World Environment Day

Save Energy Enviro Forum

June 5, 2009 • India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Presenting a document on Climate Change to Shri Jairam Ramesh, Hon'ble Minister of State (Independent Charge) Environment & Forests

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"We all have to do this together," he told the Bonn conference....Too much time has been lost in sterile debates ... America itself cannot provide the solution, but there is no solution without America."

He also thought that the development challenge was making sure that developing countries have the opportunity to follow a cleaner path forward. "I like to tell the story that earlier this decade, India had only about 55 million people with phone service, but, rather than insist on following the industrialised countries' path of wired service, India leap-frogged to cell phones, with the result that a few years later 350 million Indians have phones. We need a similar leap-frogging of fossil fuels in the world of energy."

Energy efficient technologies

The problem is that energy-efficient technologies are by no means cost-free, and developed countries, which have caused global warming in the first place, haven't put their money where their collective mouths are, despite repeated promises to this effect. In Bonn,

company, which has entered into an agreement with the Dutch company which designed this LED bulb.

"The engineering and manufacturing of this bulb has been carried out in India, and it is estimated that if all Indians were to replace one incandescent bulb with this bulb, it would save 56 billion kWh of electricity, and 44 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions, which would be equal to planting 140 million trees.

problem is that this LED bulb costs $24 (Rs1200), compared to $0.30 for a 40 Watt incandescent bulb. We will, of course, encourage the aggressive adoption of this technology, but it will be limited unless supported by a global regime for the accelerated adoption of climate-friendly technologies. We believe that a network of

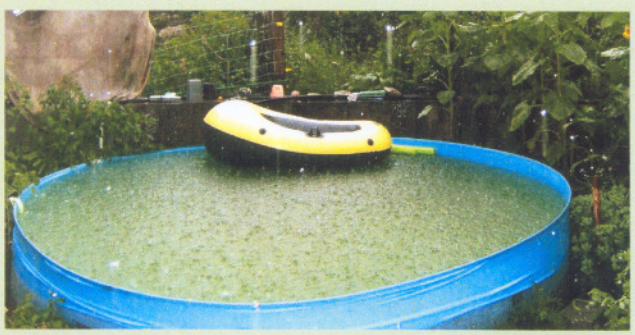
climate innovation centres would be an effective way to achieve this goal."

Dr Mathur told that while the capital cost of the Pharox bulb was high, it had a five-year warranty. It had a life of 50,000 hours, as against a life of only a fifth of this for a CFL. Even CFL bulbs had cost Rs.1000 when they were first introduced. The glass bulb has been manufactured in Firozabad, which is a traditional glass industry centre. Such technology could earn carbon credits because of its low consumption of energy.

India's innovation centres were required for developing such products and also marketing them – virtually creating markets in some instances. The Electricity Act didn't permit private operators to generate power but there was a huge opportunity for decentralised energy systems to provide electricity and cooking fuel to some 700 million Indians who had to make do without these two basic necessities. For cooking fuel, biomass, which is widely available in rural areas, would be energy-efficient and received a 60 per cent subsidy

Rain water harvesting

At the house-warming ceremony in his new home, Dr Sreepathi presented all the guests with a specially written booklet about roof water harvesting. He had decided, during construction, that he would harvest the rain falling on his roof, choosing this option first, and digging an open well only later. And having made his choice, he decided he would teach others about it too. The 'new type house' attracts many visitors. Every week 2-3 people come to have a look at it. "Though there are water shortages, very few people get convinced about rainwater harvesting. One major mental block is about the potability of stored rain water. The impression is that the tap water is best."



In Dr Sreepathi's locality, houses don't have municipal water supply. Not a single open well here has water. The number of bore wells is increasing. Though they have Sreepathi's live example nearby, they don't mind waiting for hours in queues for the tanker water than independently tapping the rain. Recently, as a result of Sreepathi's constant encouragement, two families have now started utilising rain. "In the entire city, only about 35 families that are harvesting rain", tells Sreepathi with disappointment, "Except these examples, the city is far far behind in water literacy."

Unleaded fuel

Sparrows have abandoned the cities. This disappearance of the common house sparrow from the urban areas is not something new, nor is it restricted by political boundaries. But responses to this disappearance have been quite muted in India, unlike elsewhere. A few years ago, it rang quite some alarm bells in Europe when the population of sparrows fell drastically, by up to 85 per cent, in London. On the other hand, in India, the phenomenon has hardly ruffled a feather, apart from concerns raised in the scientific community and among naturalists

Denis Summers-Smith's (recognised as a world expert on sparrows) theory was that the unleaded fuel, believed to be eco-friendly, had harmful byproducts. The fuel uses Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether (MTBE) as an anti-knocking agent. Along with byproducts of combustion, this kills small insects. The insecticidal nature of the byproducts makes the food for those birds feeding on insects scarce. Though adult sparrows can survive without insects in their diet, they need them to feed their young. With fewer insects to feed on, the infant mortality rates of sparrow went up.

Unleaded petrol is not the only culprit. In nature there can be multiple causes to a problem. The change in lifestyle of human beings is a significant factor, potentially.

Our smoky and unfriendly cities may be forcing birds to take wing and head elsewhere. The challenge is to arrest that, and to bring back some of the familiarity with the natural world that was common not so long ago.