

Saving climate debate from a lack of vision

By Dinesh C. Sharma

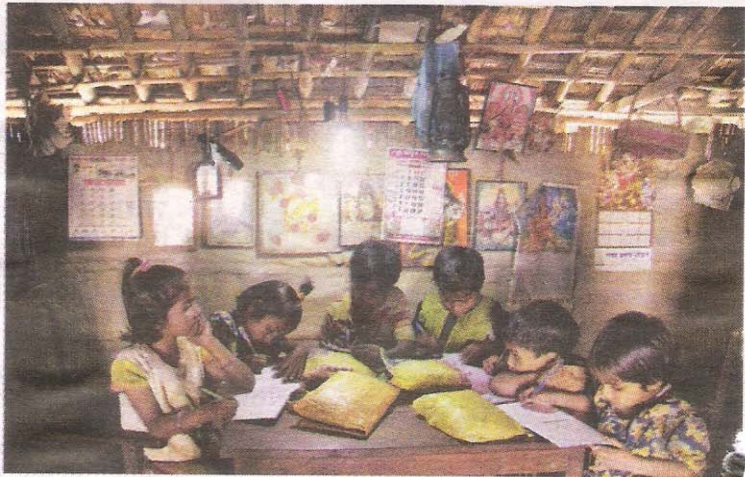
OVER the next two weeks beginning Monday, climate-change debate will hog the limelight as politicians and officials from all over the world converge in Durban to 'negotiate' the future of this planet.

We will hear renewed promises of cutting down carbon emissions, flow of technology and funds to poor countries for adaptation, new mechanisms for carbon trade, and hackneyed talk of equity and burden sharing. At the end, there may be an agreed 'outcome' or a declaration to do more in the future. The futility of this exercise is clear from the fact that while climate talks have gone on for more than a decade now, emissions have reached record highs.

Kyoto Protocol, the only instrument that binds rich countries into committing emission reduction, completes its first term in 2012, and its future is in peril. The US wants a new climate treaty that has everybody, including emerging polluters — India and China — on board. India, on the other hand, feels that signing on any targets will hamper its economic growth. Two weeks at Durban is too short a period to break this stalemate.

Praful Bidwai lays bare the contours of climate politics as it has evolved over the past two decades at the international level as well as within India. While criticising the developed world for doing nothing to cut down emissions and relying on market-based mechanisms such as carbon trade to fulfil their climate responsibilities, the author finds India's policy equally flawed as well.

The Indian position of 'emission rights' based on the per capita norm is deeply problematic. Nobody has the right to emit earth-warming gases or the right to pollute, argues Bidwai. Ironically, the Indian government which argues for equity in international negotiations turns a blind eye to iniquitous access to the so-called 'carbon space' within India. In the name of development and



For rural electrification, Praful Bidwai pitches the idea of doing away with the national grid and develop renewable energy.

The Politics of Climate Change & the Global Crisis



BY PRAFUL BIDWAI
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poverty alleviation, India is using the 'per capita norm' to cover up profligate consumption levels of its own elites. Just as the rich West, Indian elites loath the idea that they may have to forgo certain luxuries to prevent dangerous climate change.

The book provides an excellent critique of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), which was devised in a hurry in June 2008. There is hardly anything new in the plan. Its emphasis is on maintaining existing growth and consumption patterns, while improving energy efficiency and promoting renewables.

This, according to the author, hardly adds up to a change in direction. In the absence of any short-, medium- or long-term

goals, the plan can hardly be called a strategy for climate change. As a counter to the NAPCC, Bidwai offers a practical agenda for 'low carbon development' in India. Even as it continues to fight for a just deal at the international level, India must implement its own strategy for low carbon development. Such a strategy should include a boost to energy efficiency, reduce energy use in agriculture, reforms in the energy generation sector, energy efficiency in construction, aggressive promotion of public transport and alternatives to air-conditioning. For electricity in rural areas, a grid-independent decentralised system based on renewables would be a better option than using centralised power generation and distribution.

Just as Bidwai provides an alternative to the national climate change programme, he presents various proposals for a global climate deal that is "fair, ambitious and binding." Given his passion for a nuclear-free India, the author has devoted two chapters on what he calls the false promise of nuclear energy in the backdrop of Fukushima.

The narrative is well-researched and passionately told, making it an essential reading for everyone.