

Meet of the Indian Mountain States

Organised by: Central Himalayan Environment Association, Nainital, Uttarakhand

Transcription of all talks

Dr. Tolia:

I am very happy to welcome all of you today. This being the second event in the proceedings in the sense that we are in the process of creating a forum. The Hon'ble minister of water resources hails from Uttarakhand and is very much a son of the soil as far as the mountains are concerned. Mr. Tamta of course, is familiar with the proceedings as he spent the entire time of the last meeting with us.

In 2010, on the behest of the Prime Minister, a task force was set up to look at the state of the Himalayan region. The Task Force, which was headed by Mr. SB Mukherjee, the then Secretary of tribal affairs, made many recommendations. The main recommendation was that the Mountain states do not have much to learn from conventional India. We have been talking of 'carbon copy' and how it does not work in the Himalayas. Therefore the recommendation that attracted attention was that first there should be a forum where the mountain states can come together. Those who are working- and they can be from any field such as scientists, funding agencies, NGOs, citizens- should start sharing together. Once this starts, there will be many good ideas that will attract attention. These should be taken up by the departments and the ministries. So we liked that idea. That is the starting point.

The Indian Mountain Initiative is that Forum which was set up at the behest of the Planning commission by the civil society with little or no help from the government. It has been set up by well-wishers of the mountains- in which we include you, hon'ble minister, and Mr. Tamta also. The first meeting was held in Nainital at the Academy on 22-23 May 2011, and in November we had a meeting similar to this one in Delhi. The next was kindly hosted by Mr. Rai in May. Both these meeting were hugely successful and were attended by about 250 persons who were Vice Chancellors, development practitioners, officials, NGOs, and private sectors. You will appreciate the forum's need, you are occupying a responsible post now, and have had a long innings in this sector- so no one appreciates this more than you.

We do it like this- one event in one state. You will be happy to know that Nagaland requested that they want to be the third host. In September 2013, we will be having the third Summit in Kohima for two days. We would like to request you- ahead of time- to make time for these two days. This is how the mountain experience will be gathered. We are fortunate that organisations like GTZ and SRTT are all coming forward- this shows that they value that this kind of coming together is a real churning of experience. The Departments, ministries and funding agencies should take away something from that, and this is the whole idea. These are still early days, so briefly this is what we are trying to do. To sit together as we are doing now, and to brief each other, and to meet friends working in the mountains.

Naturally, we need help from all stake holders who see value in it. Thanks to the initiative, a PC sub-committee has been set up to assess the gaps in infrastructure and to assess the creation of a 'green tree index', since having forests can be a liability. That is being worked out now. We are trying to push that agenda that policy should be relevant to the mountains.

IMI is not yet a registered body. Everyone is a stakeholder and everyone is welcome, who is prepared to continue for the welfare of the mountains.

As to the total infrastructure requirements, the planning commission has logged all the requirements. Very good outputs are coming which will bridge the infrastructure gap. We need now to come up with some formula by which the mountain states can be compensated for the forests. Indian mountains host almost 34% of the total forest cover. The Green Tree Index has been suggested to compensate the mountain states for the disability they suffer due to the forests cover. I am very happy that the PC has been tasked by the Prime Minister to look into it, and 5 meetings have already taken place.

Secondly, the forum cannot continue as it is. We need some kind of blessing. One requirement that we all feel is an administrative structure looking at mountain issues. This already exists as DONER which looks after 8 states. Three more states need to be included. As of now, mountains as an entity are looked after by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. DONER's activities are pertinent to the entire mountain region and will be greatly strengthened by having a dedicated ministry. The facilities being extended to the NorthEast need to be extended to the other mountain states.

Harish Rawat

Governments and others are engaged in finding a solution to the challenge that climate change has put forth. For us, for mountains, it is an opportunity also. Earlier, our areas were not the focus of planners, policy makers, and others. They were seeing beautiful things in us, talking highly about us. But they were not focusing on our problems, which the people who are living here are facing. After climate change, people feel that if a solution needs to be found, we need to be involved in the Himalayas. It is our fortune that we have two sources of wealth. Himalayas are the largest water reservoir in the world, and we also have the jungles.

