynthetic potential is now directly appropriated for human use.

Second, parliamentarians and state legislators involved in the awareness campaign must be enlisted and their cooperation secured to craft better laws that seek tighter enforcement and foster greater understanding. In this context the Speaker of the Indian Parliament recently took an important initiative by constituting a Parliamentary Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change. The broad-based membership of the forum cuts across party lines and could create a political compact on many national issues that have an international footprint.

This forum is expected to seek the engagement of experts, national and international bodies, which could enhance the quality of debate in the Parliament and our public sphere. It will interact with similar bodies in the EU, Japan and the United States' Congressional Forum on Global Warming and Climate Change. This would help in better understanding the replacement arrangements for the Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto

Protocol, the only global treaty so far on emission controls, runs out in 2009 and unless governments reach an agreement by the end of this year there is little chance that the treaty can be ratified before 2012 when the present protocol runs out. The recent meeting on climate change in Poznan, Poland, on the broad parameters of the new international agreement unfortunately met with limited success. Sharp differences persisted on concomitant obligations of developed and developing countries on burden sharing, intermediate and final targets on emission reversals.

The parliamentary forum is also expected to engage with experts for a better appreciation of policy design to mitigate damage and adapt in the least disruptive way to the consequences of climate change. Of course, mitigation and adaptation require varied approaches. Mitigation involves consideration of energy policies, the trade-off between fossil fuel and non-conventional energy, avoiding technologies which are energy intensive, fostering urbanisation patterns with lower carbon footprints while designing newer cities, and restructuring the farming and animal husbandry industries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

On the other hand, non-disruptive adaptations entail dealing with rising sea levels and tidal surges, changing farming habits and cropping patterns tolerant to a rise in temperatures, dealing with the consequences of glacial retreat and better management of our river systems. Domestic action in India will necessitate pragmatism and acknowledge that economics of incentive, rather than a reliance on altruism, would be more effective. Engagement of states by the central government to design incentives would be crucial. Studies on black carbon and atmospheric brown clouds have relevance for India as carbon soot is largely produced through use of animal waste, wood and biofuels.

Third, emerging international negotiations mandate innovation and sophistication for which parliamentary engagement would be necessary. While we may not be a major contributor to the "stock of pollution" we are fast becoming a major contributor to the "flow of pollution" given our growth trends. There is a need for differential and differentiated obligations rather than total exemption.

An issue like climate change spans multiple sciences even though decision-making is embedded in the politics of change. The newly constituted parliamentary forum could seek to alter the climate of opinion. Getting parliamentarians to work on climate change serves this important objective of public policy.

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