

CLIMATE CHANGE: RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES

Film Screening and Panel Discussion
Friday, 28th September 2007,
Cognizant Technology Solutions, Kolkata

Organised by American Chamber of Commerce in India (AMCHAM) Kolkata
and
Centre for Social Markets (CSM)

EVENT REPORT

On Friday 28th September, AMCHAM and the Centre for Social Markets, teamed up to screen the Oscar-winning film on climate change: '*An Inconvenient Truth*' in Kolkata.

Hosted by Cognizant Technology Solutions in this IT leader's center in Kolkata's IT hub, Salt Lake Sector V, the event attracted senior representatives from AMCHAM member companies and other city businesses.

Welcoming the audience, AMCHAM Kolkata Chairman Gulshan Sachdev noted that this was the first event of its type for the organization but would hopefully lead to a series of programs addressing climate change risks and opportunities for its members and business in the region.

The 90-minute film, narrated by former US Vice President Al Gore, proved an eye opener for the audience with its comprehensive introduction to the global crisis of climate change. A result largely of greenhouse gas pollution since the dawn of the industrial age 150 years ago, climate change was now becoming a major economic challenge for countries. The challenge for business was evident.

In a thoughtful segment of the film dealing with the need to raise the game for business, Al Gore compared the competitive advantage of companies such as Toyota and Honda – which had early on gone in for super-efficient vehicles – with the lagging fortunes of GM and Ford whose fuel efficiency standards were now lower than China's. What were the lessons of this for India and the region's businesses in particular?

This question was addressed in a discussion following the film screening, moderated by CSM chief executive, Malini Mehra, and including four distinguished panelists: Mr Henry V. Jardine, US Consul General ; Ms Ishani Chattopadhyay, Country Head, Climate Change & Technology Development, AES India; Mr B.L. Chandak, Vice President, Corporate Finance, RPG Group; Mr Sudipta Das, Partner, Ernst & Young.

Malini Mehra opened the discussion by noting what a sea change there had been in public opinion in the US on climate change since the production of the film in July 2005. She cited the most recent US poll which suggested that 68% of Americans would

support a new international treaty requiring the US to cut its emissions of carbon dioxide 90 percent by the year 2050. In India there was much work to be done though with only 47 percent believing that human activity was behind climate change – compared to a global average of 79 percent.

In his opening remarks, US Consul General, Henry Jardine, concurred with the importance of public awareness raising on climate change and recognized this event as one of many ongoing efforts by the US to engage positively in the debate in India. He also mentioned efforts underway in the US at a variety of levels to address global warming and noted the importance of private sector involvement.

Ishani Chattopadhyay of AES, a world leader in the power sector, spoke of the need to take preventative action regardless of differences in opinion about climate change. The fact was that climate change was emerging as an economic issue business could not afford to ignore.

In his intervention, B.L. Chandak from RPG Enterprises, listed an impressive set of initiatives that the Group had undertaken to reduce carbon emissions and introduce resource savings across the group - which represented a hugely diverse sector from power generation, carbon black manufacture to entertainment giant Saregama music.

Sudipta Das from Ernst & Young introduced the importance of new market instruments for carbon trading and carbon off-setting such as those in the compliance market of the Kyoto Protocol, as well as in the voluntary market which was emerging. He spoke of the impact that his first viewing of An Inconvenient Truth had on him and how it had prompted a re-think of his and his family's lifestyle. He now thought twice about his transportation choices.

Indeed, Mr Chandak informed the audience that the two of them had consulted before coming to the event and had chosen to share a car rather than drive separately to reduce their own carbon footprint.

Interventions from the audience included an informative one from Surojit Bose of PWC who gave a brief introduction to the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) – another of the 'flexible mechanisms' under the UN's Kyoto Protocol whereby developing countries could gain by entering into carbon reduction initiatives with developed country firms. Mr Bose spoke of the leading role played by India and West Bengal in securing carbon credits under the CDM.

Session chair, Malini Mehra, put the role of the CDM in addressing climate change in perspective by noting how marginal current efforts were to the scale of the challenge: global greenhouse gas emissions were 45 giga tons of CO₂. Of this, the Kyoto allowances were 11 giga tons, but India's CDM contribution was only 0.02 GT of CO₂. Significant effort clearly still needed to be made across the board in emissions reductions.

Another informative intervention was made by Rahul Saraf of leading developers, Forum Projects. Mr Saraf spoke of the Technopolis - the country's first IT eco-build certified by the USA's LEED certification body - which has set new standards for resource efficient building in the state. Wishing to see more such efforts, he issued a challenge to Cognizant - the host and a lead IT player in Bengal - to adopt similar standards for its own buildings.

In conclusion, the film and subsequent discussion evidently had an impact on the audience who remained riveted until the very end of the program. In feedback to the event organizers, many of them have requested the film be screened for their company colleagues. They feel the message needs to go out, particularly the facts and figures in Al Gore's documentary which were an eye opener for them.