If climate change has any solutions, they begin with the Himalayas. Whether it concerns glaciers, mountains streams, or the developmental strategies of the states, we need to look for solutions considering the Himalayan states as a core area. At a conference, the governor of Sikkim made an important point. He said, 'now is the time, when himalayan states should not only talk of the 'green bonus' but also of the 'blue bonus'.' I feel that our possibilities increase with both of these. We are grateful to the Prime Minister's Office and to the Planning Commission for the creation of a Task Force to investigate infrastructure development in the Himalayan states. I also look at it the other way around. How do we maintain the infrastructure that is already created?

We seem to be slipping backwards from where we were, as far as the human development indicators are concerned. In the past, development has taken place and infrastructure has been developed. However this has not had as much an effect on the lives of the people living there as it might have had. When I lived in a village close to 40 years ago, my village was self-sufficient; it stood on its own feet and we could meet our requirements. Now the conditions are such that if I were to look at that same village, it is dependent on the outside for most of its needs. It feels that all the bad things have entered the village from outside. Education was once our strength, now other than a couple of states, education is a casualty. The situation is bad now. If we are to look at livelihoods we need to develop both local skills and 'advanced' skills.

Hills cannot support heavy industry, however, the people can be trained to take advantage of any such industries that there may be. When we were in UP, we were better placed. At that time, we had good polytechnic schools, ITIs, even if there were comparatively fewer in number. Now, we do not learn the skill that the world is in need of, but that which the world has discarded. Then how can our children progress. Technical education and skills development is a casualty. Also, other than the NorthEast states, we have also not managed to develop our handicraft skills.

Himachal is more fortunate than we are, because they were able to set their priorities effectively.

However, Uttarakhand, the youngest state in this community was not able to set its priorities. That is why we need to look at how we can develop our strengths to improve people's lives rather than focusing on infrastructure development. Who are we developing this infrastructure for, if entire villages are becoming empty. Some villages have more ghost houses than people! How can we check this situation? A strong initiative is required for this. This is a focused forum, and should devote its attentions to this problem. If we can help this enterprise, we will be happy to receive your suggestions. I thank you for your deliberations and your focused work.

Mr. PD Rai

The sustainable mountain development summit happened in Sikkim on 25th and 26th of May. I will just start with this code: mountain regions need our special attention in view of their fragility and the difficulties that they face. This was by Matsura, who was the director general of UNESCO between 1999 and 2009. Actually that captures most of what we are trying to say about the mountains and those disadvantages we want to overcome through some of our initiatives which we are trying to bring to the fore. This meeting is kind of a dissemination meeting, something which we hope each of you and our documentation will carry forward. We have with us an excellent panel which will assemble immediately after 3 O'clock.

The summit in Gangtok was one of the best summits I have been involved in. There was an undercurrent of passion and belief in our thinking and objectives. We had such an overwhelming response and we had to refuse many people. The state government of Sikkim and my own chief minister gave his unstinting support including generous funding and facilitation. I need to acknowledge that at the very outset.

May is a great time to be in Sikkim, and it certainly didn't disappoint. 254 delegates from all mountain states and all hill districts of west Bengal and Assam congregated at the event.

At SMDS-2, we chose three themes to work on:

Water

Mountain livelihoods, and
communities and forests

Cross-cutting themes were technology and innovation, and climate change.

There were general consensus amongst the participants agreeing to form an essential platform for regular interaction and to decide on a common essential plan for the region. And this captures the essence of IMI which Dr. Tolia has already stated.

Some of the desired outcomes from the summit were the assimilation of diversity because I think diversity is right across the mountain states. The next was how do we actually get theme-wise next steps, specially under climate change adaptation and so forth. And what kind of policy inputs will emanate from these discussions. And we wanted to capture what's happening on the ground. People came and gave their presentations and papers which are captured in the compendium which is already distributed today.

Knowledge management and documentation is part and parcel of this and has been a large part of out outcome. And then the institutionalisation of IMI.

