

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

November 2021



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

Year 12

Issue 8

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 12

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

– The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

GLASGOW CLIMATE CONFERENCE AND INDIA'S POSITION

Climate change has become one of the most potent and all-encompassing challenges facing humanity. Referring to the aggregate changes in weather patterns over a long time period, this phenomenon has triggered impacts in nearly all areas of the environment, spawning pollution, heat-waves, temperature extremes, changes in monsoon patterns, sea-level rise due to global warming, destruction of existing species and creation of new, invasive species, adverse impacts on human health and immense costs to existing socio-economic systems.

It is now established that the climate change that we are witnessing today has been mainly caused due to human destruction of the environment rather than due to natural changes in the earth's climate. As per the latest scientific assessments of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), of the 1.1 degrees Celsius global warming seen since the pre-industrial era, less than 0.1 degrees Celsius has been contributed by natural factors.

Global negotiations on climate change have sought to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius – a threshold or 'tipping point' whose transgression would lead to dire consequences for humanity. Since 2015, this threshold has been informally revised to 1.5 degrees Celsius. However, at the rate at which the world is going, we are not on track to keep global warming below this threshold. IPCC assessments establish the fast-deteriorating climatic scenarios even if the world manages to limit global warming to a threshold of 1.5 degree Celsius.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS – PRESENT AND PREDICTED

It is predicted that the earth is likely to cross the 1.5C threshold of global warming by 2040 and average global temperatures could rise by 2.7C by the end of this century as compared to 1850-1900. Some of the large-scale predicted impacts of climate change are brought home by the latest assessments of IPCC which are as follows –

First, weather extremes – of both heat waves and cold waves – are likely to become a more common event even if the world limits global warming to 1.5C, with heatwaves that occurred once in every half-century occurring every decade and with severe droughts happening almost twice as often. Every additional 0.5C rise in temperature will increase the intensity and frequency of heatwaves, precipitation and droughts.

Second, sea levels have risen nearly 25 centimeters (9.8 inches) in the last 140 years. Around one-third of that increase happened in the last 25 years alone (Deutsche Welle 2021). Sea-level rise (SLR) will continue even if global warming is limited to 1.5C, with average sea level rising to 2 to 3 meters, due to melting of polar ice sheets and expansion of warming ocean water. ***Extreme coastal surges that occurred once-in-a-century are expected to occur once a year by 2100.*** About 50% of the SLR has occurred due to thermal expansion.

Third, the capacity of land and oceans to absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂) will decrease, with CO₂ remaining in the atmosphere. Over the last six decades, land and oceans have absorbed almost 56% of carbon dioxide emissions. As is already

happening in some cases, land sinks may become net emitters of CO₂ instead of being sinks, leading to runaway warming.

Fourth, every additional 0.5°C of warming will increase hot extremes, extreme precipitation and drought, while heat extremes have increased.

The gravity of the situation is borne out by the fact that in 2019, atmospheric CO₂ concentrations were higher than at any time *in at least 2 million years*, and concentrations of methane and nitrous oxide were higher than at any time in the last 800,000 years. The world has depleted 86% of the global carbon space¹ already (IPCC 2021).

THE FAILED TRAJECTORY OF CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS

The irrefutable reality of climate change facing us today has lent urgency to the need to undertake some form of collective global action to tackle climate change. The key political and decision-making platform for such action has been the intergovernmental climate negotiations that have been taking place since the 1990s, under the aegis of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC was formed in 1992 as an outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro. The UNFCCC charter stipulated the goal of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius as the threshold for avoiding catastrophic climate change.

¹Global carbon space refers to the amount of carbon that can be released into the atmosphere by 2100 so that the rise in global temperature can be capped at a given level of temperature threshold viz. 2 degree Celsius.

The formation of UNFCCC was preceded by a wave of environmental activity at the global level during the decades of 1970s and 1980s. These were the decades when the developed countries, having reached peak levels of economic development, were beginning to turn their focus on the environment. The Stockholm conference of 1972 saw a clash between developed and developing countries, where developing countries argued that they neither have the technology nor the financial resources or luxury to sacrifice socio-economic goals like poverty alleviation and distribution at the altar of environmental protection. Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had famously made the statement that poverty is the worst form of pollution.

However, developed countries which had modernized over two centuries at the cost of the environment were neither willing to materially help the developing countries and nor were they willing to shoulder the greater financial burden of environmental protection. During the decade of 1980s, the focus began to shift from general environmental issues to the more specific area of climate change. This was especially so after the successful negotiations over and ratification of the Montreal Protocol to protect the ozone layer during 1987-89. Countries assumed that climate change negotiations would also follow a similarly smooth cooperative path. In 1988, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was formed. It was an inter-country official expert body, mainly dominated by Western countries. The kind of technical capability, technology, science and knowledge required to deal with a specialized area like climate change was possessed by developed countries. As a result, they could authoritatively dictate what a 'climate emergency' looks like.

When UNFCCC was formed in 1992 and subsequent inter-governmental climate negotiations began under the aegis of a UNFCCC mechanism called Conference of Parties (COP), the developed countries weaponized their scientific expertise on climate change to dictate the terms of climate negotiations. They argued that the impending climate emergency called for an immediate collaborative response. This undemocratic and technocratic approach was resisted by the developing countries. The heavy economic trade-offs that such an approach involved were very real for the developing and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), where millions still languished in poverty, had no access to electricity, had underdeveloped infrastructure, had majorly rural population and had only just begun to advance in emissions-intensive but necessary industries like defence, space, etc. At this point, to yield to the developed country bogey of climate change was akin to sacrificing not only their developmental and economic goals but also compromising core areas of national interest.

