

## **India's Climate Change Policy: Towards a Better Future**

**By Shyam Saran**

As a populous, tropical developing country, India faces a bigger challenge in coping with the consequences of Climate Change than most other countries. Climate Change is a global phenomenon but with local consequences. There are both external and domestic dimensions to India's Climate Change policy which has been articulated through two key documents. One is the National Action Plan on Climate Change(NAPCC) adopted on June 30, 2008. The other is India's Intended Nationally Determined Commitments(INDC) submitted to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change(UNFCCC) in October 2, 2015. The NAPCC has an essentially domestic focus. The INDC is a statement of intent on Climate Change action announced in the run up to the Paris Climate Change summit held in December the same year.

The NAPCC incorporates India's vision of ecologically sustainable development and steps to be taken to implement it. It is based on the awareness that Climate Change action must proceed simultaneously on several intimately inter-related domains, such as energy, industry, agriculture, water, forests, urban spaces and the fragile mountain environment. This was the backdrop to the 8 National Missions spelt out in the NAPCC. This need for inter-related policy and coordinated action has been recognized, only several years later, in the adoption by the UN of the 17 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). The National Missions are on Solar Energy, Enhancing Energy Efficiency, creating a Sustainable Urban Habitat, Conserving Water, Sustaining the fragile Himalayan Eco-system, creating a Green India through expanded forests, making Agriculture Sustainable and creating a Strategic Knowledge Platform for serving all the National Missions. The NAPCC acknowledged that Climate Change and Energy Security were two sides of the same coin; that India had to make a strategic shift from its current reliance on fossil fuels to a pattern of economic activity based progressively on renewable sources of energy such as solar energy and cleaner sources such as nuclear energy. Such a shift would enhance India's energy security and contribute to dealing with the threat of Climate Change. Thus a co-benefit approach underlies India's Climate Change strategy. The NAPCC constitutes India's response to Climate Change based on its own resources but recognizes that it is intimately linked to the parallel multilateral effort, based on the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC, to establish a global Climate Change regime. It was India's hope that the ongoing multilateral negotiations under the UNFCCC would yield an agreed outcome, based on the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility and Respective Capabilities(CBDR), which would enable developing countries like India, through international financial support and technology transfer, to accelerate its shift towards a future of renewable and clean energy. While India has made significant progress in implementing several of the National Missions, its expectations of a supportive international Climate Change regime based on equitable burden sharing among nations, has been mostly belied. It is in this context that one should evaluate India's subsequent NDCsubmitted on the eve of the crucial Paris Summit on Climate Change of December 2015.

Prime Minister Modi has been one of the world leaders who has taken a keen interest in Climate Change issues. Under his leadership India decided to adopt a more pro-active, ambitious and forward looking approach in the run-up to the Paris Climate summit. This is reflected in the country's INDC. It links India's commitment to ecologically sustainable

economic development with its age old civilizational values of respecting Nature, incorporating a sense of inter-generational equity and common humanity. The targets India has voluntarily committed itself to are unprecedented for a developing country. The energy intensity of India's growth will decline by 33-35% by 2030 compared to 2005 base year, which means that for every additional dollar of GDP India will be using progressively and significantly lesser amount of energy. There is confidence that based on the achievements of the National Mission on Enhancing Energy Efficiency, this target will be met. India being one of the world's largest emerging economy, which already has a large energy footprint globally, this constitutes a major contribution to tackling global Climate Change. The INDC has set a target of 175 GW of renewable energy by the year 2030 on the strength of the outstanding success of the National Solar Mission. It is reported that this capacity may well be achieved 10 years in advance. The government may raise India's target to 227 GW for 2030. The target of achieving 40% of power from renewable sources by 2030 is likely to be achieved several years in advance. The figure is already 21% as of date. India is actively reducing the component of coal based thermal power in its energy mix. It is not widely known that the country has a very high cess on coal, of the order of Rs.400 per tonne, proceeds from which go into a Clean Energy Fund. India is also committed to not building any new thermal plants which are not of the most efficient ultra-supercritical category.

India played a major role in assuring the success of the Paris Climate summit and Prime Minister Modi's personal intervention in the adoption of the landmark Paris Agreement was acknowledged by several world leaders. His initiative on the setting up an International Solar Alliance for promoting solar power worldwide was welcomed.

India is advancing on a broad front to ensure a clean energy future for its people, drawing upon its ingrained civilizational attributes and putting in place a wide range of policy interventions under the legal framework of the Energy Conservation Act, covering 15 energy intensive industries and the Energy Conservation Building Code, covering all new urban infrastructure. 32 states of the Indian Union have formulated and begun implementing their own State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC). There is also an active and vibrant civic society which is promoting citizens' awareness of the threat of Climate Change and what each of us can do as individuals to meet this threat. It is hoped that India's leadership in dealing with its own challenges of Climate Change and Energy Security will act as a spur to other countries to raise their own contributions to meeting this global and existential challenge. Failure to do so condemns humanity to an uncertain and possibly catastrophic denouement.

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It may kindly be noted that the views expressed in this article are personal of *Mr. Shyam Saran*.