

Move towards 2017 with firm resolve

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Last Updated: 23rd December 2016 09:54 PM | [A+](#) [A](#) [A-](#) | 



Ecologic's top stories of 2016 were on climate change, the effect of the annual Union budget on agricultural sustainability, wildlife protection besides the adverse effect of natural disasters and their impact on our immediate environment. We had a lot to discuss in the past year and I quite enjoyed the lively feedback. As we prepare to move on, let's look back on events in 2016 around the globe, in India and of course Chennai.

Where climate action was concerned, 2016 began positively as the Paris Protocol on Climate Change restricting global warming was just concluded in December 2015. Unfortunately temperatures began to soar and was linked to the scary anthrax outbreak in North Russia. Scientists will only confirm by early next year whether 2016 was indeed the hottest year ever.

However, we went into the year knowing full well that experts had unanimously predicted 2016 would break 2015 levels. It was not just about the mercury hitting record highs, but also about the extreme concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide. In the remote reaches of Antarctica, the South Pole Observatory recorded 400 ppm of carbon dioxide on May 23, 2016 according to an announcement from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. That was the first time it passed that level in 4 million years and the portents are ominous.

The past year was special as the UN Habitat III (Quito, Ecuador) was held after twenty years when nearly 167 countries agreed on the action plan for sustainable development of cities as per the New Urban Agenda.

The union budget for 2016 put organic farming in focus which tied in with concepts of sustainability and fair trade of agricultural produce. In other green news, many cities across states made mandatory 'green building' norms as part of their plan sanction process. Apart from stipulating minimum renewable energy sources, management of construction waste was also made compulsory for permitting new development. These laws will prove beneficial in the long run and nudge society towards sustainable practices.

Closer to home, we dealt with floods (Dec 2015) and cyclone Vardah (Dec 2016), leaving Chennai in utter disbelief that 100-year phenomenons of each type of natural disaster could actually happen within the time span of a single year!

New flood management plans for Chennai were put in place in early 2016 (several new storm water drains, desilting of water tanks and ground water recharge were implemented across the city), only to be devastated by a cyclone that uprooted nearly 100,000 trees resulting in several parts of the city to be without power, water and connectivity for a week.

With the added concern that climate change could in fact cause our city to be one amongst the first across the world to sink due to rising sea levels, it is with firm resolve that we need to move into the New Year. Please remain conscious and grateful for everything this planet has to offer and work towards preserving it for generations to come!