

## RAISE THE BAR

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

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On Monday, at the Global Climate Action Summit in New York, [Prime Minister Narendra Modi, made several announcements](#) that underscored India's commitment towards addressing pressing environmental challenges. He talked about his government's plans to curb plastic use and invited countries to join the Coalition For Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

But the centrepiece of the prime minister's speech was his announcement on upscaling India's renewable energy ambition. "By 2022, we plan to increase our renewable energy capacity to much beyond 175 GW, and later to 450 GW," he said. The prime minister's reiteration of a clean energy path for the country's development is welcome. And, there is little doubt that the country has made big strides in renewable energy (RE) in the last five years. At the same time, however, the PM's speech should also occasion a stocktaking of the challenges faced by the sector.

Increasing the share of non-fossil fuels in the country's energy mix is the bedrock of India's commitments under the Paris Climate Pact. The country pledged an installed electricity capacity of 175 GW by 2022 — a more than five-fold capacity increase in seven years. In the last four years, India has more than doubled its RE capacity.

This impressive achievement notwithstanding, the country will need to step up its pace. To meet its Paris Pact target, India will need to add more than 20 GW of RE installation a year, more than double the rate achieved in the past four years. Developments in the solar energy sector give an inkling of the challenges likely to be faced when the RE ambitions are upscaled. According to the clean energy research outfit, Mercom, the country added 8.3 GW of solar capacity last year. This is a 13 per cent dip from 2017. The fall in pace of adding solar installations has continued this year.

Land acquisitions are a major worry for large-scale solar projects, the Mercom report noted. The loss in momentum could well be temporary. But policymakers should ill-afford to ignore it given that solar installations constitute nearly 60 per cent of the country's RE energy mix under its Paris commitments.

PM Modi's New York announcement is consistent with India's goal of generating 40 per cent of its electricity by renewables by 2030. When it comes to RE, the gap between installed capacity and actual electricity generation can be large, especially when weather conditions are not congenial.

Conversation about REs in the country have largely been about installed capacity. In the spirit of the PM's New York speech, the discourse on RE needs to go one notch higher.

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