



Why environment leadership is the definitive political future of tomorrow?

08 April 2021

Tenere tree was a famously isolated tree—the only vestige of green—in the vast swathes of the Sahara Desert—until 1973—when a drunk car driver managed to crash his car into it.

In the dark reflective period around the same time last year when the governments like ours in a tiny state of Meghalaya was thrown into tackling one of the most unprecedented public health catastrophe along with the rest of the world by a virus—I was brought down to confront the brutal realities of our collective ‘ecological amnesia’.

And this incident reminded me of how humans have been ‘drunk driving’ for far too long and crashing into the natural limits of our planetary resources.

I was particularly bewildered by a quote around the same time when a climate scientist described this sordid scenario as the ‘climate change on warp speed’. With planetary horrors unravelling like the [Arctic to be ice-free](#) in summers in 20 years, and the possibility of [Amazon rain forest turning into a savanna](#) in 50 years and closer back home, the rapid change in Meghalaya’s ecosystems and disturbed forest and rainfall patterns, this dark period has convinced me that we are in the midst of a major socio-economic/societal transformation—a collapsing of foundational mythologies about growth, governance, wealth and wellness of states, nations and civilisation.

For decades, we have been stewing in the accepted wisdom of the times—the ‘growth versus nature’ paradox -legitimising and institutionalising the ‘extractive and often predatory relationship’ with nature—cementing nations and people’s strong emotional predisposition against giving a ‘crisis’ treatment to our fast depleting planetary inventory.

Nation’s and State’s growth imperatives required the erosion of natural capital but the COVID-19 has demonstrated that the human impact has exceeded the earth’s regenerative rate and now needs an alternate/ radically different playbook for our collective survival.

For a state like Meghalaya, it means a ‘reimagining of sorts’—a radical blueprint to transition itself from a ‘deforestation-driven economy to a regenerative’ one’ and a definitive pathway towards a low carbon future.

As one of India's greenest states with 76 percent of the area under forests and its livelihoods closely tied to its natural-resource-base and climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, water, and forestry, Meghalaya is at the frontline of this climate change crisis—hurtling towards us with an unyielding might.

We are also one of the most unique biotic regimes in the world and located in the biological hotspot of the Eastern Himalayan region in North East India and are an important part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot—one of the four biodiversity hotspots present in India and amongst 34 in the world. Our ecological heritage is uniquely distinctive and is at par with the most sensitive global ecological assets of the world like the Great Barrier Reef, Galapagos islands etc.

According to the 2018 climate risk report by the German Extreme Weather Tracking watchdog, the northeast region along with other states like Kerala and Tamilnadu are at extreme climate risk with global warming and extreme weather events playing havoc with natural balances and resources.

Moreover, a 2018 World bank report pegged the human displacement due to extreme weather events and climate disasters to be a whopping 140 million by 2050 and this was stated to be a conservative estimate.

Needless to say, we are in the midst of what I would like to call a 'climate emergency' and it is time for governments like us to start scripting and activating a new development/growth paradigm with the environment as the major driver of our economies.

A seminal paper on the economics of biodiversity by Sir Partha Dasgupta, an illustrious global economist, presented to the UK's government last year made a compelling case on how covid has exposed the consequences of the long absence of nature from official conceptions of economic possibilities and national accounting as a critical indicator for human progress and well being.

Ironically, a BCG report pegs the estimated total value of the world's forests is as much as \$150 trillion—nearly double the value of global stock markets. Ninety percent of it is attributed to carbon storage.

This landmark document by Dr Dasgupta calls on the governments and nations to embrace 'natural capital system' in their national accounting and cites examples of how some countries have taken steps to incorporate natural capital and ecosystem services into national economic metrics, for instance, China with its Gross Ecosystem Product and New Zealand's Living Standards Framework.

To further emphasise the perilous state of affairs, the stock of natural capital per person declined by nearly 40 percent between 1992 and 2014, a period when produced capital per person doubled, and human capital per person increased by about 13 percent.

Meghalaya is a tribal state with mostly indigenous population who still practice their bio-cultural protocols. Our Sacred groves—virgin tracts of forests that are fiercely guarded by communities for centuries represent an age-old tradition of environmental conservation based on indigenous knowledge, culture and religious beliefs.

With this 'nature-inspired spirituality at our core and an ecologically judicious—our 'survival manifesto' in other words—being written in progress, states like Meghalaya are strategically and culturally poised to script a radical new chapter on climate action leadership—a post covid template for the world.

In fact, it is our existential imperative. Not just for Meghalaya but for the world.

We all know that science and technology is the autopilot for humanity's journey ahead that will help navigate through the uncertainties of tomorrow, but it is the truest and boldest form of environment leadership that will be able to deliver the future to us—humans.

Source: <https://www.cnbctv18.com/views/why-environment-leadership-is-the-definitive-political-future-of-tomorrow-8857461.htm>