

Prime Minister Modi as a global leader in tackling climate change

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Abstract

India and other countries in the world are aware and concerned about climate change and its dire consequences. India is the world's fourth biggest emitter of Carbon-dioxide after China, the US, and the EU. But, judging from the perspective that India is a huge populous country, it is clear that India's per capita Carbon-dioxide emissions are much lower than other major economies in the world. In this context, India's commitment to net-zero emission by 2070 is significant. And this bold move has been officially announced by the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi at COP26 Summit in Glasgow, UK. Keeping this in mind, the author has made an attempt to give a glimpse of India's efforts and challenges in this regard.

Keywords: BASIC, UNFCCC, Carbon-dioxide, COP21, Climate change

India has traditionally approached climate change as a diplomatic issue, insisting that the developed world – because of their disproportionate role in causing the problem – should lead the way in reducing emissions, and provide the developing world the finance and technology to do so. While this approach is entirely justifiable and has served India well in the past, there are compelling reasons for the country to rethink its approach to international and domestic climate policy. First, climate change is likely to have profound and devastating impacts in India, impacts that will make the task of development and poverty eradication considerably harder. Second, there are several cost-effective actions that India can take that serve its development as well as climate interests. Rethinking our approach would translate internationally into our joining, even leading, a 'coalition of the willing' that advocates for an ambitious and strong rules-based global climate regime. Domestically, it would translate into a proactive exploration of lower-carbon opportunities for growth that foster development, while investing in climate adaptation and resilience. Rethinking our approach at the international and domestic levels, however, calls for strong institutions for climate governance. Climate change, often characterized as the 'defining issue of our age', is predicted to have profound 'impacts on natural and human systems on all continents and across the oceans.' These impacts are likely to cause devastation in India, a country with 7500 km of coastline, extensive tracts of low-lying areas, high population density, poor infrastructure and continued reliance on agriculture for livelihoods. With the 1°C warming that has already occurred since pre-industrial times, Himalayan glaciers have begun to retreat, and there has been a marked increase in the frequency and intensity of heat waves,[ii] droughts, extreme rainfall events[iii] and floods. If the world warms to between 2.6°C and 3.2°C, as the UN climate secretariat estimates it will based on current country pledges, this will have serious, pervasive and irreversible consequences for India – not just in terms of impacts on peoples and ecosystems, but also on economic growth, livelihoods and wellbeing. Climate change is predicted, for instance, to reduce agricultural incomes by 1525% by the end of the century in India.

Modi: A Green Global Leader?

Modi and India have been hailed as a global green leader. Former Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme Erik Solheim commented on Modi's excellent leadership skills. Solheim points to India's economic growth and how Modi has managed to turn the country from an 'environmental laggard to environmental leader'. Solheim's perspective of India is shared by many in the international political environment. Among other things, the successes of India's rural electrification program and heavy investment in the solar industry and renewable energy supply have been noticed internationally. However, India and Modi's position and leadership on climate and environment is far from clear-cut. India has been a leading voice in the international climate negotiations since the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992 but has also been reluctant to commit itself under the Paris Agreement. In international negotiations, India argues for a clear differentiation between developed and developing countries, as under the Kyoto Protocol, which put no obligations on India. India promotes this position through various negotiation blocks within the international climate negotiations such as the Like Minded Developing Countries (LMDC), Group of 77 (G77) and the BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China). Especially the LMDC group often takes a hard-line position, demanding leadership from developed countries before committing to reducing their own emissions. However, Modi has taken steps to increase bilateral climate cooperation, especially in areas where the government sees growth possibilities. The primary example being the International Solar Alliance launched by India and France in 2015. Still, the global climate regime has become more fragmented and bottom-up oriented, and the variety of climate actors and initiatives at several governance levels increased considerably compared to the situation ten years ago, and the question is how this enables the development of new forms of leadership and the role emerging global powers like India can take. India has made a huge achievement in ensuring electrification for all. Electrification is important for development as it enables education, health benefits of switching from Kerosene, and communication technology, which will undoubtedly lead to better welfare and prospects for rural communities in particular. The success of rural electrification is a continuation of many years of efforts by successive governments, and Modi has been a little lucky in being prime minister when the goal was met. Though all households in India are now electrified on paper, there has been controversies over the reporting and the supply is far from stable and reliable. In addition, about 835 million people are still dependent on biomass fuels for cooking and heating (IEA), and the population is increasing. In sum, this means that there will be an increased electricity demand, some of which will have to come from coal. One dimension the Modi government has been eager to front is their commitment to expanding the share of renewable(s) in India. Still, wind and solar produce a very small share of India's electricity and there is a long way to go before renewable(s) in India will unseat existing coal power. While the growth in wind and solar has helped to reduce building of new coal plants sharply, the coal plants that are there will continue to burn coal for decades to come, contributing to domestic air pollution as well as global emissions. The former is responsible for a staggering amount of death and disease. The Indian government is encouraging new development of wind and solar, but this is mostly driven by economics: the cost of new wind and solar is lower than the price of new coal. Moreover, solar and wind capacity can be installed much more quickly than coal power, given permitting constraints as well as coal shortages. Meanwhile, the Modi government is working hard to make it easier to build coal power stations, to develop new coal mines, and to transport coal to market. Power stations have been allowed to pollute above legal limits for years, and the government put in place new rules to limit pollution. But when the deadline came at the end of 2017, the government simply extended it another five years. While the building of solar in particular has been strong in recent years, the Modi government has curtailed this growth by putting a 25% import tariff on solar panels from China, substantially increasing the cost to developers. Moreover, state governments running tenders for solar generation have regularly cancelled these after the fact when the lowest tenders were not low enough, despite them being substantially cheaper than new coal. Under the Paris Agreement, India has made only weak promises, and even without significant policy will probably achieve those climate goals. In fact, those goals translate to a substantial increase in India's emissions in the decades ahead. If the Modi government instead removes barriers to solar and wind, and ceases to protect coal power from environmental regulation, then India's