India took the lead in pushing back. *The Indian representative famously made the distinction between the necessary 'survival emissions' of the poor and developing countries and the 'luxury emissions' of the developed world, arguing that it was the latter that needed to be heavily cut down. India also argued that the developed countries owed an ecological 'debt' to the developing world which they had colonized and looted to achieve their prosperity, besides owing an 'atmospheric debt' for their unabated historical emissions due to which the problem of climate change was created in the first place.* China, Brazil and other developing countries also firmly stood by the Indian approach.

The developing countries demanded that not only the

developed countries cut down or mitigate their emissions in view of their historical responsibilities but also compensate the developing countries by providing technology (by relaxing the devious intellectual property patents regime) and finance (such as finance for adapting to climate change, facing adverse impacts etc.). *Thus, developing countries called this approach 'climate justice' on the basis of which any future global climate regime should be formed. Till recently, PM Modi of India has emphasized on 'climate justice'. This has remained India's consistent position since the last three decades, albeit with increasing levels of flexibility and accommodation and much less of the suspicion seen earlier*². Due to the strong developing country pushback since the 1990s, the debates at UNFCCC have been dominated by them, although concrete outcomes have perpetually remained stuck due to the virulent and obstinate face-off between developed and developing countries.

With this perpetual divide between developed and developing countries, the key area of debate became more about how to fairly apportion the costs of dealing with climate change among different countries, rather than addressing the impending climate emergency. It was on the basis of this that the selfish and unworkably inefficient foundations of the UNFCCC were also created. The three main arguments advanced by developing countries have formed the three main pillars of the UNFCCC climate regime. These core UNFCCC principles are –

²A key reason for Indian accommodation of the West on the issue of climate change, especially since 2007 and mainly after 2015, is due to India's own economic rise and due to India's closer alliance with the US and other western countries. These changes in foreign policy also reflected commensurately in India's position over the years, although the basic argument has remained the same.

- First, developed countries have been historical emitters and should, therefore, bear the *‘historical responsibility’* of contributing to climate change mitigation in the present. Since developing countries did not cause emissions that lead to climate change, they should not bear the same responsibility.
- Second, developing countries also have low present per capita emissions and low cumulative historical emissions, making it inequitable to place costs of climate mitigation on them. This should be followed in the interest of *‘equity’*.
- Third, developing countries also insisted that outcomes of climate negotiations should be on the basis of *‘Common But Differentiated Responsibilities & Respective Capabilities’* (CBDR&RC). According to this principle, different capabilities and differing responsibilities of individual countries should be taken into account in addressing climate change. Since developed countries have more financial and technological capabilities, they are called upon to do much more to address climate change.

These three principles – historical responsibility, equity and CBDR&RC – have been the mainstay of the UNFCCC since its formation. Invariably, it is the debate over the interpretation of these principles and their practical application – in terms of climate finance, technology and loss & damage compensations owed by developed countries – that has led to a perpetual confrontation between developed and developing countries at successive climate change conferences.

The first climate change conference – also known as the Conference of Parties (COP) – was held in Berlin in 1995. At COP 1, the main issue was the extent to which countries should have stringent climate change targets and whether developed

or developing countries should shoulder the responsibility of meeting these targets.

At COP 3 in Japan, it was decided that stringent, mandatory targets should be imposed so as to lead to more effective action on climate change. At the behest of developing countries, such mandatory targets were imposed only on developed countries, along with a set of market-based mechanisms (such as carbon trading and offsets, joint implementation and clean development mechanism)³ to help them implement these targets. This regime was known as the famous ‘Kyoto Protocol’ which came into force in 2005. Its first commitment/implementation period was between 2008-2012 and the second one was between 2012-2020. It mandated that 5.2% emissions reduction on an average was to be achieved by developed countries relative to their 1990 emission levels by the end of the first commitment period.

Expectedly, the Protocol was toothless and its implementation riddled with domestic-level corruption. Its emissions reduction target was regarded as a vastly insufficient target to meet the threshold of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. Moreover, the Protocol also excluded from its ambit hefty emissions from shipping and aviation. It was also affected by the US’s refusal to participate in the Protocol and by Canada’s withdrawal from it in 2011, rendering it ineffective for all practical purposes. Its actual implementation was also based less on any serious action to address climate change and more

³Under the Clean Development Mechanism, developed country emitters could fund green projects in developing countries in order to meet their emissions reductions targets. Many such projects were a spectacular failure, running into controversies over corruption, usurpation of land etc.

on heavy reliance on carbon trading and offsets, often leading to manipulations in the accounting of emissions, rise in imported emissions and an overall failure of carbon markets.

After 2008, with the evident failure of the Kyoto Protocol, countries began to search for a workable alternative. As a result, at COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009, it was decided that the global climate regime should no longer be based on strict, top-down targets for developed countries (as was the case in Kyoto Protocol), but should be based on voluntary targets submitted by all countries as per their domestic economic circumstances. This approach was bolstered in successive climate change conferences leading up to the significant COP 21 at Paris in 2015, wherein countries decided to submit their individual climate action plans also known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). It was also decided – first at COP 15 and later affirmed at COP 21 – that developed countries would provide climate finance to the developing countries to the tune of USD 100 billion every year till 2020.

THE JOURNEY FROM PARIS TO GLASGOW

At COP 21 in Paris, the emergency of climate change facing humanity was reinforced with much more vigour compared to the previous years. Climate negotiations had also changed in their tenor. Small island countries – which faced the threat of imminent submergence with the rise in sea levels – were the most vocal about undertaking more ambitious climate action with all countries contributing, while developing countries like India, Brazil and China sought more space and were insistent that developed countries should bear the burden of mitigating climate change.

