



Dr. Shashi Tharoor

Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), Thiruvananthapuram
Chairman, External Affairs Committee of Parliament

Roundtable Consultation on Formulating a National Action Plan on Air Quality

To be convened by Dr. Shashi Tharoor

In collaboration with



Global Health Strategies

GREENPEACE



AIR QUALITY ASIA
www.AirQualityAsia.org

Event Details

Venue: India International Centre; Committee Room 1 (Annexe)

Format: Closed Door Roundtable

Date: 24th July

Time: 4pm to 7pm

Event Schedule

Following tea and refreshments, the consultations will formally begin with a message by Dr. Tharoor welcoming the members and introducing the agenda of the air quality consultations.

The floor will then be opened to the participating members to begin with their introductory remarks focusing on their views, approach and previous work with regard to this issue. However, given the number of participants and the limitations of time, we request each speaking member to limit their initial remarks to 5 minutes per person.

Focus would then shift to discussing a National Action Plan on improving air quality with short term and long term measures and time bound deliverables using the diversity of the organisations represented at the consultations.

A rough timeline following this schedule can be found below:

4: 00 PM	Arrival +Tea
4: 30 PM	Welcome Message by Dr. Tharoor introducing participants
4: 45 PM	Floor Opens to Participants
6: 15 PM	Discussion on Deliverables
6: 50 PM	Concluding Message by Dr. Tharoor
7: 00 PM	Close of AQRT 1

Participants

The participants come from a wide variety of backgrounds and represent diverse interests. They include experts, including health practitioners, government officials, members of civil society organisations actively working in this field, individuals and media professionals who we believe can help increase public awareness of the problem and parliamentarians across party lines who would be willing to work towards bringing legislative support and change in air quality policies.

Since we are in the process of finalising the list of confirmed participants, a complete list, including a bio of each attendee, shall be circulated closer to the date.

Mission

- 1) To identify the problem, including deficiencies in our current mechanisms to monitor, assess, and address air quality.**
- 2) To take stock of the significant health and economic implications for the country of the rapidly deteriorating air quality across India.**
- 3) To construct a time-bound plan to generate public awareness, leveraging the strengths of participating organisations and individual attendees.**
- 4) To design the principal elements of a National Action Plan on Air Quality, to bring to the attention of the public with a view to persuading the government to act.**

Introduction

“If you rubbed your skin after a short walk your fingers were left coated with sooty black smudges an indication of what you had also breathed in. During a shower, black water ran off your body. By one estimate, Delhi smog was killing 10,500 people a year by 2015; others put the figure closer to 50,000. Studies of the air suggested that 200 tons of arsenic, black carbon, formaldehyde, nickel, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide were falling on Delhi everyday. That fug triggered heart and asthma attacks, including among the young and apparently healthy; tiny particulates caused cancer in lungs. Winter brought the sootiest air, milky yellow light at noon, a carpet of grit and dust that settled on everything. Even in cabinet minister’s offices, grand government rooms with high ceilings, the smog was visible indoors. Flying over north India- or Pakistan and Bangladesh- in winter, I noticed that the entire territory was trapped under a blanket of brown, wet air, the product of cooking fires, stubble burnt in fields, brick kilns, factories, coal powered plants, and millions of vehicles. Winter inversions meant a lid of cold air that pressed the blanket low and unmoving”. -Adam Roberts, *‘Superfast Primetime Ultimate Nation: The Relentless Invention of India’*

The problem of deteriorating air quality remains confined to an urban discussion. While select regions particularly New Delhi and the surrounding NCR region, as well as other cities such as Mumbai and Bangalore, have seen increasing public awareness, advocacy and commitment from local state governments to address the issue, there is an abject failure to recognise that this is a pan-Indian concern, posing serious question to the health of the nation as a whole.

The 2017 State of Global Air report published by the Health Effects Institute revealed that since 1990, the absolute number of ozone related deaths in India has risen by a staggering 150 percent, unlike in other regions such as China and the US where the corresponding numbers have remained relatively stable. Even in terms of number of deaths per 100,000 population, India registers 14.7, more than twice the rate of 5.9 present currently in China. Further studies have estimated that in 2012, India witnessed an

estimated 515,000 to 750,000 cases of premature deaths from outdoor pollution and another 950,000 to 1,500,000 deaths from indoor pollution alone.¹

The economic implications of deteriorating air quality are equally ominous as well. A 2013 World Bank study estimated that welfare costs and lost labour income due to air pollution amounted to a staggering 8.5% of India's GDP. Lost labour output due to air pollution (man days lost etc) resulted in a loss of USD 55.39 billion, also higher than China's USD 44.57 billion losses. Further, welfare losses due to air pollution cost the country USD 505 billion or roughly 7.6% of the country's GDP.²

Despite these indicators of the magnitude of an exacerbating issue the country is facing, toxic air quality continues to be ignored within the public domain. The lack of public concern on this issue is compounded by the fact that official data monitoring systems remain out of date and do not produce effective real time data, graded response mechanisms are absent and implementation of official plans to tackle the issue are either slow or they do not keep up with pace of India's development story.³

While India has officially shown considerable commitment and willingness to address these issues in the past- as the previous National Action Plan on Climate Change, 2008 as well as in international forums such as the Copenhagen Agreement and more recently, with the Paris Agreement, to tackle these pressing concerns, the pace of action on protecting and cleaning the environment is too slow.