In the outcomes, water should not be looked at through the lens of hydropower, but of ecosystem services. These were some of the points that were the outcomes of the summit which are already in the documents with you, and so I will not labour over them.

Hydropower being part of the clean development mechanism, increasing the number of power projects, leading to forced emigration and social tension are all discussed. I think one of the

outcomes of the hydropower discussion was that we need to debate this completely from all sides and come to some understanding rather than politicising it. Difficulties come when politics steps in.

On the livelihoods front, it was interesting that because we were discussing it and there was large representation from places like Nagaland and Arunachal, we found that organic farming, herbs, horticulture, were also discussed. One of the huge issues which comes I think mainly from the Uttarakhand area is migration from the mountains in search of livelihoods. This needs to be dealt with. How we do it- these answers are something we are still debating. The role of government in several issues such as the national water policy has already been brought up.

Human-animal conflicts was one of the issues that came up regularly, and how it affects lives and livelihoods in the region. Limitations of terrain in the region, multiplied by weak human capital, poor infrastructure, limited enterprise development and governance challenges. Innovation and research could be encouraged on the lines of Silicon Valley. Technology research should be used to fulfil the aspiration of youth. How can we marry what is 'green' with the technologies that are out there through mobile phones and the internet if we are able to reach it to far-off places.

There were two parallel sessions. One of these was on mountain cities. This was an interesting session; keynote was given by Dr. Shivramakrishnan, chairman of the centre for policy research and facilitated by Bharti Gupta-Romola. Our own Gangtok mayor was the chief guest. And this, I think, we really need to bring to center stage. One of the thematics going forward might actually just be this. A legislator's meet was also organised to discuss issues related to mountains and legislation. This was considered a GLOBE event and was funded by DFID, whom I want to thank. GLOBE stands for Global Legislator's Organisation for Balanced Environment which comprises of MPs from over 30 countries. Indian MPs have their own forum which we call as GLOBE India.

Finally there was the Gangtok Declaration and 10 items have gone into it. A part of it was adopted and sent to the Rio + meet in 2012. It goes like this:

“We resolve that the mountain states in India have not received the attention due to them and to sustain the mountain development agenda is far from even being conceptualised, Though several mechanisms and frameworks have been promulgated at the national level. We recommend that greater focus and attention be given to sustainable mountain development agenda without further delay and continued for the next 20 years.”

finally, I would like to again thank the government of Sikkim, the government of Nagaland, the government of India through DONER, DFID, ICIMOD, GIZ, SDC, ATREE, WWF, PWC, the Tata trusts etc for generously contributing financially so that the summit could be organised; and it was a huge success.

Going forward, we will be having the next summit in Kohima.

Mr. Romola:

I think we have heard a little bit about how IMI got started and as it is evolving, and gathering momentum, it is appropriate that we try to establish the DNA of IMI and that we are doing through the institutionalisation process that we started at Gangtok under the convenorship of Mr. Rai. We had a side event there where about 25 people participated in the first meeting on institutionalisation of IMI and then we had a workshop in December last year where we looked at what kind of vision, mission, values and plans we need to look for the IMI.

As you can see this initiative was started by a few like minded individuals and institutions, but any initiative of this type which has a very high vision and aspiration needs to go beyond. Therefore we

decided it was appropriate for us to determine the vision of IMI. Therefore I am going to very quickly touch upon the progress we have made in the last year towards this. In these two workshops we arrived at the vision statement of IMI .

Vision: making people of India proud of our mountains.

This is a very short statement but captures the essence both in terms of the aspirations of the mountain people as well as the needs of the country and it combines these two. Its important here to talk about what we mean by the mountains. We chose to focus on the 11 mountain states and two hill districts as the geography which we will take into account. At the same time, we decided that we would look at mountains not from one perspective but from many. Mountains we believe have geophysical features, they have climate, biodiversity, water resources, the population and livelihood issues of the mountains and another dimension which is equally important, which is the positioning of the mountains as most of the mountains states in India are the border states as well. So the mountains assume a significance in terms of all these dimensions and IMI would look at mountains from all these perspectives.