future emissions pathway could be much lower. But we must remember that this is a country with enormous poverty, and the path of global development that India follows has long been paved with fossil fuels, fuels that have considerable government support in India. And, while India is one of the world's largest emitters, other countries have already developed on the back of enormous historical emissions. A strong focus from developed countries and international NGOs on India's responsibility for mitigation will therefore likely continue to hit rock bottom in the Modi government, and focusing on bilateral cooperation may be a more fruitful strategy for actors wanting to enhance India's climate change mitigation.

The Modi government's performance has been debated on many counts since it came to power. While there has been a lot of emphasis on the various schemes that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has proposed (Jan Dhan Yojana and Swachh Bharat, to name a few), his government's role in the upcoming climate summit in Paris has been considerably underplayed. One of the crucial barometers for success on the international stage for this government will be to see how it navigates the complex contours of the summit in Paris where India is a significant stakeholder. Climate change has plagued the world for decades now, and it is time to have a comprehensive international agreement to protect the planet. There was a lot of optimism since the precursor to the Paris summit saw a landmark emissions agreement between the United States and China. While the Chinese agreed to peak emissions by around 2030 and to cap their annual coal consumption through 2020, the Americans committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 26 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. Many observers felt the December 2014 Lima climate talks were just kicking the can down the road and were not a success. However, some did feel that it brought the countries together on the path of taking responsibility for climate change. The political equations behind a global climate change regime are significantly complex and thus not much has transpired in terms of tangible outcomes since the Kyoto Summit. India's role in climate summits has always been reflective of the view of developing countries. Prior to the summit in Lima, India's stance was unequivocal on the issue of emissions — it was not going to agree to any binding agreement, considering India's per capita carbon emissions were 1.7 metric tons in 2010 and remained below the global average of 5 metric tons. According to the World Resources Institute (WRI), India was at the bottom for per capita emissions among the top 10 emitters, with average per capita emissions of around 1.92 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, while that of Canada was 24.6 tons, the United States 19.6 tons, Russia 15.3 tons, and China 7.69 tons in 2011. In March of this year, India was not willing to agree to the U.N.'s Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), which wanted countries to commit to a cap on emissions (though they have since updated their stance with a new commitment on INDC, which includes reducing India's emissions intensity by 33 to 35 percent by 2030 as well as transitioning to 40 percent cumulative electric power installed capacity to transition to non-fossil fuel based energy resources by 2030; emissions intensity is the measure of the rate of converting carbon emissions to GDP). One of the biggest sparks of hope in this regard is the positive track-record of Modi. He has a stellar track record in promoting renewable energy in Gujarat over his tenure as the chief minister for 12 years. Under his leadership, Gujarat built one of Asia's largest solar parks and was one of the pioneers in commercializing solar power throughout a state in India. His views on climate change as a subject and India's track record are at odds with each other. India had agreed for the first time at the 2010 Cancun summit to have voluntary cuts on emissions and after Modi came to power, during the Lima summit in Peru, India took a more aggressive stance arguing the need for development for poorer countries. It is expected that in the Paris summit, India will push for the "climate justice" argument as promoted by Modi. India's INDC targets make clear its commitment to clean energy. In addition, the country has also committed to improving its emissions intensity per unit GDP from 33 to 35 percent by 2030; and to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tons of carbon dioxide through additional tree cover. The key contentious issues between India and the United States would be on the valuation for "adaptation" — the costs of adaptation that the developed countries need to pay developing countries such as India to forego their development initiatives using non-renewable means. India estimates it might need up to \$206 billion for itself alone from 2015 to 2030. Considering the clout that Modi has in the international community from his global endeavors; this is his biggest opportunity among world leaders to be the catalyst for this landmark agreement. Probably for the first time India can take a leading role in driving the change. Modi's penchant for climate change could be the push that India needs to

