

Two South Asians from UNEP shared the first Y. P. Abrol Memorial Award

The first ever international South Asian Award on Nitrogen Management was announced in a special virtual event held on 3 June 2021, as a part of the 8th Triennial Conference of the International Nitrogen Initiative (INI2021). The conference was hosted by the German Government, between 31 May and 3 June 2021. The award is shared by Anjan Datta from Bangladesh and Mahesh Pradhan from Nepal, for their work as the founding architect and the current-coordinator, respectively, of the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management (GPNM). It is a unique multistakeholder partnership of governments, academia, industry and civil society that addresses global nutrient pollution through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), where both the awardees have been employed. Their efforts have been important in the intergovernmental recognition of sustainable nitrogen management and its ongoing implementation.

The 'Prof. Yash Pal Abrol Memorial Award for Excellence in Science and/or policy towards Sustainable Nitrogen Management' was established by the Sustainable India Trust in 2020 in the memory of its founder, who passed away on 26 July 2020. He was an accomplished crop physiologist and widely regarded as the father of Indian agricultural nitrogen research¹. Considering the proactive role of Indian scientists in Indian nitrogen assessment² and in the first ever India-led UN resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management³, this award signifies the emergence of South Asia on the global stage of nitrogen management^{4,5} and is a fitting tribute to him.

'Prof. Abrol developed nitrogen fertilizer recommendations for green revolution from the Indian Agricultural

Research Institute, New Delhi. He also founded the Indian Nitrogen Group, South Asian Nitrogen Centre of INI and the Society for Conservation of Nature in New Delhi. They hosted the 5th INI Conference in New Delhi that led to the Indian Nitrogen Assessment (2017) and the ongoing South Asian Nitrogen Assessment', said Himanshu Pathak, Executive President of the Society for Conservation of Nature and Director of the National Institute of Abiotic Stress Management (NIASM-ICAR), Malegaon, Maharashtra. The award committee was chaired by Tapan Adhya, former director of the National Rice Research Institute, Cuttack and currently a biotechnologist at KIIT University, Bhubaneswar. He is also the current director of the INI South Asian Centre.

In his acceptance speech, Anjan Datta said that valuable nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus that are crucial for food security often end up in the wrong place causing water and air pollution, ill health, biodiversity loss and climate change. 'The establishment of GPNM promoted international efforts towards closing the nutrient cycles. Its efforts at UNEP led to the UN resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management piloted by the Indian government and more countries are monitoring and developing mitigation targets for nitrogen pollution now than ever before. The Indian initiative is a result of the decade-long efforts of Prof. Abrol and the Indian Nitrogen Group. I am fortunate to have known him and I am honoured and humbled to receive this award', he said.

Mahesh Pradhan said, 'I am fortunate to inherit GPNM from Anjan Datta, who did all its ground work on nitrogen with INI, Prof. Abrol and others. The UN

resolution gave us the impetus for Colombo declaration to "halve nitrogen waste by 2030". The emphasis of this INI conference and the Berlin declaration on nitrogen management for sustainable development goals is very timely. This will be followed by the special nitrogen session as a part of the World Environment Day celebrations being hosted by the government of Pakistan. This event connects nitrogen with the UN decade of ecosystem restoration.'

The event was attended by a large number of international participants of INI2021, as well as the family members of late Y. P. Abrol, including his wife Mridula Abrol, sons Amar Abrol and Manav Abrol, brother Inder Pal Abrol and sister Asha Ralli. The INI conference ended later that day with the adoption of the Berlin Declaration. More information on Abrol and his contributions can be found on the websites of NAAS, INSA, NASI and also the www.sustainable-india.org and www.scon-india.org

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3. United Nations Environment Programme. Resolution adopted by the United Nations Environment Assembly on 15 March 2019: sustainable nitrogen management. United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, fourth session, Nairobi, 11–15 March 2019; UNEP/EA.4/L.16; <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/28478/English.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>
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