By the time of the Paris Agreement, it was widely accepted

that humanity had reached such a phase that global warming should ideally be kept below 1.5 degrees Celsius in order to avoid the catastrophic effects of climate change. This was bolstered by subsequent reports released by IPCC in 2018 and in mid-2021 about the dire impacts of climate change even if we manage to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Between 2020-2021, UNFCCC also released its analysis of updated NDCs submitted by individual countries, stating that none of these actions would together be sufficient to keep global warming in check even if all the stated commitments in the NDCs are met. To keep the target within reach, global emissions would need to be reduced by 45% from 2010 levels by 2030. ***The current national pledges of countries are on course to see global warming between 2.5C and 2.7C by the end of the century – much higher than the threshold decided under UNFCCC.***

Many countries – like India, China, the US, Russia, etc. – did not submit revised NDCs at all. Indeed, prior to Biden’s presidency, the US – under Trump – even withdrew from the Paris Agreement, saying that the present climate regime was unfair towards rich countries.

The Paris Agreement itself – in many of its aspects – remained non-operationalized, marked by continuous bargaining between countries over who should commit to more action against climate change. ***In essence, the global climate regime has remained toothless, absorbed in intricate technicalities and unable to deliver concrete action. At every point, the economic costs of climate action have proven to be a hindrance to global negotiations.*** That is why neither the strict Kyoto Protocol and nor the more flexible Paris Agreement have been able to really deliver.

THE OUTCOMES AT GLASGOW

Prior to the Glasgow climate change conference held recently, the developed countries have, for months, tried to build up pressure to reach some kind of an ambitious agreement. US's Special Envoy for Climate Change, John Kerry's forays around the world all summer have been mainly for this purpose, as have been UK's attempts at doing the same. In particular, the attention has been on big developing countries and amongst the largest present emitters like India and China to commit to more ambitious action.

The main tool for achieving this ambition has been the discourse around Net Zero Emissions (NZE) or emissions neutrality and about pressurizing countries to adopt more ambitious climate change domestic targets. Under an NZE regime, the amount of greenhouse gases emitted equals the amount removed from the atmosphere through various technologies of carbon removal or capture and through forestation programmes.

The outcomes of the Glasgow conference reflect some of the headway made in this regard, although most of the conference, like previous climate negotiations, have been loud on rhetoric and mute on substance. The key outcomes of Glasgow have been listed in the form of the 'Glasgow Climate Pact'. The following are the significant outcomes –

First, it is for the first time that any climate change outcome document makes a reference to mitigating the use of coal and fossil fuels. The Glasgow Pact talks about the 'phase down' of coal and of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. The point saw disagreements between developed and developing countries,

as the initial draft agreement, at the behest of developed countries, made a reference to ‘phase out’ of coal, which developing countries, like India and China, see as critical to their economies. The developing countries also perceived that the developed countries displayed a lack of sincerity and equity while talking about mitigating fossil fuel use, as fossil fuels like oil and gas are more important to their economies as compared to coal.

Second, new individual commitments were made. The majority of countries – more than 130 – declared the year by which they would achieve NZE, with most rich countries committing to the mid-century or 2050 target. China has announced to achieve NZE by 2060. India – while resolutely against the idea of NZE earlier – made a surprise announcement during the conference to achieve NZE by 2070.

In addition, countries also committed to revised national ambitious targets. The current pledges are of little use as they will not be able to avert serious global warming.

Third, the Glasgow conference saw some main pledges being signed by countries viz.

- **Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use** – It aims to conserve and restore forests by 2030 and facilitate policies to keep global temperature rise below 2C. Deforestation is responsible for 2.2% of the net global carbon emissions (Ritchie and Roser 2020). It has been signed by more than 140 countries and is based on a \$19.2 billion pledge. The signatory countries represent nearly 90% of the global forest area (Koshy, 2021). Major countries like Russia, China, Brazil, European Union (EU), the US, UK and Japan are party to it.

However, India – with its domestic target of having a third of its area under forest and tree cover from the present 24.5% (PIB 2019), and creating a carbon sink for absorbing 2.5-3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide by 2030 – did not sign this pledge. India has not given any official reason for abstaining. However, the country is in the process of bringing about changes in its forest laws so as to promote commercial plantations and infrastructure development on forest land.

- **Global Coal Pledge and Clean Power Transition Agreement** – The coal pledge – signed by more than 40 countries – which was based on the commitment to phase out coal use and the clean power transition agreement – signed by 23 countries – stated that there will be no new construction of power plants or permits issued for the same. Major international banks also committed to stop financing new coal power plants. However, the pledge also provided some flexibility by stating that new coal-fired power plants would be allowed to be built if they are able to capture and store their carbon emissions – an expensive technology which is mostly rare and inaccessible.

| Country | Coal Consumption (%) |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| China | 54 |
| India | 12 |
| US | 6 |
| Japan | 3 |

None of the major coal producers and consumers signed this pledge, such as India, China, US, and Australia which account for nearly three quarters of coal consumption. EU, Canada and UK have signed this pledge.

- **Global Methane Pledge** – Methane is 25 times more potent gas than carbon dioxide in contributing to global warming. It also accounts for a fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions. In contrast to carbon dioxide which has ‘stock’ emissions that stay in the atmosphere for 100-1000 years, methane emissions are short-lived for just 12 years. However, due to the higher potency of methane, addressing its emissions would have a more immediate impact on the global emissions trajectory (Koshy 2021). This pledge was spearheaded by the US and the EU. It aims to reduce global methane emissions by at least 30% from 2020 levels by 2030. More than 100 countries have signed this pledge. However, the top emitters of methane – China, Russia, and India – did not sign the pledge. India regards the pledge as a way for developed countries to take a shortcut by making an impact in emissions reductions by bypassing the more serious carbon dioxide emissions (Rajya Sabha 2021).