attain the next level and his relationship with Barack Obama could provide the much needed push for the climate talks to take it to a substantially progressive level. This would constitute as symbolic international leadership and it can be done in the following steps. First, Modi needs to ensure that the Americans and Chinese are on the same page on key issues related to emission controls and respective pledges a few weeks before the summit; for this he will have to use his proximity to both Obama and the Chinese leadership. A core goal should be to transfer the verbal commitments to on-paper demands considering that reports suggest that the Americans might not keep to their \$100 billion pledge from the last summit. In addition, this process could also raise the prospects of an Indo-Chinese-American agreement prior to the summit. Second, the Indian negotiators should push the United States on the definition of INDC targets — the developing nations want the developed countries to include mitigation (interventions to reduce the sources, adaptation financing as well as technical assistance available whereas the United States wants the scope to be narrowed down to mitigation alone). The two countries could reasonably strike a bargain and allow two of the three variables here, so that it is acceptable to both the developed and developing countries. Third, the influence of the Asian bloc could be leveraged to the maximum especially aligning with other initiatives such as the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank which are rivaling global institutions. These factors could propel the summit to be a place where there can be substantive dialogue and a coherent approach to ensuring that the world sees a climate deal at last. To sum up, for the summit to be a success, someone has to have vision and leadership that can drive the process. India, being a key player, needs to execute its vision, keeping its own objectives on the table yet providing leadership that can transform the global narrative. In this the Indian prime minister can be the appropriate man to lead the charge considering his rapport with global leaders. Modi's best opportunity to put India on the global decision-making map is right at the Paris summit. Will his leadership inspire his negotiators as well as provide a breakthrough in the summit? Only the outcome of the Paris climate summit 2015 will tell. (1)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is all set for a second term in office after winning an absolute majority at the recent elections in India. In his first term, he strived to raise India's profile in the international arena, and one of his creditable contributions in the climate space was his leadership in the formation of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) launched in 2015. In addition, the country continued in its ambitions towards climate change mitigation, adaptation, and finance for various related projects.

Mitigation

At the domestic level, Modi's government has been very keen on eradicating energy poverty by fast tracking India's rural electrification program, and to a large extent, succeeded in it. Modi was elected on a 'development first' plank in the first term, and there are enough signs that there will not be much change in his development agenda moving in to the second term. This raises some critical questions. For one, would Modi's government be able to steer the low-carbon transition within the bounds of social justice? Though there is a spurt in the investments in renewable energy, especially in solar energy, India cannot afford to slow pedal on the dependence of fossil fuel resources at least for the next decade. About 835 million people are still dependent on biomass resources for cooking and heating, this would mean that there will be increased electricity demand, and most of which will come from coal. India has competing demands on land and water resources and these competing demands will have a great impact on deployment of large scale solar and wind energy infrastructure. Secondly, how will the government deal with air pollution, which is another key issue that will have implications on India's climate policy? This needs urgent attention. Seven of the world's 10 worst polluted cities are in India, a new study has revealed. Air pollution is responsible for a staggering number of death and disease in India.

Adaptation

The support for adaptation and resilience related activities has been very limited so far and it is critical that Modi's government focuses on this by providing clear policy guidance with provisions to enhance investments. Climate policy on adaptation and local resilience has to be strengthened. Farmers are one of

hardest-hit communities experiencing the wrath of climate change and extreme weather events for the past few years. Farmers' distress is a matter of huge concern and every effort has to be made to promote resilience at the local level. The timing is perfect as all 29 state governments are currently in the process of reviewing and revising their State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC). This effort needs unstinted support from the central government with clear structures established to monitor and measure progress. Mainstreaming adaptation into policy and practice is vital to the success of SAPCC, which also has enormous significance in light of India's NDC commitments.

