

Modi articulated the Global South's position at CoP-26-Business Journal

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's firm yet responsible speech at the opening plenary of the CoP-26 climate change summit in Glasgow set the tone not only for India, but all developing countries, which are eager to contribute to a greener planet but feel cheated, discriminated against and handicapped by the hypocrisy of rich nations.

Modi's blunt statement that "the promises made till date regarding climate finance have proved to be hollow", and his exhortation that "developed countries provide climate finance of \$1 trillion at the earliest", echoed concerns of the G77 group of developing countries. South Africa, which coordinates closely with India, has estimated that more than \$750 billion per annum is owed by the Global North to poorer countries for quicker transitions to clean energy-based development. According to The Wall Street Journal, public-cum-private climate finance from North to South has never exceeded \$75 billion in any year between 2013 and 2019. Even the modest goal of \$100 billion climate finance per annum that was mooted in Copenhagen in 2009 has not been fulfilled. Modi's remark that "countries which do not live up to their promises made on climate finance must be pressured too" brought home the frustration that there has been too much emphasis in Western discourse and negotiation stances on more ambitious future carbon emission cuts and not enough on keeping past promises on climate finance and redressing historical climate injustice.

It is disingenuous of rich countries, having released so much carbon into the atmosphere since the dawn of the industrial revolution and been the prime cause of anthropogenic climate change, to pressure the Global South into deeper carbon cuts and early 'net-zero' emission dates. India's position, which echoes that of the G77's 134 member states, is that rich countries have already used up their carbon space and should compensate for their past carbon footprint by attaining 'net negative' emissions by 2030.

India and its partners also have every right to doubt the veracity and seriousness of net-zero declarations by 2050 made by rich countries. The EU faces severe energy shortages and rising power

bills. Convincing coal-dependent members like Poland to shut down fossil-fuel industries or gas-dependent members like Germany that seek to import fossil fuels for decades to come, is not going to be a cakewalk. The EU has a 'long-term strategy' for its 2050 net-zero goal, but its struggles to enforce supranational authority on member countries do not bode well.

The US, which insists it's back with a bang to provide global leadership on climate change under President Joe Biden, currently consumes 8.5% of the world's coal with only 4.25% of the world's population. The stiff resistance Biden's Clean Electricity Performance Program has faced from politicians within his own Democratic Party, and the possibility that the US presidency will shift back to Republicans in 2024, reveal how far the US can really go in fulfilling its 2050 net-zero commitment. The same holds for Australia, the world's third largest exporter of fossil fuels after Russia and Saudi Arabia. Prime Minister Scott Morrison's CoP-26-eve declaration that Australia too would achieve net-zero by 2050 has been met with derision by Australians themselves.

Then there is the 800-pound dragon. China has financed and built so many coal-fired power plants (76% of the global total in 2020 alone) that its belated eschewing of this obnoxious practice of globalizing pollution offers little solace. China's own carbon neutrality target year of 2060 must be juxtaposed with the fact that in 2021, Beijing started building 43 new coal-fired power plants and 18 new blast furnaces.

Despite its ascent, China cleverly tags along with the G77 on climate issues. The reality is that China is also a big part of the problem and should be judged by its counterproductive actions on the ground, rather than insincere targets. President Xi Jinping's absence at the Glasgow summit could be taken as a sign of Beijing's unwillingness to sacrifice Chinese self-interests for the sake of global public goods.

In contrast to all these big polluters, India has shown its verifiably responsible side by rapidly ramping up investment in wind and solar capacities and scaling up goals, such as 50% renewables in its energy mix by 2030. Modi's candid admission that India may not achieve net-zero until 2070 should not be a cause for global alarm because whatever coal or gas-fired emissions India exudes in coming decades will progressively be mitigated by a revolutionary leap forward in renewables.

Modi reminded everyone at Glasgow that India accounts for 17% of the world's population but emits only 5% of global emissions. Even at the height of its late industrialization in the coming decade or two, India's share of global carbon emissions is unlikely to hit the levels that Western countries and China reached at their peaks. Clubbing India with China or projecting India as a major obstacle to a greener future, as some in the West and among activist circles do, is factually and proportionally fallacious.

Modi's invocation at Glasgow of the "suffering" of all developing countries and his vow to raise their voice is justified by facts and accomplishments. It is time for the world to acknowledge India as a leader in climate solutions and for the onus of climate action to be shifted to countries that have exhausted their carbon credits and lost the moral argument long ago. Without enforcing climate justice, CoP-26 will go down as yet another well-meaning attempt that ultimately failed the litmus test of saving the planet.

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