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Rajendra Pachauri speaks out over sexual harassment claims

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It was the crowning glory of a distinguished career when, in December 2007, the head of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the charismatic Rajendra Pachauri, collected the Nobel peace prize in Oslo.

Elected by governments five years before to chair the small independent organisation charged with informing them on the state of global climate science, Pachauri had seen off the Bush administration, which loathed the IPCC for not taking its line on climate change. He had weathered vicious attacks by sceptics and steered the IPCC to worldwide acclaim.

The award, which he shared with Al Gore, was, he said, "a rare triumph for science" and for the many scientists who had been relentlessly attacked in the rightwing press.

Nine years on, this international figure, who was named Indian of the year and has received major awards from dozens of countries, is lying low in Delhi. He is accused of sexual harassment, stalking and criminal intimidation of a young colleague whom he had employed as a researcher while he travelled the world seeking governmental support for action on climate change.

Faced with prison, ruin and disgrace when his case comes before the Delhi courts next month, Pachauri has resigned from the IPCC and stepped back from Teri, the huge energy research institute that he founded and which has taken solar lighting to hundreds of millions of Indians. Meanwhile, his many enemies are revelling in his discomfort, his health has suffered and he has been subject to death threats and demonstrations by women's groups.

His accuser, who cannot be named, is a science graduate. She says he besieged her with offensive messages, emails and texts in the 16 months she spent working with him. In February 2015, she gave police a cache of several thousand electronic messages as evidence.

She says she rejected Pachauri's "carnal and perverted" advances. "On many occasions, Dr Pachauri forcibly grabbed my body, hugged me, held my hands, kissed me and touched my body in an inappropriate manner," she told police.

From the emails, Pachauri appears enamoured of the woman. “I am yours for life,” he writes at one point; “I have never felt so overwhelmingly in love as I have been with you, and even though you gave me so much pain, I will always be your well-wisher and carry beautiful memories of the joyous moments between us, limited as they might have been,” he says in another.

In emails, poems and messages, he professes undying love for her “in soul, mind and heart”.

“I will go on a fast after a cricket match ... I will break the fast only when you believe I love you with sincerity and unfathomable depth,” he wrote.

“Please you are not to grab me and or kiss me,” the woman told Pachauri in one text. He replied: “I wish you would see the difference between something tender and loving and something crass and vulgar.”

Until now, Pachauri has said nothing about the case beyond denying all the charges, and claiming that his emails and computers had been hacked or misused. Now, however, in a series of emails with the *Observer* and in one meeting in London, he claims that his accuser was acting for money, and was probably set up to trap him by persons unknown.

He claims that she had access to all his five email accounts, and to his electronic files which included personal correspondence and many poems that he had written over the years.

“What is disturbing [is] that right from the first day over a period of about 16 months she was creating and assembling an archive of messages, which to anyone would seem very unusual. As far as I know, the emails, text messages etc that she collected were personal, semi-personal and only in a few cases official,” he says.

A demonstrator protests against Pachauri outside the offices of Teri in New Delhi. Photograph: Hindustan Times via Getty Images

He claims it would have been easy for someone to have assumed his identity and sent messages seemingly from him to her, without his knowledge.

“I was, during that period, extremely busy and carrying out email communications on six different email accounts. These included my Yale, IPCC, Teri official, Hotmail as well as Gmail accounts. I generally corresponded with her on my Gmail account, but since I had a huge volume of messages to deal with I did not frequently read my messages, except when I was alerted about a message waiting for me. When I did access this account, I would only read unread messages. Honestly, how many of us check our sent items regularly?”

In what would have been a sophisticated sting, he argues that his poems were taken and turned round to make it seem they were addressed to her. In one he wrote: “She’s so cold! Unrequited stays my love and arms empty and bare!/Yet in this poor man’s heart love for her incessantly grows/But she’s cold and for this love of mine Ms. ___ would never care.” The original name would then be changed.

“The poems I have written and saved electronically all have some names or the other, particularly in the case of romantic poems, and these can be easily altered by replacing the name that is mentioned with anybody else’s name.”

Through her lawyers, the woman has told the *Observer* that there is no truth in Pachauri’s claim that computers were hacked, and that the Delhi police are also convinced there is no truth in it.

“There are emails, SMS messages and WhatsApp messages which categorically prove to the contrary. It is a blatant lie being stated by Mr Pachauri,” said her lawyer, Prashant Mendiratta.

But Pachauri counters that, far from him chasing her, the correspondence shows that she had approached him. “She actively flirted with me and aggressively encouraged a deeper relationship between us.”

