

# SETTING THE TONE AT GLASGOW, THE JOB AHEAD IN DELHI

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

With current per capita emissions that are less than half the global average, [India's pledge to reach 'net zero' emissions by 2070](#) has cemented India's credentials as a global leader. The emissions of all others who have pledged "net zero" by 2050 are above the global average.

At [COP26 in Glasgow](#) (October 31-November 12, 2021), India successfully challenged the 40-year-old frame of global climate policy that pointed a finger at developing countries with the alternate frame of 'climate justice', that unsustainable lifestyles and wasteful consumption patterns are to blame. The political implication of the date 2070 is that the world should get to 'net-zero' by 2050. For that, the rich countries will need to do more and step up closer to their share of the carbon budget. India's stand also signals that it will not act under external pressure, as requiring equal treatment is the hallmark of a global power, and will have an impact on other issues.

## How coal, climate justice and zero emissions clashed at COP26

The problem, as Gandhiji had also observed, is really western civilisation; it also accounts for the spate of criticism of India's open challenge in the plenary, and getting global agreement on a "just" transition to phase down, and not phase out, coal. The subject of oil was not touched, even as automobile emissions are the fastest growing emissions, because it is a defining feature of western civilisation. Coal is the most abundant energy source, essential for base load in electrification, and the production of steel and cement. Its use declines after the saturation level of infrastructure is reached. The irony of the host country pushing other nations to stop using coal — an energy resource which powered its own Industrial Revolution — was not lost on the poor countries who called out "carbon colonialism". That India and China working together forced the G7 to make a retraction has signalled the coming of a world order in which the G7 no longer sets the rules.

The Prime Minister's stand in the opening plenary, pushing 'climate justice', and the Environment Minister, Bhupender Yadav's constant reminder that the negotiating text is not balanced as there is little advance on financial and other support, gave courage to the others to also successfully question the negotiating frame which focused on emissions reduction. After 40 years there is more specific language on both finance and adaptation finally recognising that costs and near-term effects of climate change will hit the poorest countries hardest.

The debate has now shifted to the national level, with questions on the feasibility of the goal of 'net-zero' by 2070. Here again, most of the concerns mirror those raised in the West without appreciating the significance of 'climate justice'. Seeing the challenge in terms of the scale and the speed of the transformation of the energy system assumes that India will follow the pathway of western civilisation where the energy system and lifestyles that evolved over a century have to be transformed over the next 30 years.

## India refutes allegations on 'weakening' Glasgow climate pact

India is urbanising as it is industrialising, moving directly to electrification, renewable energy and electric vehicles, and a digital economy instead of a focus on the internal combustion engine. Most of the infrastructure required has still to be built and automobiles are yet to be bought.

India will not be replacing current systems and will be making investments, not incurring costs.

There is sufficient evidence in the literature that the consumption of affluent households both determines and accelerates an increase of emissions of carbon dioxide. This is followed by socio-economic factors such as mobility and dwelling size. In the West, these drivers have overridden the beneficial effects of changes in technology reflected in the material footprint and related greenhouse-gas emissions. Climate change has to be addressed by the West by reducing consumption, not just greening it.

Glasgow climate summit | Coal 'phase-down' is a right, says Environment Minister

For India, in parallel with the infrastructure and clean technology thrust, the focus on a decent living standard leads to behavioural change in the end-use service, such as mobility, shelter and nutrition — for change modifying wasteful trends.

First, consumption patterns need to be 'shifted away from resource and carbon-intensive goods and services, e.g. mobility from cars and aircraft to buses and trains, and nutrition from animal and processed food to a seasonal plant-based diet'.

Second, along with' reducing demand, resource and carbon intensity of consumption has to decrease, e.g. expanding renewable energy, electrifying cars and public transport and increasing energy and material efficiency'.

COP26 deal | U.N. chief says 'not enough', warns 'catastrophe' close; Greta Thunberg denounces it

Third, equally important, will be achieving a' more equal distribution of wealth with a minimum level of prosperity and affordable energy use for all', e.g., housing and doing away with biomass for cooking. Indian civilisational values already lay stress on vegetarianism, frown on wastage; mobility-related consumption is not disproportionately increasing with income. National acceptance of a 'floor' as well as 'ceiling' of sustainable well-being is feasible.

The Government now needs to set up focused research groups for the conceptual frame of sustainable well-being. It should analyse the drivers of affluent overconsumption and circulate synthesis of the literature identifying reforms of the economic systems as well as studies that show how much energy we really need for a decent level of well-being.

China defends joining with India on coal 'phase down' instead of 'phase out' at COP26

The West has yet to come out with a clear strategy of how it will remain within the broad contours of its carbon budget. The political problems of a scaling-down of economic production and lifestyles will provide useful lessons. It is becoming difficult for the West to use international trade that is shifting manufacturing and the burden of emissions to developing countries with the rise of a digital economy. And increasing inequality and a rise of protectionism and trade barriers imposing new standards need to be anticipated. This knowledge is essential for national policy as well as the next round of climate negotiations.

Explained | [Why is India's coal usage under scrutiny?](#)

After the Stockholm Declaration on the Global Environment, the Constitution was amended in 1976 to include Protection and Improvement of Environment as a fundamental duty. Under Article 253, Parliament has the power to make laws for implementing international treaties and agreements and can legislate on the preservation of the natural environment. Parliament used

Article 253 to enact the Environment Protection Act to implement the decisions reached at the Stockholm Conference. The decisions at COP26 enable a new set of legislation around ecological limits, energy and land use, including the efficient distribution and use of electricity, urban design and a statistical system providing inputs for sustainable well-being.

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