

Ashutosh Sheshabalaya

# EYE ON THE TIGERS

**They are omnipresent, even if they lie shrouded backstage in discussions about climate change. At last count, there were almost two-and-a-half billion of them – Chinese and Indians.**

Indeed, one of the most sterile facets of the global warming debate is to refer to China and India, rather than to Chinese and Indians. China and India may be among the world's biggest CO<sub>2</sub> emitters. But your everyday Wang or Rajiv hardly qualifies for such an honour.

The reasons are clear: out of the world's 235-plus countries, China and India's populations outnumber the bottom 220 put together. And their per-head/per-body contribution to global warming is vastly lower than that of the West.

In the typical Indian's case, commercial energy use is, crucially, also far below the global average. In 2005, world electricity consumption was 2,400 kilowatt hours (kWh) per person. India's was just 432 kWh – four times less than China's 1,662 kWh. Oil use, too, exemplifies such trends. An Indian's consumption of crude, at 0.8 barrels per year, pales against the world's 4.5 barrels, and is less than half China's 1.8. There is little point throwing more dazzling, vulgar beams of light by juxtaposing such figures against the Western world, lit up end-to-end for the Christmas and New Year festivities.

Still, what is clear is that the difference between India and China is at least as significant as that between China and the world. And here is a suggestion to move the climate change debate beyond noisy palavers (a word originally referring to the patronising monologues of European colonial adventurers in Africa).

Firstly, differentiate between India and China. Both may be rising industrial powers, but China's economic growth-at-any-cost is rather different from that of India, and this difference goes far beyond the numbers referred to above.

Although similarly determined to reduce poverty, democratic India also boasts deeply ingrained soft systems which have begun priming its voters for the trade-offs between economic growth and their longer-term costs.

It was India – not China, or the West – which established the first Ministry for Renewable Energy. That was in the early 1990s. Since then, India's Supreme Court – widely considered among the world's most activist judiciaries – has set the country's green agenda, from forcing metalworking and chemical plant closures to driving one of the world's most ambitious environmental projects to date, namely the conversion of the New Delhi public transportation system to compressed natural gas. There are hundreds of other such examples.

The rest of the Indian system, too, has responded – at least as far as is possible in what remains one of the world's poorest countries. Rural India now hosts 30 million high-efficiency 'smokeless' stoves, with a conversion efficiency four times higher

than their predecessors. Indian biomass gasifiers – a key renewable energy technology – are exported across the world, even to squeaky-clean Switzerland. More broadly, even modern, industrialising India has chipped in. The country's energy intensity has fallen from 0.3 kgs of oil equivalent per dollar GDP in 1972 to 0.19 kgs in 2003 – equal to Germany.

Against this, the near-comprehensive lack of awareness of such efforts outside India remains striking. So too does the innate assumption that clean air and climate change are concerns of enlightened shock troops from the West battling recalcitrant polluters in ChIndia's wastelands. On



November 23, without so much as a by-your-leave, the *New York Times* announced that the US was "the world's third largest wind (producing) country, after Germany and Spain".

It also cited the head of the European Wind Energy Association talking about "new countries with significant wind capacity" – among them Britain, Canada, Italy, Japan and the Netherlands. No numbers anywhere, nor a single mention of India. As it happens, figures from the

## India's installed wind-power capacity is three times that of Britain, Canada, Italy or Japan – and double that of China

Global Wind Energy Council show India in fourth position, with 7,093 megawatts of installed wind-power capacity in July 2007, three times that of Britain, Canada, Italy or Japan, and double that of China.

This is not to say that continuing industrialisation in India will not add to the world's environmental woes. But pretending that India, and the 800 million Indians below the Davos line are doing nothing about it robs the debate of seriousness – and provides little incentive for meaningful cooperation with the West.

Ashutosh Sheshabalaya specialises in interpreting Indian opportunities, risks and trends