Climate Finance

Without adequate climate finance, the proposed NDCs and SAPCCs would not be implementable. Despite considerable progress in reducing poverty, India remains home to a large number of the world's poor population. Further, India's NDC states that at least USD 2.5 trillion (at 2014-15 prices) will be required between 2015 and 2030 to address climate change. Considering India's enormous developmental obligations, domestic resources alone are clearly insufficient to meet the finance needs of climate action. Modi's government has to find ways to generate adequate resources both domestically and internationally to meet the finance needs. Currently, climate investments are much skewed to mitigation activities. While enhancing the allocations made under the National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) there is a critical need to improve the capacities to access climate finance from bilateral and multi-lateral sources, especially the capacities of state agencies. There is also a felt need to create a roadmap to ramp up the private climate investments.

Convening

Though Modi's government revamped the Prime Minister's council on climate change as soon as it assumed office in the first term, this body has not been active, and met infrequently to discuss the pressing climate issues that affect the country. This body should be reinvigorated to be more effective in providing guidance and support, and acting as a catalyst in furthering climate action. As India is a member of the Global Commission on Adaptation, it is imperative that the new government under Modi's leadership should engage more intensively in giving life to the action tracks identified for implementation. With the right leadership, the new cabinet can help shape policies, processes and implementation plans to enable India to achieve its NDCs and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has earned accolades for demonstrating leadership towards environment security and mitigating climate change. Modi himself was recently named among the 2018 "Champions of the Earth" [1] by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) under the "Policy Leadership" category for his "pioneering work in championing the International Solar Alliance and promoting new areas of levels of cooperation on environmental action." Since the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement in 2017, India has emerged as a shining example for other developing nations of "how stronger environment and climate actions could be successfully aligned with development imperatives. The revised pragmatism and reformed insights of the post-2014 government on climate action was evident from the reconstitution of the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change aimed to "revive and streamline the council and set the agenda to deal with climate change. In the COP20 in Lima, and then again in the COP-21 in Paris, the government stressed India's enhanced commitment in the global fight against climate change. Subsequently, India demonstrated its will towards enhanced action in its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) submissions. Indeed, India today is leading the world in the path of green energy transitions. It has embarked on an ambitious goal of achieving renewable power capacity of 227 GWH by the year 2022 and is committed to reducing industrial carbon intensity by 35 percent from 2005 levels. However, the energy sector, followed by agriculture continues to contribute the highest share of carbon emissions, thereby making India third among the world's biggest emitters. Ironically, despite India's consistent improvement in Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) rankings since 2014, its contribution to global emissions has remained steady. In the

coming years, one of the key challenges for the Modi government would be to address the gap and secure more financial as well as technological resources that could further improve the targets. As a potential global leader in climate action, India should assume the responsibility to ensure that countries, especially the developing ones, fully embrace a socially fair and equitable clean energy transition, while benefiting from the economic opportunities offered by such transition. While the Modi government, in the last five years, has invested in modernizing its own energy infrastructure, it must play a key role in mobilizing significant finance for other developing countries that will help in capacity development and meet the basic energy reliability and access needs. India could use its experience to build the capacity of the regions that are in the process of developing market rules and physical infrastructure, and enable them to take advantage of the rapidly changing dynamics in global clean energy markets. India has the opportunity to encourage an energy-efficient development that ensures high penetration of renewable energy and could minimize new demand for oil or coal. India has played a ‘responsible’ and ‘uniting’ role at the Poland negotiations ahead of the COP-24 and in defining the “rule book” for implementation of climate actions. While a consensus has been drawn on measuring, reporting and verifying emissions reduction efforts and contributions to climate finance, there is still the need for finalizing of rules regarding carbon market mechanisms, and preparing a long-term sustainable vision. At the plenary session of the World Economic Forum at Davos in 2018, Modi pushed for the developed world’s commitment to supply requisite technology and finances to developing countries, critical for achieving success in the fight against climate change. Securing the long-term interest of the developing countries and creating a global unified response to climate change would depend on mobilizing adequate finances to implement the respective countries’ mitigation and adaptation efforts. In terms of determining progress in climate action, a majority of measures or outcomes of the global climate negotiations are mitigation-centric. As a result, adaptation measures or even for mechanisms such as the loss-and- damage receives less attention and financial support. These, however, are imperatives for the developing countries. Alongside mitigation efforts, the developing countries must ensure that their development gains are made resilient from the impacts of climate change. India should shape its foreign policy agenda on climate in such a way that enables a paradigm shift from a state-centric model of climate diplomacy, to a de-centralized one that brings increased focus on specific resilience and adaptation needs of various communities in the developing and least developed countries. The international politics of climate change is built on ‘material’ structures, ‘anarchic’ principles and ‘power’ politics. Such a system is harmful for efforts and collective actions for climate change mitigations and adaptation that requires the bridging of financial and technological gaps between countries. In the coming years, India has the opportunity to draw a fresh framework that reflects contextual efforts at local, regional and national levels on the projected risks and policy requirements. Such a framework should be geared towards securing the interests and voices of the most affected communities. Ensuring a strong bottomup policy framework and highlighting it in the international stage can transform the nature of global climate politics. While such a policy pathway is in progress through the Paris Agreement, however, there is a need for more concerted approach to bolster and sustain the efforts. As a country leading the global climate governance, India in the coming years must create frameworks for the rest of the developing economies to foster climate compatible development, and lead energy transitions while ensuring reduced socio-economic disparities and technological divide. (2)

