

Embassy of India in Paris

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“Climate: "India is one of the few countries to meet its commitments under the Paris agreement”

FIGAROVOX/TRIBUNE - India's ambassador to France, Jawed Ashraf, defends his country's efforts - the second most populous in the world - in the fight against climate change and for environmental preservation.

By Jawed Ashraf

Leaders from 40 countries will attend a global climate summit hosted by U.S. President Joseph Biden on April 22-23. The return of the United States to the global climate agreement has been welcomed around the world. The summit is important for other reasons as well. As concerned as we are about the Covid pandemic, we cannot afford to ignore the "long-term pandemic" of climate change.

Six years after the historic Paris agreement, projections of temperature increases have become more alarming and our planet is showing more stark evidence of climate change. Despite all the progress made, the world is not meeting its commitments. However, there are success stories, bold and imaginative actions, from countries large and small, that should inspire us, and technological developments that should give us hope.

I can speak about India, a developing country with the second largest population on the planet, low per capita energy consumption, and one of the fastest growing economies in the world, lifting millions out of poverty. Yet India is one of the few countries that is on track to meet - or even exceed - its commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Against the target of 40% of electricity generation capacity from non-fossil fuels by 2030, India has already reached 38%; according to the International Energy Agency, it will reach 60% by 2030, even as our total capacity doubles. India has already reduced its energy intensity by 25% from 2005 levels and is on track to exceed its commitment of 33-35% reduction by 2030.

Since taking office in 2014, Prime Minister Modi has made climate change a national mission. His strategy is based on four pillars. First, he has raised awareness of climate change and nature protection by drawing on India's ancient cultural and spiritual heritage and simultaneously linking it to the well-being of our most vulnerable citizens. This has also involved motivating behavioral changes, from the revival of the circular economy to responsible consumption.

Second, policies, regulations, and incentives have enabled us to increase solar power fourteen-fold, double our wind power in just six years, and reduce the price of electricity from these sources to 2-3 cents per unit.

According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, between 2014 and 2019, solar energy expansion in India was 10 times faster than in the European Union. The growth of all renewables, including hydro, was 12.6 percent - faster than the global average of 8.4 percent, the G20 average of 8.1 percent, and the EU-27 average of 4.9 percent.

Third, supply is one aspect, demand management is another. To reduce demand for fossil fuels and electricity, we are building subways in 27 cities and have an accelerated program for electric cars, a national hydrogen mission, and fuel standards equivalent to Euro VI.

The government has allowed cooking gas to replace firewood and coal in 80 million homes over the past seven years, launched a national mission to introduce LED light bulbs in homes and offices, and created a massive program to improve energy efficiency throughout the economy. India's railroads, the fourth largest network in the world, will have net zero emissions by 2030.

Fourth, we focus on biodiversity conservation. Forest cover increased by 1.3 million hectares between 2014 and 2019. Wildlife populations are increasing. Agriculture is going organic. Plastic use is reduced or banned.

At the heart of India's strategy is making clean energy reliable, accessible and affordable. This belief also guided Prime Minister Modi's call for the International Solar Alliance, launched in Paris in 2015 with France as a co-founder, which now has nearly 90 member countries.

In this momentous year, India and France are also celebrating a Year of the Environment with a wide-ranging program of cooperation on biodiversity, environment, urbanization,

climate change and clean energy. Sustainability solutions are also at the heart of our Indo-Pacific cooperation. We applaud French leadership and President Macron's vision.

National efforts and individual choices are important. But international partnerships are essential. This is the lesson to be learned from efforts to develop, produce and distribute vaccines worldwide at affordable prices to defeat the Covid pandemic.

Climate change requires the same urgency. Advanced economies must do more to meet their own commitments and help the developing world. This follows from their historical responsibility and the international commitments made at several summits and agreements.

This means they must invest heavily in technology and make it widely available as a global public good, backed by a much greater commitment of financial resources for the developing world. Otherwise, higher targets will remain a mirage and renewed commitments a mere aspiration.

The April Climate Summit, which sets out a broad vision and seeks a new direction, renews our hope for an effective and solution-oriented global climate effort.

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