Mission: We are a collective initiative for recognising the value of mountain regions and enabling people to realise the potential by integrating knowledge and experiences of multiple stakeholders

I will explain each of these terms.

Initiative: we have been talking of IMI. To us, it means it is proactive, driven by the passions of the people, a voluntary effort , and driven by the aspiration of something that we wish to achieve. It's not something that is forced upon us by somebody, but something that is evolving and is dynamic, and driven by the needs and driven by the vision. That's the kind of meaning that we ascribe to the word 'initiative'.

At the same time, it is a collective initiative because it has a large number of constituents. It is trying to do assimilation by which the whole can be bigger than the sum of its parts, and in that sense also it is a collective. It is trying to integrate the macro issues with the micro, grassroots issues with policy issues, and see how one can work for the other. It looks at different dimensions, different means of livelihood. It looks at integrating vertical dimensions, taking knowledge and expertise from one and transfer it to action in the other.

It is something that recognises value. Value can be recognised in multiple ways. We are talking of value in terms of opportunity, research, and also in terms of networking of different constituents. The passions of different people are coming together to launch an initiative that will yield the results that we desire. In that sense, it is providing value through these activities.

The minister was talking of how in spite of assets in the mountain areas, people are migrating to other districts. How can we enable people in the mountains by providing them with better livelihoods and being a catalyst for action to take place. IMI will not be the organisation that will actually lead the organisation, but it would catalyse action. It will provide framework, policy support, provide the platform to enable others to take action. All that it will do to recognise the potential present in the mountains on all dimensions. It will do so by integrating the knowledge and experiences of the people. It will not substitute or duplicate the work of others, but complement it, whether done by the government, NGOs or other institutions.

We felt that we need to look at the cultural values. The **cultural values** for the IMI are as follows:

- a. Integrative:
- b. Inclusive: of all sections of society, focusing in particular on inclusive for women
- c. Collaborative
- d. Voluntary
- e. Passionate
- f. Democratic
- g. Open

The institution has to be:

- a. Member oriented. As you can see, there are three institutions that have played a critical role. They have built this core. There is a need for more people to continue to build it. Rather than one institution holding it as its own, it has to be inclusive of more institutions. Leadership also has to move, but provide institutional memory. One of the things we discussed is that chairmanship of IMI should rest with the person who has held the previous summit. So there's the continuity.
- b. Non-hierarchical: I have must mentioned shifting leadership without losing the core and the basic values.
- c. Decentralised: It has to have multiple events, coordinated by multiple people. In order for it to be decentralised, there has to be a strong connector in terms of process documentation, outcome documentation. I am happy to say of the meeting in Gangtok that it's process document was bigger than its outcome document. In the initial years, it is very important for an initiative of this type to carry that out.
- d. Constitution to be drawn upon these principles.

This is the work that we have done so far towards the institutionalisation of IMI.

India's Mountain states Crown Jewels or Distant Cousins?

Panel Discussion:

Moderator: Dr. Pratap Bhanu Mehta

Panelists:

Dr. Sayida Hameed, Member of the Planning Commission, GoI

Mr. Hem Pande, Addl Secretary, MoEF, GoI

Dr. A. K. Shivakumar, Member, National Advisory Council

Dr. Phil Marker, Counsellor, Energy, Climate & Growth Unit, DFID

Mr. Hem Pande, Addl Secretary, MoEF, GoI:

To us, it is clear that mountains are the crown jewels, but clearly to some people these are distant cousins. I think that mountains are the crown jewels; I have nothing else to say. But as I am representing environment and forests, let me present a typical Indian problem- India is unique in many aspects though we compare ourselves with China or Brazil as far as environment is concerned. No other country has the immense biotic pressure that India has. I don't like the word 'environment' per se, since environment is human- centric. That's why I use the word ecology.