India is the fourth-largest emitter – with methane emissions accounting for 14.4% of India’s total greenhouse gas emissions – of methane, with its methane emissions mainly coming from agriculture and dairy, waste-disposal and rural economy. This is a sector which India has excluded out of its pre-2020 pledges and Paris pledges. The two main sources of methane are enteric fermentation and paddy cultivation which impact the livelihood of small farmers, as opposed to the industry-dominated agriculture of advanced countries (Rajya Sabha 2021). India regards these as necessary or ‘survival’ emissions of the poor population, arguing that it is exploring ways to deploy technology for methane capture and conversion to biogas.

- **China-US Climate Declaration** – On the sidelines of COP26, a joint declaration was reached between US and China.

The agreement seeks a reduction in methane emissions, tackling deforestation, and regulating decarbonisation. It is vague and does not specify any concrete commitments or road-map to achieve its objectives.

- Cooperation on green technology – More than 40 countries agreed on a plan led by the UK to speed up affordable, clean technology by 2030 including zero-emissions vehicles.

- Farming and agriculture – 45 countries pledged to make farming more sustainable and invest in green agricultural practices. The UK aims for 75% of farmers to adopt low-carbon practices by 2030.

- Clydebank Declaration – This relates to creating zero-emission maritime shipping routes and was signed by 22 countries.

Fourth, the Glasgow pact noted that rich countries had failed to commit the climate finance of \$100 billion a year as promised in 2009. A new commitment was made that developed countries would double the finance provided for climate adaptation from 2019 levels by 2025. This would raise the adaptation funding to \$40 billion annually compared to \$20 billion in 2019.

Fifth, very little could be agreed on ‘loss & damage’ which has been a key area of concern for developing countries and vulnerable island states. It was only agreed to convene a dialogue on this issue between 2022 to 2024. Nothing concrete was seen in this area.

Sixth, rules for carbon trading – pending since the 2015 Paris Agreement – were finalized. The first sticking point was

the developing country's demand that extra carbon credits leftover from the past – from the time of Kyoto Protocol – should be allowed to be carried forward and traded. This was agreed to up to the cut-off year of 2013. The main beneficiary of these legacy credits has been India, where carbon trading took place on a large scale. The second sticking demand – mainly of developed countries – was that systems should ensure that there is no double-counting of emissions.

CLIMATE JUSTICE VERSUS CLIMATE ACTION: HISTORICAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMISSIONS

The Glasgow climate conference has gone the way of previous climate conferences. *From the outcomes it is clear that the conference delivers a breather to self-congratulatory decision-makers and has nothing concrete in store to mitigate or even adapt to climate change. The climate crisis can be borne out by the fact that the world has little more than 10 years of carbon budget – or atmospheric space to emit – left to exhaust. Since 1850, humans have emitted around 2500 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, depleting nearly 86% of the global carbon budget. Presently, if we have to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius, we have only around 400 Gt tonnes of carbon budget left, which will be exhausted in a decade* (DTE 2021).

At Glasgow, the developed countries stressed the idea of NZE as a way to address climate change. However, achieving NZE by 2050 or later is not only a far-off target, but countries do not have an immediate mitigation schedule to explain how they plan to reduce emissions. Given the constraints on atmospheric space, NZE should ideally be reached by 2039, if the current rate of global emissions of 42 Gt of carbon dioxide

equivalent is taken (Jayaraman and Kanitkar 2021). The mid-century goals belie this.

There is also little clarity on the modalities to achieve NZE which have not been agreed upon and are likely to be contentious, but without them these goals would yield little returns. These modalities revolve around how to achieve NZE – by emissions reduction, absorption of emissions by more plantations or removal of carbon from the atmosphere or through carbon offsets trading.

Emissions reduction would involve stringent mitigation actions in keeping with fairness and equity; removal and absorption of emissions are essentially based on largely untested and highly expensive carbon removal technologies and on carbon sequestration methods like forestation which are not without issues regarding availability of land, type of plantations, while carbon offsets offer a way for countries to engage in emissions trading to meet mitigation targets contributing towards NZE. Carbon offsets trading would entail that emitters would simply balance or offset their net emissions through trading without actually reducing the carbon released by them into the atmosphere. Without substantive mitigation and by focusing only on balancing net emissions, NZE would only be achieved in a technical sense without helping to check global warming in real terms.

In other words, as Sagar, et al. (2021) have explained, ***“The use of “net” zero potentially allows countries to keep emitting today while relying on yet-to-be-developed and costly technologies to absorb emissions tomorrow. Its focus on long-term targets displaces attention from meaningful short-term actions that are credible and accountable.”*** Indeed, NZE provides a way for

countries to achieve carbon neutrality even at the current level of emissions or even by increasing emissions and provides relief to developed countries whose burden would be shared globally (Sinha 2021).

The vagueness of NZE has been the reason why India had resolutely been opposing it till recently. It neither assures effective action and also takes away from concrete issues of developed country commitments to address climate change. The contention of developing countries – at which every climate change conference since 1992 invariably gets stuck – is that this remaining carbon budget needs to be divided fairly.

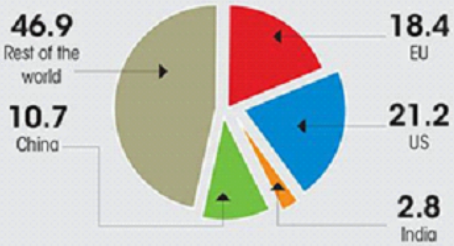
Around 70-80% of the carbon space has already been consumed by mainly developed countries since 1850, and even China is fast gathering pace to meet the developed countries' emission levels (Gopalakrishnan and Subramanian 2019). Thus, by contributing over 60% of global cumulative emissions, with just one-fourth of the global population, North America and Europe are responsible for nearly 970 billion tonnes of carbon emissions (Sanwal 2021).

