



GREEN DELHI

Delivered by Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi

A very good morning to all of you very distinguished participants to this, what I would consider a very important meeting, organized by the London School of Economics to discuss climate change and what collective and individual contributions towards this can be. I would especially like to thank Mr. Burdett for having invited me and Mr. Stern for having given this very wonderful and lucid presentation.

When Mr. Burdett wrote to me he asked me three questions around which I assume he wants me to speak. First question was what were the challenges that I saw when I came into power for the first time nine years ago. The challenges were enormous at that time as Delhi was looking like a decaying city, under the weight of which migration brings in about half a million people every year. Delhi is also a city which was about to disintegrate because there seemed to be no one agency which seems to be responsible for what is happening to Delhi.

The federal government sits there. We have an elected government which I represent, and we have a municipal corporation which looks after about 97% of Delhi's municipal work. It has a very small but very efficient New Delhi Municipal Council which does not have an elected body because it is a nominated body. It has the cantonment board which looks after a small part of Delhi, but the government which I am supposed to represent and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi – my government – looks after the whole body and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi looks after 97% of municipal administration. It is an elected body which is not directly under me – that is the state government – and it comes under two ministries of the government of India which are the Ministry of Development and that of Home Affairs, so it is a very complicated system that we work in. In a very complicated system it is very easy to pass the buck. “I cannot do it because somebody else does not

allow it, or why should I be motivated when it may be someone else's job?”

However when we came into governance in 1999 we found this situation absolutely horrifying. For one, Delhi was one of the most polluted cities in the world. It was not as developed as other cities to which it would like to compare itself to such as London, New York, and even Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and all. It has an enormous amount of money. It is a heritage city. And it is a beautiful city. It is a city of poverty, but not the type of poverty that you see in the rest of India, so there are poor people and there is a tremendous shortage of housing because it is almost impossible to cater for the half million people coming into the city. And because there is a shortage of housing, either houses are developed by land mafias on unauthorized constructed colonies where there is no availability of the basic civic services. Otherwise, the service providers of the city settle down in what you call the slum areas and what we call the zopadpatti clusters, a site which is familiar also in Bombay. Thus, our first priority has to be how to give decent living accommodation to not only all those who live in Delhi but also for those who come outside of Delhi. Can we make holding areas for the construction labour that comes into Delhi so that they can live under a decent roof, have some drinking water, have electric supply, and minimal cleanliness at least basic sanitation? These to me still remain the challenges of Delhi, because unless we are able to cater to these four million people who live in this kind of conditions. If out of the 16 million four million are going to live in that condition, that city is going to find it difficult to come up to the standards that all of you are going to discuss about.

But now I would like to share the happier side of the picture. In spite of Delhi not having any natural resources at all – not even water resource – it has man-

aged to grow up into a city which changes its public transport system. Indeed, it is the only city in the world which has a fleet of vehicles particularly within the public transport – whether it be the taxis or the tuc-tucs – which are driven by the CNG gas and that is about 100,000 vehicles. Before that the emissions coming from diesel and petrol were not of the kind of standard we have today – the Parot 2 and Parot 3 norms or the Euro 2 and the Euro 3 norms – and the smog was just awful. So one step which contributed towards easing Delhi's environmental concerns was this introduction of the CNG fuel for public transport. Then there was the introduction of the metro which came around the same time. Today we have about 80 or 72 kilometres of metro running around Delhi. It is an absolutely clean system due to the absence of any sort of emissions, which is going to by the year 2010 become 200 plus kilometres and that will make an enormous change.

Thirdly, we started increasing our green cover. Our green cover was a mere 37 square kilometres in 1998 and 1999. Today we can (with humility, but with pride) share with you that there is over 375 square kilometres of green cover in Delhi. This is why we boosted the fact that Delhi is one of the world's greenest cities in the world and certainly the greenest city in India. We also have originally in the topography of Delhi about 300 water bodies which were ruined because the land mafia took over them, filled them up and started building over them, or the water dried up and nobody could take care of that. We started a campaign about three to four years ago and we said that we must restore as many as we can of these 300 water bodies. And I am happy to share with you that today about nearly 200 water bodies have been rejuvenated and are great sources of water supply, washing, and giving underground water to the areas where they are. How did this happen? In the kind of multiplicity of authorities that we have and the kind of pressures that we had, and the kind of society that we are like, most societies – selfish and looking only at their own achievements and or their own requirements and not bothering about the others – with enormous wastage of electricity, enormous and shameful theft of electric power, and enormous and shameful wastage of water where a community tap is kept leaking for the whole of the 24 hours, seven days a week or months on end. The Yamuna River which is supposed to be the life-line of our city but completely devastated because it

is highly polluted not only because of the sewers that come in from the city itself but also due to the industrial units considering that Delhi has been a great trading and industrial centre.