Ecology is where life and non-life, biotic and abiotic are interacting and providing services- 24 are counted. Himalayas are young and growing mountains. The Indian Himalayan region does great wonders. With our four-wheelers, we drive up to the mountains and strew the area with packets. The mountains are not for that purpose, so there has to be a carrying capacity study. The balance between the three pillars of sustainable development- economics, ecology, sociology- is to be sought, and that is the challenge facing India. 20% of the people in the world still consume 80% of its resources. So what kind of sustainable development are we talking of? Not just the internal or economic rate of return, but the environmental or ecological rate of return needs to be considered.

This is more important for the mountains. After the project has been approved, then it comes to the MOEF for environmental clearance . This must change.

Today before going into project mode, first one should think where should I have the project, and have the right kind of environment impact assessment. This is more important for the mountains. If we consider the kind of 'development' that is taking place, and the muck that s coming in, it must stop. Uttarakand government is trying to do something by regulating the number of people entering vulnerable area. Similarly a day might come when the mountains states need to regulate people entering them, how they should travel, what kind of water they should drink. All this should come into being.

A few years back, we had brought out a book 'governance for sustaining himalayan ecosystems'. We had circulated it, but unfortunately we did not get good responses from any of the states. Here we have given prescriptions , or voluntary guidelines for states to follow. Even if some of these are followed, the fragile ecosystems of the states will survive.

You all know how important our ecosystems are- it's our life, our livelihood. We have to be careful of valuing ecosystem services as some have begun to do, to control nature. Himalayas are a biodiversity hot-spot- one of 34 in the world. Once you are recognised as a biodiversity hot-spot, you have extra responsibility of conserving and sustainably using the species out there. Fortunately, we are proud that we have not lost any species in the mountains so far. Even the mountain quail that was said to be lost has now been spotted. So we are very proud. Thus crown jewels will remain crown jewels.

Dr. Sayida Hameed, Member of the Planning Commission, GoI:

What a wonderful title this is: Distant cousins or crown jewels. Being Kashmir born, surrounded by all the mountains, my feelings are embedded in the mountains. I wrote a book which was released just a year ago, called 'beautiful country: stories from another India'. It was about an India that does not make it to the 24X7 news channels, and a number of chapters were about the mountain states.

I have had the privilege during the last 8 years of walking around these areas, and also as part of the Planning Commission of opening the Civil Society window that enables us to understand what concerns civil society has on big planning issues. This ensured that there was some way that the concerns of the people who are actually working in this complex, beautiful area have a voice in major policy making. Those concerns come to us through that window, and through our annual plan discussions.

As a result of the Prime Minister's statement during the 54th meeting of the National Development Council, there was a task force which was constituted. This is the report that was developed. The reason you still can call it 'distant cousins' is that a lot of commitments are made, but when it comes to very squarely looking at what happens, you find that very little happens on the ground. In that, the Indian Mountain Initiative is an extremely important step to get people like me to take the concerns back to the commission.

I just want to touch upon the role of women, which never finds any significant space in any policy making documents. And we all know, regardless of whether its the women in the 8 states of the north east, whether its the women in Uttarakhand or any of the other mountain states, the role that women play is very well recognised and spoken about in a flow of talks. But when it comes to actually mainstreaming their concerns in policy making, there is a lot left to be desired. Apart from the drudgery, apart from the health and education, there is the issue of labour that migrates- it is the issue of female headed households. Women's role in disaster management and mitigation and also ecological preservation and use of biodiversity are areas of concern. What I would like to see, is

that women's concerns are embedded in all the sectors of the plan.

That is a very difficult task, but now we are seeing results. Across the government department sectors, it is ensured that women and children's concerns are embedded in the results framework document. A special sensitivity and a special lens will have to be applied as far as the women of this region are concerned to bring added depth to the policy making.

Dr. A. K. Shivakumar, Member, National Advisory Council

I am working with Mr. Rai on the Sikkim Development Report and have got a glimpse of the beauty of the region. Thank you for inducting me into this mountain group. In the national advisory council we did have a working group on the NorthEast and we made a set of recommendations which are on the website touching on four areas i.e. Communications, financial inclusion, higher education and health. We read a lot of reports- and everyone says the same thing about the richness of the region, the cultural diversity, the biodiversity. But there is a sense of frustration about the paradox that levels of human development are quite low. Every problem that we had identified as graduate students 25-30 years ago are still there.