The entire gamut of rich countries, with just 12% of the world's population, is responsible for over 50% of the cumulative greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere since 1850, and the "main consequence of the European so-called Industrial Revolution was not only colonial conquest but also the environmental calamities we witness today. The Europeans called their savagery "modernity", the rest of us called it "colonialism", but its overreaching effect on the planet we all live on was the ongoing climate crisis" (Dabashi 2021).

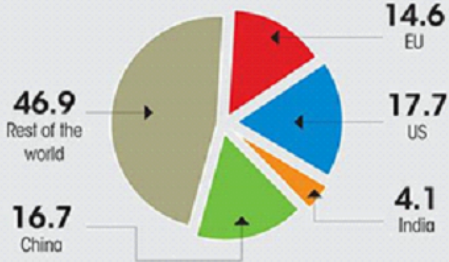
In terms of historical responsibility, let us see the cumulative emissions till recently.

Share in CO₂ emissions (%)

1850-2011



1850-2030



Source: Centre for Science and Environment

In 2018, the US, with 4.3% of the world population has been responsible for 25 per cent of cumulative emissions since 1850, while the EU with 6.8 per cent of the population has been responsible for 18.4 per cent. India, with 17.8 per cent of the population, has been responsible for only 2.8 per cent, while China, with 18.3 per cent of the world's population has been responsible for 10.7 per cent (Gopalakrishnan and Subramanian 2019). It is also projected that by 2030, this inequity will remain, with a lion's share of carbon budget being cornered by developed countries and China.

INDIA TAKES THE LEAD – CLIMATE AMBITION AND FINANCE

Despite the debate over the fair apportioning of the remaining limited carbon budget and the emissions space occupied by developed countries and China, India did not take a recalcitrant stand in COP 26 and presented a far-reaching vision, even as it continued to remind the developed countries of the historical responsibility that they owed to the world.

India's announcements at COP26 Summit by PM Modi marked one of the key unexpected watershed moments of the Glasgow conference. The PM highlighted India's achievements in the field of climate action. India is at number four in the world in installed renewable energy capacity and its non-fossil fuel energy has increased by more than 25% in the last 7 years (PIB 2021). India's renewable energy capacity (including large hydro) is about 149.57 GW which is about 38.3% of the country's total installed electricity capacity, and non-fossil-fuel electricity capacity is 156.35 GW, which is around 40% of the total installed capacity (Lok Sabha 2021). Indian railways had announced the target of reaching NZE by 2030, which is

expected to lead to an estimated reduction of 60 million tonnes of emissions annually (PIB 2021).

The PM also announced new climate commitments for India in the form of the five nectar elements or ‘Panchamrit’:

First, India will reach its non-fossil energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030.

Second, India will meet 50 percent of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030.

Third, India will reduce the total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes annually by 2030.

Fourth, by 2030, India will reduce the emissions intensity⁴ of its economy by a little less than 45 percent.

Fifth, by the year 2070, India will achieve the target of Net Zero. These ‘panchamrits’ will be an unprecedented contribution of India to climate action (PIB 2021).

Interpreting the Targets:

PM Modi delivered his speech in Hindi and the term ‘energy’ has been used in the translation of his speech, but given the scale of the targets promised, it is likely that the right term is ‘electricity’ (Powell and Sati 2021).

First, India’s present installed capacity of non-fossil energy for electricity generation is 134 GW. According to one of the projection scenarios by Central Electricity Authority (CEA), this will be 522 GW by 2030, under the following scenario:

⁴Emission intensity is defined as the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions emitted for every unit of GDP.

| | Installed capacity (GW) in 2019 | % of generation in 2019 | Installed capacity (GW) in 2030 | % of generation in 2030 |
|--------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Coal and gas | 228 | 80 | 282 | 32 |
| Hydro | 45 | 10.1 | 61 | 8 |
| Renewable | 82.5 | 9.2 | 455 | 56 |
| Nuclear | 6.7 | 2.7 | 19 | 5 |

Source: Narain (2021)

Second, meeting 50% of the country's energy/electricity requirements from Renewable Energy by 2030 would mean – in case of electricity – increasing renewable energy consumption from the current 10-12% of power generation (at 102 GW of renewable energy capacity as of 2021) by five times in the next 9 years. If hydro and nuclear are also included in renewables besides solar and wind, then India's current RE installed capacity is about 150 GW, which is 40% of India's total power capacity (Raghunandan 2021). As per CEA, India's power requirement in 2030 would be 2518 Billion Units of electricity. To meet this with 50% installed capacity coming from renewables by 2030 would mean increasing renewable capacity to 630 GW (including hydro) (Narain 2021).

India also plans to restrict coal. Presently, 60 GW of coal thermal power is planned and under construction. India's projected coal capacity will be 266 GW by 2030 – an addition of 38 GW, which would be included in what is planned (Narain 2021). India does not plan to invest in coal beyond this.

Third, reducing total carbon emissions by 1 billion tonnes by 2030 in absolute terms would mean a reduction of 24% based on current projections of India's emissions by 2030. India's present emissions are 2.44 billion tonnes and projected emissions by 2030 are 4.02 billion tonnes (under a business-as-usual scenario), excluding emissions from land use (CAT 2021). A reduction of 1 billion tonnes by 2030 would mean bringing 2030 emissions down to 3.02 billion tonnes.