So these were the challenges that we found in front of us. How did we overcome many of them? Along the way for making people realize how they have to conserve water, how electricity has to be conserved, that you cannot have a consistent growth of 9 to 10% every year of electric power users, we have to stop somewhere that growth because we cannot built up coal plants in our city because they are polluting. We have to buy power from outside and power is not easy to get. My first lesson which I learnt when I became the Chief Minister of Delhi was by an uneducated farmer who came to see me. He said that I will never overcome the power problem. So I said, "Why?". He said for the simple reason that wherever there is a heater there is no meter, and wherever there is a meter there is no heater. I thought it was the simplest explanation on how people exploit something that they know is free. And then it dawned upon me that why Delhi's electric power consumption goes on raising at the rate it does is that nobody has to pay for it, that nobody is asked to pay for it. It is so easy to hook on a wire and thief the power. It is so easy to put on a community tap and let it run the whole day because you are not having to pay that out of your pocket so let the water just run away, good treated water. Or use good clean water to wash the street in front of you, to wash your cars, and clean the trees that are in front of you.

So we started a campaign of how to conserve energy, water, petrol and etc and how do you personally contribute in making Delhi into a greener and cleaner city. So we started this movement and as a government you know that movements are not always successful because people by and large are suspicious of governments. The governments are always considered as those of who are ruling and therefore far away from those who are ruled. But we started a system of development through partnership, which in our language called bhagidhari. It was an interactive system between our bureaucracy because eventually you and I, the political people have lots of grandiose ideas, good dreams and wonderful aspirations but the implementation must be done via the bureaucracy. So we started by making that bureaucracy which works

in a kind of clustered framework directly with the people. The people were to understand what are the constraints of the bureaucracy, how it functions and what are its responsibilities and for the bureaucracy to understand that when people come to ask us looking for more water or more education, or looking for a better road, don't shoo them away, don't shy away from them. Listen to them, because they probably have a suggestion which you do not know because you are planning inside a government office which is closed. So interact with them! If a community or an area thinks that a road is much more important than fencing a garden, then please do the road this time and you can fence the garden in the next plan. So this interaction between the people, the bureaucracy and of course the political leaders helped us enormously. And Delhi received the United Nations award for the best governance and for the best new practices in governance in the world. I say this with a great sense of humility.

We went forward and today Delhi does look like a cleaner city and it certainly looks like a green city. Why does it look like a green city? We plant one million trees every year. When we came into governance we found that one million was a figure that was in the papers – that this department did this much, that department did a hundred thousand and so forth. Hence the logical conclusion was that if over the past so many decades Delhi would have been green at this rate we should have far less people and more trees in Delhi. But that was not the case because the figures were official figures. If we involve people, if we involve school children, today we have about 8,000 equal clubs running in our schools where the children grow trees, nurture plants, and in our government we do not gift each other with flowers but we gift each other with plants. And I proudly say that every Delhite now has a green finger.

The challenges in front of us remain exactly what they were when we took over because shortages are there and demands have been written. We are talking about developed countries and underdeveloped countries. The developed countries will probably reach the pinnacle of their demands but the underdeveloped countries are still aspiring, we are still fighting to get to the standards of Europe, of America, and even the South-East Asian countries. And our demands are much more because we are much larger.

We are aware that our glaciers are melting. We are aware of all these things, and we want to get credit carbons so the challenges are the same as anywhere else in the world but with the nature somewhat different.

We are also very proud of the fact that one of our own citizens who runs TERI (Tata Energy Research Institute) was given the Nobel Prize this year for his work in climate change. The nice part of it is that the people are beginning to feel aware that we cannot draw water out from under the earth without putting some water back. Water harvesting is important. You have to use solar panels to heat your water and the same goes for other mass consumption use of resources such as electricity. Therefore there is awareness, perhaps it is not enough as it ought to be, but awareness can come around only if we also emphasize production as much as we emphasize conservation. Conservation to my mind is the key if you want to stop the kind of climate change that is happening right in front of our eyes. Year after year, we can almost see changes annually. The winter pattern has changed, the summer pattern has changed and also the monsoon pattern has changed. Fuel...we are going to try to have a mono rail in Delhi so that we can add on a clean system of travel.

But Delhi is difficult, it is a tough city, it is a heritage city, it has layers upon layers upon layers of growth over thousands of years to make them all modern, to change them all for the requirements of a modern clean city. A city which will contribute towards making the climate better for humanity and for all the animal and floral kingdom, that would be our greatest contribution. We are aware of it. You would be surprised to know that Delhi has at least the variety of 100–150 trees, it has a variety of birds that can arrive to 200–250. We have two bio-diversity parks where people are learning things. So we are moving but sometimes I wonder, “is it fast enough? What we are doing, is it enough?”. Everybody is getting involved in it and becoming aware of the responsibility that each one of us has not only as a government, as a society, as scientist, as leaders of their communities, as NGOs, to make a better world for the future generations to come. Thank you very much.

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