

Exclusive

Account of first familiarization visit to India by IORA members' journalists

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Part 3

At the invitation of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), a number of journalists and media personnel from member states of the Indian Rim Ocean Association (IORA) paid a one-week visit to India during November 11-18, 2017 as part of a familiarization program.

They were from Iran, Australia, Oman, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, the Union of Comoros, Mauritius, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Seychelles and Madagascar.

Established on March 7, 1997, IORA is a 21-member intergovernmental organization which seeks to expand regional economic cooperation and strengthen mutually beneficial collaboration through a consensus-based approach.

The vision for IORA originated in 1995 during a visit by the late South African president Nelson Mandela to India, where he said, "The natural urge of the facts of history and geography should broaden itself to include the concept of an Indian Ocean rim for socioeconomic cooperation."

This sentiment and rationale underpinned the Indian Ocean Rim Initiative in March 1995, and the creation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (then known as the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation) two years later, in March 1997.

The Indian Ocean Rim defines a distinctive area in international politics consisting of coastal states bordering the Indian Ocean. Home to nearly 2.7 billion people, in addition to Iran, other IORA member states are Australia, Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, the UAE and Yemen.

The IORA region boasts nine percent of world GDP, 12 percent of global exports and 18 percent of global investment flows.

Tremendous TERI



The media group from the Indian Ocean Rim Association member states, visiting India as a part of a one-week (November 11-18, 2017) familiarization program, attend a meeting with the experts and distinguished fellows of the Energy and Resources Institute in New Delhi (1st L, 2nd L, 3rd L) on November 15, 2017.

The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) was the first place visited by the media group on the fourth day (November 15) of the week-long trip. According to teri.org, the institute is a leading think tank dedicated to conducting research for sustainable development of India and the Global South.

TERI was established in 1974 as an information center on energy issues. However, over the following decades, it made a mark as a research institute, whose policy and technology solutions transformed people's lives and the environment.

The institute's key focus lies in promoting clean energy, water management, pollution management, sustainable agriculture and climate resilience.

Visiting TERI was a tremendous opportunity for me to learn more about an institute directly involved in addressing environmental problems and endeavoring to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels by promoting the generation and consumption of renewable energies, as I find the goals pursued by such think tanks very much in line with my own values and targets.

TERI's efforts to develop clean lighting and cooking solutions have impacted the lives of nearly 4.5 million people who lived without electricity in rural India and parts of Africa-communities, whose incomes have improved with access to energy and who can now breathe better quality indoor air.

Nearly 600 small and medium enterprises in India have adopted a range of energy efficient technologies and practices promoted by TERI. These technologies, applied in key industries such as foundry, glass, forging, engineering and brick making, have altogether reduced energy consumption by 200,000 tons of oil equivalent (toe).

Elsewhere, small industries that struggled to cope with escalating bills of diesel or electricity now derive clean energy from TERI's biomass gasifier technology. Till date, TERI has deployed nearly 600 gasifiers for thermal applications in 15 subsectors, reducing the energy bills of these enterprises and providing a cleaner work environment to their workers.

At the institute we, the members of the media group, attended a meeting with a number of TERI experts and distinguished fellows.

The session was addressed Pradipto Ghosh, a director and distinguished fellow at TERI.

Commenting on the deforestation process in India, Ghosh said Although India is a very densely populated country, "we maintain more than 23 percent of our land area under forest and tree cover".

Over the past 10 years, he added, the area under forest and tree cover in the country has become larger.

"We have a very comprehensive and a fairly sophisticated system of monitoring the state of forests and tree cover all over the country every two years. So the point is that we have taken on board the responsibility of maintaining the forests at a very early stage of development."

Ghosh added similarly as far as the conservation of wildlife is concerned, of

course, India has lost a significant number of species and wildlife habitats.

"However, despite the huge pressure of population we maintain some 600 national parks and sanctuaries in India."

He added that is the extent of the area which has been kept completely free of human interference, habitation and encroachment for the purpose of creating vast reserves and conserving wildlife.



The members of a media group from the Indian Ocean Rim Association member states, visiting India as a part of a one-week (November 11-18, 2017) familiarization program, are about to enter a corridor leading to a number of biology labs at the Energy and Resources Institute in the Indian capital of New Delhi on November 15, 2017.

"I would actually assert that next to Africa and, perhaps, parts of South America, India remains the most richly-endowed country in terms of wildlife and biodiversity."

As mentioned in the first part of the report of this familiarization visit — published on December 25, 2017, in early November, New Delhi had become the most polluted city on earth, as air quality had reached epically bad proportions in the Indian capital.