Fourth, a reduction in the carbon intensity of the economy – emissions per unit of the GDP – by 45% by 2030 would mean working on carbon-intensive sectors such as transport, cement, and iron and steel, among others. India has already achieved a 28% reduction in its emissions intensity by 2020 compared to 2015 (GoI 2020), and is well on the path to achieving a 40% reduction in emissions intensity by 2030 (Narain 2021).

Fifth, achieving Net Zero Emissions by 2070 will be challenging without the provision of hefty climate finance, likely to the tune of USD 10 trillion, in order to decarbonize sectors like power, industry and transport (CEEW 2021). According to estimates, “India's total installed solar power capacity would need to increase to over 5,600 gigawatts to achieve net-zero by 2070...usage of coal, especially for power generation, would need to drop by 99% by 2060, for India to achieve net-zero by 2070...consumption of crude oil, across sectors, would need to peak by 2050 and fall substantially by 90% between 2050 and 2070. Green hydrogen could contribute 19% of the total energy needs of the industrial sector” (Chaturvedi and Malyan 2021).

A key part of meeting the NZE target could be through

reforestation – whose global pledge India did not sign. Forests and trees act as natural carbon sinks for absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. However, the definitions of plantations and forests continue to be disputed leading to wide divergence in estimates. Plantations do not sequester carbon as effectively as forests. Presently, India’s forest and tree cover can absorb 29.62 billion tonnes CO₂eq. This is projected to increase to 31.87 billion tonnes CO₂eq by 2030 (FSI 2019). But it requires an immense amount of finance. According to some estimates, at least 60,000 crores a year is needed to achieve 2.5–3.0 billion tonnes of CO₂eq sequestration – as committed by India under the Paris Agreement of 2015 – through additional forest and tree cover and currently we are facing an 82% gap in that funding (Mathur, et al. 2021).

Mapping India’s Climate Action:

Policies:

- National Action Plan on Climate Change formulated in 2008.
- National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) for climate adaptation in vulnerable states and Union Territories.
- India’s pledge under UNFCCC to reduce emissions intensity of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 20-25% from 2005 levels by 2020.
- India’s pledges to UNFCCC under Paris Agreement in 2015, viz.,
 - > To reduce the emissions intensity of GDP by 33 to 35% by 2030 from 2005 level,

- > To achieve about 40% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy resources by 2030,
- > To create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

Achievements:

- Reduction in emissions intensity of GDP by 28% between 2005 and 2020.
- India is currently at number four in the world in installed renewable energy capacity.
- India's non-fossil fuel energy has increased by more than 25% in the last 7 years, reaching 40% of India's energy mix.

International mobilizations:

- International Solar Alliance (ISA),
- Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)
- India-Sweden initiative for the 'Leadership Group for Industry Transition' to work towards accelerating voluntary transition of all industry sectors towards low carbon growth.
- Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) launched by India at Glasgow for climate-friendly infrastructure development in small island states.
- Green Grids Initiative-One Sun One World One Grid (GGI-OSOWOG) launched by India along with the UK at Glasgow summit.

The Prime Minister also said that for effective climate action, developed countries should provide climate finance of USD 1 trillion, and that climate finance commitments should be as closely tracked as climate mitigation commitments.

While these announcements have been made by the PM, India has still not yet updated its official NDC that was submitted to the UNFCCC under the Paris Agreement in 2015. Thus, India has not given any of the new targets in written. Indeed, in the recent winter session of the Parliament, the government also informed the Rajya Sabha that “India expects developed countries to provide climate finance of US \$1 trillion per year to the developing countries. As far as India’s additional announcements are concerned, additional climate financing to the tune of approximately US \$1 trillion by 2030 would be required” (Rajya Sabha 2021). *The government’s official reply – as well as the non-revision of India’s 2015 NDC – to the Parliament implies that fulfillment of new pledges made by the PM at Glasgow are dependent upon the provision of climate finance.*

Reasons for the government’s position clearly reflect the feasibility of meeting ambitious climate targets without sufficient resources and technology to do so and in a way that does not compromise core economic interests that coincide with national interests. Economy – spanning defence, infrastructure and other strategic and non-strategic sectors – is a key part of country’s soft power projections onto the global stage. A little over \$ 24 trillion (PPP), China’s economy is far ahead of India’s economy at \$ 9 trillion (PPP). China, despite being a ‘developing country’, has also occupied the present lion’s share of emissions and is leading a range of international infrastructure projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Table: Emissions Profile of Major Economies

| Country | Cumulative Emissions (1750-2019) (in billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) | Per capita emissions in 2019 (in tonnes) | Total annual emissions in 2019 (billion tonnes) | Size of the economy (in trillion US Dollars) |
|------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| United States | 410.2 | 16.06 | 5.28 | 22 |
| European Union (EU-28) | 364.8 | 6.41 | 3.29 | 15 |
| China | 220 | 7.1 | 10.17 | 15 |
| Japan | 64.5 | 8.7 | 1.11 | 5.4 |
| India | 51.9 | 1.9 | 2.63 | 2.7 |

The ambitious targets set by India require a robust approach which should not compromise with national interests. The country also needs to mobilize resources to finance the transition towards green growth and mass-scaling renewable energy alternatives.

Presently, India has majorly mobilized climate finance through domestic sources. It is estimated that India will require \$2.5 trillion for achieving its 2015 climate commitments under the Paris Agreement, while an additional \$1 trillion will be required for achieving additional commitments by 2030 (Rajya Sabha 2021). So far climate finance mobilization has been largely domestic. As per India's Third Biennial Update Report (BUR) to the UNFCCC in February 2021, between 2014 and 2019, while Global Environment Facility and Green Climate Fund have provided grants of a total \$165.25 million, the corresponding domestic mobilization amounts to \$1.374 billion (Rajya Sabha 2021).

