

Is the world really flat!

Dr R K Pachauri, August 01, 2011

I have had some interesting experiences in recent days which support Thomas Friedman's view of the world being flat, but at the same time highlight the huge gap that exists between India's technological capabilities and activities and those of the developed world. I was in Paris for less than a day and then went on to Brest in the region of Brittany in France for an IPCC meeting. On the way back I spent the night in a hotel in Paris and was to catch a train to London early the next morning. While coming down in the elevator at 6.00 a.m., this contraption got stuck between two floors, and it took me almost half an hour to be rescued after constant ringing of the alarm bell, etc. I thought to myself that not only was the malfunctioning of the elevator a symptom of developed countries on the decline in very routine functions and maintenance etc., but it also reminded me of the fact that perhaps a happening like this in any hotel in India would have been dealt with a little more efficiently. So the world is really getting flat!

But in Brest I saw a range of research activities which included the development of a number of marine based energy technologies, including wave and tidal energy, OTEC, as well as floating wind energy generators for deep sea installations. This research facility is located in a shipyard in Brest, and I thought to myself that this was truly an example of cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial work in a developed country, which we seldom find in India. It is also unfortunate that despite India being bounded by an extensive coastline we have hardly done anything in the field of renewable energy technology development for marine locations. In the field of science and technology the world therefore has certainly not become flat, particularly with the bureaucratic and slothful structure that we have for science and technology in this country.