Commenting on the major sources of New Delhi's air pollution, Ghosh said in 2015, a study was conducted in the Indian capital for the Punjab, a state bordering Pakistan, whose results revealed that the burning of the rice's paddy straw, or stubble, in the Indian state, which is an ecologically unsustainable region for growing the crop, is the primary cause of air pollution in this region at this time of the year.

He added as an outcome of disseminating this study, it became well-known the outcome of which was greater concentration on devising policies to address the problem of air pollution.

"Such solutions, however, are not easy to adopt as they involve using modern technologies, developing policies, particularly fiscal ones, and of course, getting the major stakeholders and farmers on board with the possible solutions."

"The point is that the attention of policymakers is now focused on what should be done about this problem, he stressed.

"I guess that if, three years from now, you come back to this region at this time of the year, you will see a marked reduction in New Delhi's air pollution as it takes about three years for a policy to become effective on the ground. We try to harmonize environment and development."



A view of the campus of the Energy and Resources Institute in the Indian capital of New Delhi.

Shifting to the Paris Agreement, he said the accord is the best thing "we could have got as it enables the countries to contribute [to the reduction of air pollution and process of preserving the environment] in terms of their capabilities and in the light of their respective national circumstances"

Commenting on TERI's level of cooperation with Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Ghosh told Iran Daily that the former director general of the institute, Rajendra Kumar Pachauri, was a two-term chairman of the IPCC from 2002-2015.

He added in addition, individual TERI scientists and experts are, and have been from the very beginning, contributors to the IPCC.

Ghosh said the institute does not receive any grant or untied funding, adding the funding that TERI receives from all sources, whether it is the government of India, state governments, the corporate sector, international organizations or foreign governments, is all based on its own funding for individual projects.

"Thus, TERI does not get any line of financing which is not linked to a particular deliverance."

He stressed that a very important function of the media is to give correct information to the public and thereby, raise public awareness in a responsible way.

"I say in a responsible way because while the level of public understanding has increased over the past years, at the same time what we have seen is that in many countries, including India, there has been media reports failing to be science-based. They have tended to paint either pictures of extreme gloom or

vice versa. Therefore, it is important that while raising public awareness, the media relies on careful scientific responsible research and uses that information to elevate the level of public cognizance which is the most secure basis for governments to take the kind of strong policy measures that are needed to fulfill their responsibilities with respect to the Paris Agreement."

Over the last two decades, TERI's research has consistently supported the government of India in global climate policy negotiations. TERI is among the few institutions in India with climate modelling capability to forecast climate risks at regional scales.

The institute's program on modelling and economic analysis helps policymakers to understand future scenarios across resources and sectors, and prioritize policy options for low-carbon based green growth.

Recognizing the youth as an important constituency, TERI has reached out to nearly 25,000 schools and 10,000 colleges in India, through various program on environmental sustainability. In the sphere of higher education, TERI University has conferred postgraduate degrees on more than 1,300 students in various disciplines of sustainable development.

Every year since 2001, TERI has been convening one of the largest international summits — the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit, now elevated to the World Sustainable Development Summit — to provide a common platform to leading thinkers of the world to share and reiterate key messages on sustainable development.

TERI is headquartered in New Delhi, with regional centers in Bengaluru, Guwahati, Mumbai, Panaji (Goa), and Nainital (Uttarakhand)

Beyond India, TERI has also actively promoted South-South Cooperation. It has implemented various projects in countries of Latin America, South Asia, South East Asia, and small island states.

Following the meeting with TERI experts and distinguished fellows, the media team was taken to visit the institute's campus, which was full of beautiful diverse plants and trees with different uses, and biology laboratories as well as equipment.

Prior to entering the laboratories, we were requested to put on surgical masks and take an air showers to minimize the likelihood of us contaminating the labs' environment.

TERI's labs are very well equipped with the latest equipment. One of the TERI scientists showed us around and provided us with the information we needed about the labs, the equipment and their functions.

Boarding for Bangalore



A number of the members of a multinational media group from the Indian Ocean Rim Association member states, visiting India as a part of a one-week (November 11-18, 2017) familiarization program, pose for a photo in the cabin of the plane which is about to leave New Delhi for Bangalore on November 15, 2017.

At about 3:00 p.m. we left TERI for Indira Gandhi International Airport to take a 150-minute flight to Bangalore.

Bangalore is the capital of the Indian state of Karnataka. It has a population of over ten million, making it a megacity and the third most populous city and fifth most populous urban agglomeration in India. It is located in southern India on the Deccan Plateau.

Its elevation is over 900 meters (3,000 feet) above sea level — the highest of India's major cities.

Upon exiting the airport in Bangalore, I noticed that the city was less crowded and greener than New Delhi. The air pollution level was also not as high as that of the Indian capital.

Exciting visits were expecting us, I could tell.



A view of the building of Bangalore Parliament in the the capital of India's southern Karnataka state.

The final part will appear on Thursday.