The second thing is that many good things are happening in the region, which very few people know about. For example, Manipur reports levels of infant mortality that are comparable to Kerala. That is remarkable, and it has been consistently so for many years. The secret of it is linked to the position of women there. In Mizoram, 90% of children are immunized against a national average of 43%. The importance of recognizing this cannot be overemphasised. Recognising these things that are happening and communicating these to us will also be an important function of IMI. In addition to the role of women, we also need to acknowledge that everything that is happening or not happening depends on the role of the state government. There is very limited role of the formal private sector in these regions. In all these areas that I am talking of- health, vaccination, security etc- it is the State that has a role. So something is happening in terms of good governance that also needs to be recognised.

The tendency to cheat or short-change the NorthEast is quite depressing. I am told that used machines rejected in Bombay are refurbished and sold in the NorthEast as state of the art machines. I am sitting in a meeting when they are talking of landlines in the CM's office. Why are we talking of landlines? We should be talking in terms of the best and most appropriate technologies. But somehow there is a tendency that in the northeast anything goes. This is very frustrating for me.

Equally frustrating in terms of governance is the deficiency in officials of the right calibre. It has also come up in our NAC recommendations that the two institutions that centrally responsible for the overall development of the North East but have not performed as expected are the North East council, and the Ministry itself. We have to look at these institutions of governance critically and ask ourselves what kind of reorganization is necessary, because both of them are central to the development of the north east.

Your next conference has three themes, water, forests and agriculture. I would like to see the subsequent one to be health, nutrition and education. We need to make these issues of focus as well. We know that private out-of-pocket expenses for health are extremely high, and continue to be high in the north-east. This is a major cause of impoverishment. In the north-east, secondary and tertiary care is a problem, but primary care is being provided. There are a lot of health problems amongst young people, especially concerned with drug addiction, associated mental health problems. With migration, the health of old people is compromised.

Eco-tourism is a word I constantly hear, but you cannot have tourism without a health care system to back it up. The last thing I want to know is that I am in a remote forest area and my chest starts

to pain. We must give centrality to health. When it comes to health, the opportunity the north-east provides is innovation. There is no health care system in the world that has succeeded in providing healthcare to all; India is also grappling with that problem. The 12th plan has provided for universal health coverage. An effective legislative framework and use of technologies will make it possible for state-paid universal healthcare, at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, with no out-of-pocket expenses.

A big word being used these days in the context of environment is resilience and vulnerability. When you talk of resilience and vulnerability, you talk of the lives of people. So in all the IMI discussions, we must remember that when we talk of vulnerability, we talk of all kinds of insecurities.

Dr. Phil Marker, Counsellor, Energy, Climate & Growth Unit, DFID

I will confine myself to the international perspective and some of the things we are doing. My take on 'crown jewels or distant cousins' is that they are a bit of both. Like the crown jewels, for most people the Himalayas are forgotten for most of the year to 'gather dust' except a few days in the summer when they visit for a holiday. For people living in the plains, they are fortunate to enjoy many of the benefits due to the mountains. Raising awareness of the mountains and the issues that mountain people face is extremely important. But I am not going to preach to the converted and say much about why mountains matter.

As climate science globally improves, we are learning more and more about how mountains are a beacon for climate change. We are seeing climate change, first and more prominently in mountain areas and realise how vulnerable mountains are to climate change. That's a wake up call for most of us. Mountains can contribute hugely to development. We have spoken of hydro-power and the necessity of finding socially and environmentally safe ways of obtaining results. Other colleagues have also spoken about getting the best of possible technologies into mountain areas such as renewable energies and low-carbon technologies.

One of the things I was struck with at the Kathmandu conference last year was the importance of recognising the environmental services that mountains provide. The UK is doing two things that are relevant to the mountain states. As part of our obligation to climate change, the UK has acted domestically and reduced carbon emissions by 2%, but we also have a International fund to help developing countries tackle the issues of climate change.

