

## How to talk climate change in Paris

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*There is absolutely no ground for India to agree to cut its emissions at the 2015 climate change summit. Instead, it has a strong case to press the three biggest emitters to do more as there is still a huge gap between what they have pledged and what is required by science and their historical responsibilities*

The United States and China, the two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, have recently agreed on a timetable to limit their emissions. Under the agreement, the U.S. has agreed to emit 26-28 per cent less carbon in 2025 than it did in 2005 while China will peak its emissions by 2030 and increase the share of non-fossil fuels in its primary energy mix to 20 per cent by 2030. The U.S.-China agreement came soon after a proposal by the European Union (EU) — the third largest emitter — to reduce its emissions to 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030, conditional on whether other countries would make similar commitments at the Paris summit in December 2015. The EU also proposes to raise its share of renewable sources to 27 per cent in total energy consumption by 2030. Following the U.S.-China deal, the U.S. President, Barack Obama, said on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Brisbane, “If China and the U.S. can agree on this, then the world can agree on this — we can get this done ....” Announcing a \$3-billion contribution to the U.N.-backed climate change mitigation fund, he said that the U.S.-China agreement showed the way forward.

### The U.S.-China agreement

A closer look at what the agreement really means shows that, first, it does not lay out a road map for meeting the targets. Second, it is bilateral and voluntary. Thus, there are no penalties if either the U.S. or China misses the targets. The fact that Japan, Australia, Canada and Russia are doing less than what they had promised to do under the Kyoto Protocol is a case in point. The 26-28 per cent reduction, now agreed upon, from 2005 levels is less than the 30 per cent reduction from the 2005 levels the U.S. had promised earlier in compliance with the Copenhagen Accord. Third, it allows China unlimited emission expansion until 2030. China had already set itself a goal of raising the share of renewables in its energy use to 15 per cent by 2020. Raising it by an additional 5 per cent in the next 10 years is more or less a continuation of an existing policy.

The U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says a 2°C pathway — seen by most scientists as necessary in preventing catastrophic climate effects — requires annual greenhouse gas cuts of 40-70 per cent by 2050, compared to levels in 2010 and to zero or below by 2100. Thus the pledges by the three biggest emitters for 2025 and 2030 are not sufficient for limiting climate change to 2°C above the preindustrial average temperature and much less than what they can or should do.

### What the facts are

Despite that, some commentators say that the U.S.-China agreement has shifted the focus to developing countries, especially India, which is the fourth largest emitter. Should India be then concerned and fear isolation at the Paris summit if it does not agree to cut its emissions?

India has already committed itself to a 20-25 per cent reduction in intensity of carbon emissions (tonnes of carbon dioxide divided by GDP) below 2005 levels by 2020. But the U.S.-China agreement may put renewed pressure on India to do more. Does India really need to do more? And what can it do to deflect the focus away from it and back to the three largest emitters who indeed need to do more if climate change is to be limited to less than 2°C?

Country-wise estimates for annual emissions of the largest six emitters vary depending on the source and the year. But in 2012, they were estimated to be roughly 8,500 million metric tons (MMT) for China, 5,400 MMT for the U.S., 3,800 MMT for the EU, 1,900 MMT for India, 1,800 MMT for Russia, and 1,300 MMT for Japan. These figures reveal two striking facts. First, India may be the fourth largest emitter, but its emissions are less than a fourth of China, about a third of the U.S., and about half of the EU. Second, they are roughly equal to those of Russia and not a lot higher than those of Japan. Russia and Japan are also among the industrialised countries which went back on the commitments they made under the Kyoto Protocol. Yet, the U.S.-China agreement is expected to shift the focus to India and not to Russia and Japan. Nothing can be more wrong. India's emissions, even if it grows robustly, are expected to be about 4,000-5,000 MMT by 2030 — still well below the emissions pledged either by the U.S. or China under the agreement. In fact, they will continue to be so for a long time to come and perhaps forever as China's greenhouse gas emissions have been estimated by the International Energy Agency to further rise by 20 per cent by 2030 from 2012 levels.

India may be the fourth largest emitter, but it is a relatively small emitter despite having a large population. Its cumulative emissions have been low: less than a third of China and a tenth of the U.S. Its per capita emissions are roughly a tenth of the U.S., less than a sixth of the EU, less than a fourth of China, and about a seventh of Russia. Thus, there is absolutely no case for India to agree to cut its emissions at the 2015 summit in Paris. On the contrary, there is a strong case for it to press the three biggest emitters to do more as there is still a huge gap between what the three top emitters have pledged and what is required by science and their historical responsibilities (the cumulative emissions). It is irrelevant that India is the fourth largest emitter. The fact is that India is still in its early stages of development and has a long way to go before its emissions stabilise.

### India's strategy

Though there is absolutely no case for India to curb its emissions, it is in its self-interest to increase the share of renewables in its primary energy mix — which can also be justified as its contribution towards controlling climate change and provide it greater energy security. Given our low per-capita energy consumption, we do need to go out of our way to shore up energy efficiency across the board and also purposefully boost green energy. Reports in *The New York Times* last week suggest that renewable energy prices are falling so rapidly that they could compete soon with coal and natural gas even without subsidies. Moreover, increasing the share of renewables will prevent India from a lock-in in outdated and fossil-fuel dependent technologies as fossil fuels are fast depleting and will become more costly as the years go by.

While the Union Minister of State for Environment and Forest, Prakash Javadekar, refused to comment on the U.S.-China climate agreement, there are indications that the government is seized of the matter as it realises that the international community — rightly or wrongly — will want India to make some firm commitments for 2025 and 2030. What should India's strategy be then as it approaches the 2015 summit at which a global climate treaty is expected to be concluded?

First, India should insist that there should be no reference to its annual emissions reduction till it achieves stabilisation as developed countries did and China proposes to do. Unlike China, India has a young population and it can grow till after 2050 when its urban transition and industrialisation will be almost complete and its annual emissions will stabilise. Thus, India may propose to peak its emissions in 2050. Second, India may commit itself to a 25-30 per cent reduction in intensity of carbon emissions below 2005 levels by 2025, higher than the already promised 20-25 per cent reduction in intensity below 2005 levels by 2020. Third, India may propose to raise its share of renewable sources to 20 per cent — the same as China — in its total energy consumption by 2030. This seems achievable as India will have access to the same technologies as China. In its final report, the Planning Commission's expert group on low carbon growth strategy had projected that the contribution of solar, wind, and biomass to electricity supply can realistically increase from the present 6 per cent to 18 per cent by 2030.

The newly reconstituted National Council on Climate Change chaired by the Prime Minister can accept this target and announce it as India's objective both domestically and internationally. He may also announce India's plans to ramp up solar power capacity fivefold to 1,00,000 MW by 2030. Third, India should take the lead in securing timelines and commitments on finance and technology, both crucial to addressing climate change. This would help keep intact its support among vulnerable developing countries and the small island states, which have been demanding that more concrete action be taken rather than efforts to just reduce emissions. Finally, India must put renewed pressure on the three biggest emitters to cut their annual greenhouse gas emissions by 40-70 per cent by 2050, compared to levels in 2010.

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