Documents filed with the court by Pachauri’s lawyer are said to show that, on 29 September 2013, just weeks after she went to work with him, the woman wrote in an email: “I am learning as I always say and if I may, please allow me to hug you when deem[ed] appropriate if you cannot seem to hug me and rightly so. I hold nothing against you at all and never will.”

In another, she says: “Remember how I first met you and what followed next? It was all the inside of me telling me that I must pursue it with this particular man. I will be happy with what makes you happy as long as that brings you satisfaction and sense of belonging.”

And again, she writes: “Yes, I may not have taken a step towards you in the direction you want me to but I think I did take a few so as to always ensure that I am around and there for you even if silently. You have no idea how much I value you and how weird it feels when you are on travel or not in office; the invigoration that you bring, is so missing.”

But the woman’s lawyer denies that she was flirting. “My client was not flirting with him or making advances to him. At no point did she encourage him or give him any reason to make inappropriate physical contact or demand sexual favours.”

Pachauri is adamant: “From my perspective this was nothing but a very cordial and mutual relationship. There was a light and friendly tone to our correspondence, but at no stage did I ever hint at having a physical relationship nor did I in any way engage in sexual harassment.”

With others, they travelled to cities around the world together during which time he says she never complained or said anything to him or any other member of the Teri staff. He claims to have been staggered when, after 16 months, out of the blue, she complained and went to the police: “She gave me absolutely no warning that she was going to file a complaint with Teri or with the police, or ever brought up that she had any issues of the kind. I, on the other hand, unwittingly gave her a contract for employment for three years, which she gladly accepted. But soon after she started lobbying for a higher position which would have involved two promotions.”

Although a second woman has appeared on TV complaining of Pachauri’s advances in 2002, one woman spoken to at Teri says the institute is the “safest place for women to work”, and that “Patchy”, as he is widely known, is seen as one of the family. “I fail to understand that if she had

any problem, why she waited for so long. Apart from HR, there were a large number of female senior colleagues to whom she could have spoken. Also, why [if she was being harassed] she accompanied him on foreign trips,” she said.

Pachauri says his computers and telephone were hacked. In February 2015 he received an email on his Gmail account. It read: “U bludy climate clown,,v got ur email n now v will us!!!! 2 hack ur mail n u in peeses.”

He says: “I have repeatedly received death threats anonymously over the years. In recent months I have received these threats over the telephone from numbers that were valid when East Germany was a nation. I am not sure how these people have numbers pertaining to that defunct international code.”

He says he suspects strongly, but cannot prove, that there has been a coordinated attempt to destroy him professionally and personally and that money may also be involved. Ever since he was elected to lead the IPCC in 2002, he says the IPCC has been vilified by climate sceptics and rightwing free-market thinktanks, often known to have been funded by powerful fossil-fuel interests.

‘My client was not flirting with him. At no point did she encourage him or give him reason to demand sexual favours’

Prashant Mendiratta, lawyer for the accuser

For sceptics to force the resignation of the head of the UN’s climate panel would be a coup, undermining its scientific credibility and possibly derailing global agreement, he says.

In 2009 he survived strong calls for his resignation when he took responsibility for an error in the IPCC’s fourth assessment report. In 2010 he was investigated by British journalists who alleged potential conflicts of interest with his advisory roles. Pachauri sued the *Sunday Telegraph*, which was forced to apologise and pay £53,000 costs.

But Pachauri points to a blog by one of the journalists, Richard North, and suggests that there could have been a conspiracy to bring him down. North wrote in August 2010: “Pachauri is on the ropes but he ain’t down yet. The view is it will take one more ‘killer blow’ to fell him ... and it looks as if it’s been found!”

North said last week that he was referring only to his financial investigation of Pachauri but adds that many people – possibly in the Indian government or within Teri – would like to bring him down.

“More than a few people would think he is too big for his boots,” said North. “He treated Teri as his personal fiefdom. Obviously she was leaned on. This is straight out of *All the President’s Men*. It’s about ‘rat-fucking’. Black politics to undermine Pachauri’s reputation. I can see people using her. But there has to be someone at the head of it.”

Adding to the intrigue, Pachauri says it is “curious” that the attacks on him in India have been led by the business journal the *Economic Times*. Its former editor Swaminathan Aiyar is a research

fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington DC, which has funded many climate-sceptic thinktanks.

There is no suggestion that Aiyar has played any part in the scandal but he has written columns calling for Pachauri's resignation. Referring to the allegations of harassment, he says: "This is 'gender terrorism'. It is high time the famous and powerful were exposed, denounced and ostracised."

A spokeswoman said: "The Cato institute has had no involvement in the case being brought against Mr Pachauri."

The next stage of the trial is set for April, after which Pachauri will be summoned to appear in the Delhi court. Until then, the man who as much as anyone persuaded the world to act on climate change is unable to act himself.