It is estimated that in order to achieve the pledges made by India at Glasgow, substantial domestic action and finance are needed. As per estimates, India would need \$200 billion per year in the 2020s and 2030s to be able to become net zero by 2070, with expenditure increasing progressively as the low-cost technologies are exhausted (PTI 2021).

And yet, these costs are nothing compared to the future that awaits us in a worsening era of environmental degradation propelled by climate change.

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The leadership shown by India at Glasgow – despite having a minuscule historical contribution to greenhouse gas emissions – has marked the beginning of a new way of thinking unseen before in Indian policy circles. Despite the vigorous efforts to mobilize finance for implementing its ambitious climate agenda – and rightly holding the developed world to account for it – *India's approach is no longer dictated by the selfish erstwhile idea that countries that created the problem of climate change should alone address it.*

India has reached a point where it is amongst the most vulnerable countries to climate change and costs of climate hazards – natural disasters as well as slow-onset events like air pollution – are extracting a heavy cost from the country. Some of the most glaring climate-induced events in India bear this out.

As per IPCC's 2021 assessment, the *Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, has warmed faster than the global average.* The sea surface temperature over the Indian ocean is likely to increase by 1 to 2 °C when there is 1.5°C to

2°C global warming (IPCC 2021). Indian subcontinent will also witness 20% increase in extreme rainfall events. More than four in five Indians live in climate-vulnerable districts (Patel and Shrikanth 2021).

The incidence as well as the impact of annual floods has increased, be it in southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu or northern hilly areas like Uttarakhand. The magnified impact of floods – caused due to multiple reasons like uneven and unplanned urbanization, changes in monsoon precipitation patterns etc. – is having a tangible impact on lives and the local economy. Drought and heat-waves patterns have also worsened, as has the frequency of other disasters such as cloudbursts, landslides, erratic monsoon and the perpetually worsening problem of air pollution.

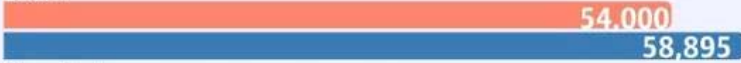
As per the latest estimates, at least a billion people in the South Asian countries currently face severe water scarcity for at least one month annually. Nearly 740,000 excess deaths in India annually could be attributed to extreme temperature changes due to climate change (Krishnan 2021). The direct costs of India's lack of disaster preparedness in the last two decades amounted to Rs 13.14 lakh crore, while extreme weather events have cost India over \$99 billion in the last 50 years (Mohanty 2021).

Slow killers like air pollution are also having a serious impact. At least 30.7% of deaths in India – amounting to 2.5 million people every year – can be attributed to air pollution from fossil fuels, while air pollution is also responsible for 1 in 5 deaths world-wide (Sreedhar 2021).

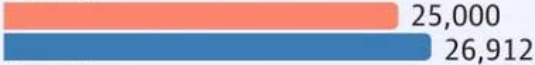
Gasping for air

Air quality continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate in major cities of India, as per the Greenpeace report

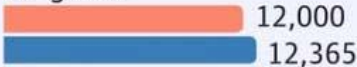
Delhi



Mumbai



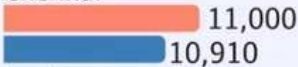
Bengaluru



Hyderabad



Chennai



Lucknow



Estimated deaths

Estimated cost (₹) cr.



Source: (The Hindu 2021)

India and China, globally, have the most number of deaths from air pollution, with China's annual deaths due to air pollution from fossil fuels being nearly 4 million (Sreedhar 2021). In 2019, air pollution caused 16.7 lakh deaths in India – ten times more than India's COVID19 death toll as of December 2020 – while economic losses from air pollution in 2019 were 1.36% of India's GDP (Basu 2020).

Even the projected costs of climate change for India are expected to be quite high. It is estimated that India may lose around 3 to 10% of its GDP annually by 2100 and its poverty

rate may rise by 3.5% in 2040 due to climate change. Analysis in India shows that districts that have warmed the fastest have seen 56% less GDP growth compared to those that have warmed the slowest (Picciariella, et al. 2021). In terms of global temperature projections, if global warming is contained up till 2 degrees Celsius, India's GDP loss will be 2.6% annually, and in case of 3 degrees Celsius global warming, this loss will magnify to 13.4% annually (Picciariella, et al. 2021). Climate change will also directly lead to the greater spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, chikungunya, filariasis, Japanese encephalitis and visceral leishmaniasis.

Besides leading to deaths, and adverse socio-economic and health impacts, climate change will also completely disrupt agricultural and food systems. It will have an adverse effect on crop production and indirectly lead to bad quality of food being produced.

CONCLUSION: DELINKING COP AND CLIMATE ACTION

These projected and present impacts of climate-induced events, especially for a vulnerable country like India, show how massive is the gap between the COP climate change global negotiations and the disaster that humanity is fast moving towards. The trajectory of global climate negotiations, under the mechanism of COP, shows that these annual conferences have become little more than talk-shops. Even after 30 years of negotiations, countries are still bargaining over what is an ideal threshold of global warming and about who will bear the burden of climate change. After 30 years, the main thing that countries have somehow agreed upon is that climate change poses a serious threat to humanity and that now we have reached

a point where all countries need to take action.

This shows that the climate negotiations are at odds with the climate emergency facing us today, which will impact not only environment, but also the whole gamut of our socio-economic systems, spanning economy, food, lifestyle etc. India has done well to display the climate leadership that it did at COP. The most critical issue for India is how to meet its climate commitments towards going renewable without compromising on core national interests. This requires financial mobilization, as India has correctly continued to insist upon. The majority of such mobilization has come from domestic sources, while the majority of international mobilization is in terms of loans and not grants. And this suits India well. Bilateral technology sharing with western allies in the field of climate change can accelerate India's achievements of its climate objectives and is something that India is already focusing on in every bilateral and regional forum. India's current foreign policy focal points have become counter-terrorism and climate action, reflecting a consistent rise in India's leadership in this area.

