

India is indeed walking the green talk

Even with all its challenges, the country is setting a global example in meeting its Nationally Determined Contributions



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Did you know that even at the fifth anniversary of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (December 2020), India was the only G20 nation compliant with the agreement? Or that the country has been ranked within the top 10 for two years consecutively in the Climate Change Performance Index, released by an independent international organisation that evaluates the performance of countries emitting 90%+ of global greenhouse gases (GHGs)? Or that the Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA) scheme is the world's largest zero-subsidy LED bulb programme for domestic consumers?

A world comparison needed

Despite these accomplishments, global pressures are intensifying on India to commit more towards the Conference of the Parties (COP26), scheduled for November 2021 in Glasgow. Early this year, the COP26 President, Alok Sharma, and the United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, visited India. In July, the U.S. called out to every significant economy for committing to a meaningful reduction by 2030.

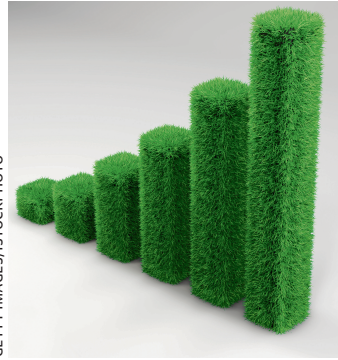
That brings us to the question. Is it fair to apply pressure on India

to raise its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) committed in the Paris Agreement? We can attempt to answer the question by comparing the achievements of other countries *vis-à-vis* India's performance, given that climate change is a global public good and there is a free-rider problem – not much incentive for countries to contribute their fair share since they can enjoy benefits even otherwise.

Let us first gather the historical perspective. Examining World Bank data for CO₂ emissions (metric tons per capita) over two decades since the Kyoto protocol informs that at the current rate, both China and the U.S. could emit five times more than India in 2030. The U.K.'s emission levels could be more than 1.5 times that of India. Brazil, with its dense forests, may end up at similar levels.

On China and the U.S.

Among recent efforts, last year, China, the world's largest GHG emitter, joined the 'race to zero' and targets carbon neutrality by 2060. Interestingly, it hopes to peak CO₂ emissions by 2030 for bending the emissions curve. The Climate Action Tracker, an independent scientific analysis tracking governments' actions, also expressed its concern stating, "Most worryingly, China remains committed to supporting the coal industry while the rest of the world experiences a decline, and is now home to half of the world's coal capacity." Recently, the U.S. rejoined the Paris Agreement and commit-



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ted to reducing emissions by 50%-52% in 2030 and reaching net-zero emissions economy-wide by 2050. While they re-energise their fight on climate change, legislation may not be straightforward, given the Democrats' strength in Congress. Such ambitions will also require much more near-term investment than even the U.S. President Joe Biden's \$2.3 trillion infrastructure package.

France and Australia

The French government, during the novel coronavirus pandemic, set green conditions for bailing out its aviation industry. However, the analysts say that no baseline for reducing emissions from domestic flights was fixed, and it is unclear what measures were adopted to promote rail for domestic travel.

An Australian Prime Minister, in 2018, lost his chair on a proposal to address climate change through an emissions-reduction target. The complicated domestic politics prevented them from addressing the problem, despite the country being vulnerable, and stretches of

the famous Great Barrier Reef having died in recent years. It was, at least, the third instance in Australia when climate issues brought down its Prime Minister. It illustrates how difficult it is for governments to develop policies to mitigate climate change.

Walking it like talking it

In comparison, with all its challenges, India is on track (as reports/documents show) to meet and exceed the NDC commitment to achieve 40% electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based sources by 2030; this share is 38.18% (November 2020). Similarly, against the voluntary declaration for reducing the emission intensity of GDP by 20%-25% by 2020, India has reduced it by 24% between 2005-2016. More importantly, we achieved these targets with around 2% out of the U.S.\$100 billion committed to developing nations in Copenhagen (2009), realised by 2015.

As part of its mitigation efforts, India is implementing one of the most extensive renewable energy expansion programmes to achieve 175 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2022 and 450 GW by 2030. India has also coupled its post-pandemic revival with environmental protection. As part of the fiscal stimulus, the Government announced several green measures, including a \$26.5-billion investment in biogas and cleaner fuels, \$3.5 billion in incentives for producing efficient solar photovoltaic (PV) and advanced chemistry cell battery, and \$780

million towards an afforestation programme.

Some activists feel that India needs to demonstrate action at the global level. However, we need to appreciate that among many steps, India provided leadership for setting up the International Solar Alliance, a coalition of solar-resource-rich countries, and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, a partnership of governments, United Nations agencies, multilateral development banks, the private sector, and knowledge institutions.

The developed nations could also intensify their pressure especially on jurisdictions not meeting the Paris Agreement goals. At this stage, India can always share independent international assessments, acknowledging that our climate action is among the few compatible with the well-below 2°C warming target. India's contribution to global emissions is well below its equitable share of the worldwide carbon budget by any equity criterion.

To sum up, India has indeed walked the talk. Other countries must deliver on their promises early and demonstrate tangible results ahead of COP26. In any case, we can always *suo motu* revise the NDC for the first stocktake (2023) while simultaneously protecting our interests. The responsibility of sustaining the entire planet does not rest on a few countries; everyone has to act.

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