

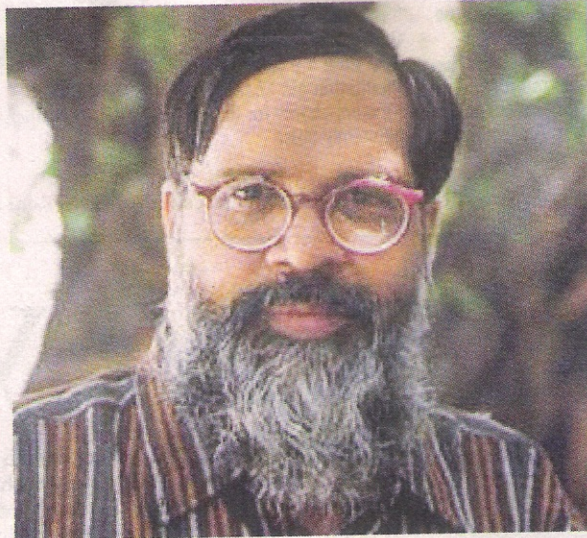
Time running out on global warming

SUCHETA DASGUPTA talks to PRAFUL BIDWAI on his book dealing with the politics of climate change

What's the relevance of this book? And, how is the climate change scenario different today from the early 1990s?

The book is a grim reminder to the existing climate change scenario. Since the early 1990s, globally there has been a 37 per cent increase in carbon dioxide emissions from fuel combustions. In the 1992 Rio summit, the developed countries promised to reduce the emissions, but failed. Between 1990 and 2009, the emerging economies, too, saw the massive increase in emissions. For India, the figure is a whopping 167 per cent; for China it is 197 per cent. Meanwhile, the developed countries have not reduced their emissions. Now we have a situation in which we are only years away from a point of no return.

For the climate to stabilise, global warming must not be allowed to rise to more than two degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels. At present, it is about 0.8 degree above pre-industrial. No wonder, over the last few years, we have been witnessing abnormal natural phenomena. For a two-degree warming target, carbon dioxide emissions need to be at 44 billion tonnes by 2020. The rate at which the emissions are growing it will be about 49-53 billion tonnes. If you don't fill this gap, you're finished.



What are the specific threats of climate change to India as a country?

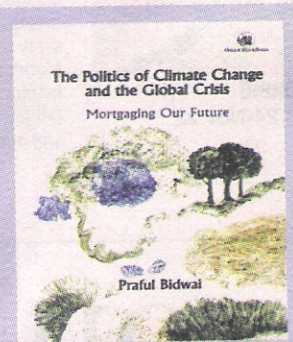
The specific threats to India are many. We have a coastline of 7,500 km which is vulnerable to the already increasing frequency of cyclones, sea storms and rising sea levels. Some of our greatest rivers are dependent on glaciers where melting is rapidly increasing. Hence much of our agriculture in river deltas which is based on irrigation by canals and on rainfall is under threat.

If global warming rises by one per cent, Indian agriculture will lose 10 per cent of its production. Also, there are the health impacts of climate

change. It is changing the balance in nature of different pathogens. For example, mosquitoes have started breeding in Himachal Pradesh; there are unexplained crow deaths in Ranchi and Jamshedpur; one witnesses droughts in the Deccan; and, Kutch gets 30 inches of rainfall. So, India has a huge stake in this for the sake of its 1.2 billion vulnerable people.

What is India's role in combating climate change?

Domestically, what we need to do is limit emissions that arise from the luxury consumption of the rich. Last year, India's emissions grew by 5.5 per cent



THE POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE GLOBAL CRISIS
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through the use of more energy, buying of more cars, dishwashers, air conditioners — consumption of such items has been rising by over 1.5 per cent than the GDP. Essential commodities are dearer, wheat is now three-and-a-half times expensive. On the other hand, cars are now cheaper. The Government should tax them higher, so that fewer people buy them. Do what countries like Singapore do: Allow private vehicles to ply on alternate days, introduce high parking fees, follow the example of Brussels to have car-free days.

What is of vital importance is that the entire National Action Plan on

Climate Change must be revised. It has been prepared in a hurry. Next, encourage manufacturers to adopt technology to promote energy efficiency. Issues on water management have to be worked on seriously. Most of India's rivers have become sterile, poisonous and biologically dead. We must invest in agriculture, make it capable of withstanding long periods of drought, distribute seeds that are sturdy among farmers and move away from Green Revolution practices which involve high level of inputs. Move towards renewable energy in a big way.

Globally, India has to play two very important roles — defend the principle of common but differentiated responsibility and push the developed countries to enter a fair, ambitious and legally-binding climate deal.

What's your take on the recently concluded Durban conference?

Contrary to what has been said in sections of the Indian media, the Durban conference was a major setback to the cause of climate stabilisation. It delays any significant climate action till 2020, when it will be too late. What is done before 2020 will determine whether global warming is contained to two degrees, the maximum the earth can bear.