There are three things I will mention that are relevant to mountain states in India.

One is the work on the Mount Kailash ecosystem on the border between India and China. Its part of an effort to support efforts to manage water resources across borders, to find ways to develop better collaboration between countries.

The second is a program which is yet to get off the ground, so this is something we are trying to move. It is a program in which we look at the less-studied aspects of climate science, such as high-altitude winds, high-altitude snowfall, modelling steep topographies. This is important to see the kind of impacts that people face on a day to day basis. The last is work on resilience of poor peoples' livelihoods in rural areas of mountain communities.

The importance of building mountain communities for international development is fundamental. GLOBE which has been described earlier, hopes to bring together legislators around the world. Let me commend all the organisers of today's events. It is fascinating to hear the results of the last summit and some interesting discussions.

Dr. Pratap Bhanu Mehta

When I thought of this title 'crown jewels or distant cousins' the unfortunately, the best I could think of was 'crown jewels and distant cousins'. Crown jewels are the ecology, the mountains, the gods. There are no people. The people still remain distant cousins.

We have to acknowledge that fact. In the imagining of the mountains regions, we have not kept the people and those relationships front and centre. We need to begin with that conversation. One or two exceptions apart, for Delhi the mountains were a frontier zone- we inherited that British mentality about our border lands. And that still continues, there's just no denying that, particularly when we talk to our security personnel.

There are the mountains, and there are the mountains of the mind which we have created which have made the mountain people our distant cousins. You cannot think of a future for the north-east, without dismantling something like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. There is no way you can say we are not distant cousins until that day comes. It is a scandal that that region is so inaccessible. Its a scandal that our border infrastructure is so pathetic. But behind that was actually an ideology of distant cousins.

The political climate has changed over the last 15-20 years. Particularly it's changed because in the North-east, the dynamic of change is there. The initiative that the people have taken to try and find their own destiny despite all these interdictions and circumventions. That has been the biggest driver of that change. It has not been Delhi.

I think we will have to confront the questions about the basic governance architecture that created this distant cousins- the security conditions. The form of asymmetric federalism that we have practised- whether these are now serving the interests both of the north-east and in some sense of the larger side. We might have ended with the worst of both worlds. In that sense, the distant cousins problem remains.

What is assisting change is this extraordinary energy. As an academic, the most interesting place to give a seminar in the country right now is in the north-eastern states. There's an energy in college students there which you don't find anywhere else.

In a way, we are at an interesting moment where there is a dynamic bubbling out which we need to capitalise on rather than curtail. There are two or three critical elements of that which are going to be very important and which cut across the issues that my co-panelists have talked about. The first one is simply state capacity. We are at this juncture in the ecology of the mountain regions where very small changes can have huge impacts on the development prospects of those regions. Sikkim is going for an organic strategy. It is also going to be very vulnerable to minor changes in the ecological system. And the blunt truth is, we haven't a clue what these changes will be like. We have no forecasting, we have no localised science to really say what these changes are going to be all about. We have zero scientific capacity.

Think of the regulatory challenge that the environment is going to pose for us in the coming years, and think how miserably we failed it. With all the attention, with all the resources, we have not been able to save a single river. Just imagine what happens when there is a rush of tourism and the other things we unleash in the mountain states. My submission is that all these states need a strategy for what state capacity involves- a really analytical understanding- not x number of bureaucrats and so forth. The biggest challenge I see is just that. Migration and so forth will deplete local capacity in very many ways. So I urge that the states together set a new paradigm for looking at these things.

The thing that excites me about IMI, is that in India we often encounter identity politics and most of it is extremely destructive, very constricting. Here is an initiative that brings out something that we

all need to be thinking of more, which are our ecological identities. If you look at the political history of India, our regions were divided ecologically. We then created a political process that constantly abridged that ecological identity in so many ways, and we are now trying to put the pieces together. The most exciting intellectual thing about this initiative is that it can be an example of how to bring together a very constructive sense of what this ecological identity is, which then has the potential for unlocking all these other deadlocks. I hope that the IMI dialogue as it proceeds will send an example of what is possible.