But it is a problem that can still be addressed, if the right kind of public awareness and government intervention is generated. When at the peak of toxicity in its air, China formulated a National Air Pollution Action Plan, which imposed stringent controls on emissions and strict guidelines for air quality checks. China's air strategy since, albeit still in an incipient stage, has shown promising potential, and a valuable lesson that the fight for improved air quality is not a lost cause.⁴

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/14/youre-more-likely-to-die-from-air-pollution-in-india-than-china-study-says/?utm_term=.747ca6e36544

² <http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/AU3JZ499V8mJKHbUEZEDmO/Air-pollution-cost-India-85-of-its-GDP-in-2013.html>

³ <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/graded-response-action-plan-not-working-delhis-air-quality-is-poor-just-like-last-year-4672400/>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-35351597>

National Action Plan

- The primary agenda of the event will be to conceptualize a national level action plan to address the issue of deteriorating air quality in the country with a close focus on how large-scale public awareness can be raised in this regard, with an eye on an end goal of persuading the government and industry to adopt a pro-active response and approach to this issue.
- We believe that it is important for all participating organisations and individual attendees, who are all concerned stakeholders in this regard, to agree on a set of common substantive points which can then be put forward in the public domain in a manner agreed upon by participating members.
- A joint initiative, particularly an alliance of NGO's, has a greater potential to influence public discourse and in turn, persuade the government to address the issue at a policy level.

Thematic Talking Points for Participants

The members participating at the roundtable come from a variety of backgrounds. The diversity this brings to the Roundtable is an asset that we wish to tap into. For this reason, a few suggested talking points have been included which might be useful to steer the discussion at the consultation.*

Media Professionals

- Establishing the credibility of air quality as a high priority issue in the 'alternative fact' age.
- Identify existing coverage on the issue and help contribute to how this can become a mass concern in the country.
- Making air quality and the larger environmental narrative a consistent and comprehensive interest for media professionals.
- Understanding why this issue has not been headline grabbing/ prime time material and working towards finding solutions.
- Feasibility of a renewed Green Campaign or a similar National Level Media Campaign on Air Quality
- Political perspective of media and climate change

Healthcare Experts

- Air pollution and its effects on health as a pan- Indian problem with a focus on pulmonary and pediatric concerns.
- Challenges healthcare professionals face when it comes to handling air quality related problems.
- Health and air quality from a policy perspective including existing conceptual and implementation gaps between policymakers and healthcare providers
- Air quality strategies factoring in healthcare perspectives

Civil Society Organisations

- Discussion on improving data collection systems monitoring air quality with a focus on dissemination of real time data for public awareness.
- Problems in existing government plans to tackle poor air quality across the country and how the narrative surrounding air quality can be shaped and changed.
- The possibilities of graded response measures to counter the immediate short term effects of declining air quality.
- Long term measures to check the further deterioration in air quality through sustained efforts.
- The possibility of an alliance of CSOs aimed at formulating a national level awareness campaign on the issue.

Members of Parliament

- Understanding the problems of tradeoffs between development projects and environmental concerns in local constituencies.
- Explaining the priority of air quality to the common man.
- The political landscape of climate change in India keeping in mind the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Climate Accord and the Indian government's positive reaffirmation of its commitment to the cause.
- Possibilities of immediate legislative action through parliamentary interventions during the Monsoon and Winter Parliament Sessions.
- Possibilities of a Clean Air Bill along the lines of the US and the UK laws.

*These are just suggestions. Participants are encouraged to go above and beyond these.

Two Member Participation

Each participating organisation is requested to bring two members to the roundtable. The first should ideally be a Senior Expert/ Campaigner on the subject of air quality or alternatively a Senior Representative of the organisation. The second member should ideally be a Junior Researcher/ Campaigner on the issue of air quality, or an assistant to the Senior member. While this applies specifically to participating organisations, individual attendees are also encouraged to bring an aide as well.

The reason for this is that we understand that it will be difficult to get all the Senior members into subsequent consultations on a regular basis due to frequently conflicting schedules. However, we would like the Junior members to form a Core Working Group post the initial roundtable to carry forward the work of the initial consultation.

Participating organisations are requested to send us a brief brio of participating members which can be circulated in advance with other invitees. We would request that these are emailed to jkkoshy2017@gmail.com.

Collaborative Agenda Building

While Dr. Tharoor has identified a broad agenda for the Roundtable, we understand and appreciate that each organisation and individual attendee comes from different backgrounds and thus has had a unique engagement with the issue in the past. In order to leverage the diversity of expertise and experience in the room, we encourage and welcome suggestions on specific thematic points that need to be examined and deliberated upon.

We request that you send these to us so that we can combine these suggestions and bring an inclusive and comprehensive final agenda to the table.

Paper Trail

We also welcome and encourage organisations to share reports and relevant papers on the issue of deteriorating air quality in the country. This could pertain specifically to work they have done in this field or, alternatively, work they feel will be pertinent to the discussion at the Roundtable.

This should ideally be sent prior to the roundtable to John Koshy (jkkoshy2017@gmail.com) of Dr. Tharoor's staff so that it can be circulated in advance to participating members, thus ensuring that everyone is equally informed before the Roundtable.

An initial curated list of reports and papers that have been shared with us, is attached along with this document.

Additionally

If you or your organisation requires any further clarifications feel free to reach out to John Koshy of Dr. Shashi Tharoor's staff at 9650207038 or jkkoshy2017@gmail.com