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HIGHLIGHTS

THE REPEAL OF FARM LAWS

On 19th November, coinciding with the auspicious Purnima day – Guru Nanak’s birthday – PM Modi made a personal announcement to repeal the three farm laws. With this and by meeting some follow-up demands of the protesting farmers, curtains have been drawn on the farmers’ agitation at the Delhi-Haryana border. The protest has been going on for more than a year. It has been marked by much violence and ill-will – such as Republic Day violence, Lakhimpur-Kheri violence, lynching and rape at Singhu border and sporadic expressions of pro-Khalistan sentiment across some parts of Punjab – despite the best attempts of the central government to pacify the protestors without withdrawing the legislation.

At this point, the protest was indeed fading out on its own, neither getting much crowd and nor much media attention. Therefore, the government’s decision to take back the laws has come as a surprise to many. It is being speculated in some quarters that this decision was taken to placate the farmers ahead of the elections in various state assemblies. However, this does not make much sense, as only a section of Jat and Sikh farmers were leading the protests – hardly enough to make a dent in BJP. And when the protest itself was fizzling out, there was hardly any political capital that the party could have lost in the upcoming assembly polls. Indeed, one can argue that the embarrassing withdrawal of the laws would have cost the party more electoral capital given that the support for the laws among the farmers of the country far outweighed its opposition.

The reason for the withdrawal – hidden in cryptic words by the PM – can only be slightly deeper. In his speech announcing the withdrawal of the laws, the PM mentioned that he introduced these laws for the welfare of the farmers, but is withdrawing them in the national interest. The day of the withdrawal also happened to be the Sikh holy day of Guru Nanak Jayanti. It is not difficult to understand that the withdrawal of these laws will pacify the sentiment of the Sikhs greatly who were gradually becoming alienated. Alienation of Sikhs from Hindus does no good to the cause of national interest. And BJP's ideological parent, the RSS, recognizes this more than anyone else and recognizes the sacrifices made by the Sikh community for the nation. Therefore, this step – taken without calculations of electoral mileage – is a step in the right direction.

TRIPURA BY-POLLS

In recent weeks, Tripura has seen much political activity in the form of acrimony between TMC and the ruling BJP, communal tensions with the Muslim community which resonated till Maharashtra, culminated in the massive BJP victory in the local elections. TMC has been attempting to expand its base across the country as a viable alternative to the Congress party. In North-east in general and Tripura in particular – due to the latter's Bengali speaking population – the TMC has been very aggressive. This has resulted in much acrimony, although the TMC attempts were unsuccessful as in clear from its performance in local elections.

BJP won 217 out of 222 seats in the civic body elections and won all the 14 urban bodies as well. It also won the Agartala Municipal Corporation which is now without an Opposition

for the first time since its formation. The CPI(M) won only 3 seats across urban bodies. One seat was won by Tripura royal scion's TIPRA Motha. The TMC – winning only a single seat – seems to have emerged as the main opposition, with the second-highest vote-share after BJP.

PREVALENT COVID19 SITUATION

Spiraling COVID19 cases of the Delta variant had not even come under control in the US, UK and Europe, even as a new variant of concern was flagged by the World Health Organization (WHO) viz. Omicron. Presently, the USA has been averaging nearly 1 lakh cases a day due to the Delta variant, while the Omicron variant has been detected in at least 19 states. In Europe, massive lockdowns were being imposed due to the resurgence of cases and the rise of deaths by around 10%, despite some of the world's highest rates of vaccination. Europe is also witnessing anti-lockdown protests. Israel, Russia and China are similarly logging higher cases and are on alert, including imposing lockdowns.

The resurgence despite high vaccination rates is inexplicable to the scientists. Instead of introspecting about what is going wrong, governments and pharma companies are still insistent that the virus is spreading due to the unvaccinated. This defies all logic, as it implies that a mere 20% of the unvaccinated population in nearly fully-vaccinated countries can spread the virus to vaccinated people also. It also doesn't explain the high death rates and overflowing of hospital capacity in US and UK.

Instead of introspecting, governments and pharma companies have gone into a reactionary mode. They are insisting

on an additional booster shot of vaccine. Many governments are at various stages of making vaccination mandatory.

In the midst of all this, the emergence of a new variant viz. Omicron from South Africa poses new concerns. So far, all that is known about the variant is that it is much more transmissible than Delta and can possibly evade vaccines. However, symptoms are largely mild rather than severe. For now, it is a wait-and-watch for this variant.

The National Ship

“This national ship has been ferrying millions and millions of souls across the waters of life. For scores of shining centuries it has been plying across this water, and through its agency, millions of souls have been taken to the other shore, to blessedness. But today, perhaps through your own fault, this boat has become a little damaged, has sprung a leak; and would you therefore curse it? Is it fit that you stand up and pronounce malediction upon it, one that has done more work than any other thing in the world? If there are holes in this national ship, this society of ours, we are its children. Let us go and stop the holes. Let us gladly do it with our hearts’ blood; and if we cannot, then let us die. We will make a plug of our brains and put them into the ship, but condemn it never. Say not one harsh word against this society. I love it for its past greatness. I love you all because you are the children of gods, and because you are the children of the glorious forefathers. How then can I curse you! Never. All blessings be upon you!”

– *Swami Vivekanand*

(Complete Works of Swami Vivekanand, Vol. 3, pp. 226-27)