India sought to make a virtue of its ‘inclusive growth’ development model based on a ‘rightsbased’ economic model. The normative model of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government is however yet to be formulated distinctly. Modi and his other key lieutenants like former party president and current Home Minister Amit Shah have repeatedly used the phrase ‘*vishwa guru*’ (world teacher) as the social ambition of India. Minor expressions of this vision have been ideas like the propagation of the International Day of Yoga at the United Nations. But beyond such efforts, a holistic formulation of a new normative agenda is yet to emerge. Scholars have argued that while Modi draws his considerable personal efforts at foreign relations inspired by Swami Vivekananda, the 19th century Hindu monk who advocated *karma yoga* or the virtue of well-meaning action and activity, the idea of karma yoga is yet to be developed into one or more pivotal sectoral ideas for policy imperatives. Modi has attempted to put forth a normative view, of a kind, has been in his connecting India’s environmental policy to lessons from ancient Hindu texts like the

Vedas and by using material from these texts to explain India's leadership stance on climate change at COP21 (Conference of Parties) in Paris in 2011. The announcement for an income tax rebate for customers of electronic vehicles in the first budget of the second term of the Modi government is the other indication of India trying to lead the way in adopting measures against climate change with an aim to convert most vehicles to electric-powered by 2030 and with an already achieved target of producing the world's cheapest solar power]. Under Modi's watch, latest assessments suggest that the country might exceed its own targets of replacing fossil fuel use with clean energy by 2030. Under current assessments, renewable energy might provide half of India's energy needs by 2030, up from the 40% target set by Modi. India has seven of the top ten most polluted cities in the world and it is one of the most water-stressed countries – its major cities are already running out of water. If Modi can show significant transformation in fighting climate change, curbing pollution and transforming the energy habits of 1.3 billion people, he would have created a new normative agenda that he can own. There are now clear and unambiguous indications that that is the Indian prime minister's aim. (3)

Conclusion

India's foreign policy has shifted in decisive ways under the Modi administration. In the effort to reinforce its global role, India has tended to opt for geo-economic choices rather than merely building up military power. Climate actions have become integrated as a part of such a geo-economic approach. Climate policy has not only been incorporated into the geostrategic discourse but has provided one way for India to reinforce its role as a globally responsible actor and to promote its international influence. In the Indian case, climate policy has primarily resulted in a cooperative geo-economic strategy. The new cooperative attitude in climate negotiations and the establishment of the International Solar Alliance have provided a route to enhanced partnerships and a rising global profile, which also enables India to strengthen its influence in developing countries through climate financing and other kinds of support for development. The cooperative approach makes sense from the point of view of India's wider foreign policy objective of establishing itself as a globally responsible actor. A more competitive strategy might turn against itself by prompting opposing reactions from counterparts. The Indian case also gives rise to reactions from other global actors.

Climate change is not an overarching issue in India's geo-economic policy, but has been one area where its strategic choices become visible. With regard to the geo-economic analysis of climate change, the Indian case shows that climate change and its prevention can generate cooperation between countries and global actors. This is relevant especially with regard to climate security literature, where the focus is usually on the potential for conflict. A geoeconomic analysis does not exclude the conflict scenario but goes beyond to reveal a range of economic and security impacts that have various consequences for international relations, including cooperation. The geo-economic approach thus widens the scope for analyzing the implications of climate change and its prevention. Moreover, it provides tools with which to examine the contexts and choices that lead to certain policy outcomes. These should be of geostrategic interest to all countries, not only to avert potential threats but also to take advantage of new opportunities. Through such emerging interactions, climate change may contribute to shifts in global power relations. There is a clear need, therefore, for further research on both the concept as well as concrete cases of the geo-economics of climate change.

Notes and References

- (1) Hindustan Times, 27 September 2018.
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- (3) Ian Hall (2017), Narendra Modi and India's normative power, *International Affairs*, 93:1, p. 129.