

Peer Pressure

Lima Accord cuts through rich-poor impasse, encourages competitive climate action

It's as if traffic flow has resumed on a long blocked motorway with the Lima call for climate action. Developed countries were burning the bulk of fossil fuels when UN climate change talks took off two decades ago. That's less the case now and they refuse to be the only ones delivering emission cuts. But developing countries argue, rightly, that their per capita emissions still remain significantly lower and developed countries must do more to mitigate their current emissions while assuming responsibility for historic pollution. The Lima Accord finds a way out of this rich-poor impasse: Every country will declare its own commitment, albeit in light of different national circumstances.

Environment minister Prakash Javadekar says he got what he wanted. What's now needed is a blueprint of how his government can contribute to prevent global temperatures rising more than 2°C over pre-industrial levels, which would risk triggering catastrophic climate change. Around 190 countries should be submitting this over the coming months, and these 'intended nationally determined contributions' should fructify in a comprehensive global pact next December in Paris.



Of course that's not going to be a cake walk. But since all national action plans will be published on the UNFCCC website, peer pressure should encourage governments to make more ambitious commitments than they would in a business-as-usual scenario. Don't underestimate the strategic power of naming and shaming. Plus, domestic targets will reflect domestic opinion. China has pledged emissions peaking by 2030 because its citizens are protesting pollution. Similar pressure is building up in India. We want clean air too. But we also want economic growth and poverty elimination. And our per capita emissions are far lower than China or developed countries. At the end of the day locally driven emission curbs will have greater odds of success than top-down global targets.

India's challenge is how to reconcile targets like economic growth, manufacturing revolution, job creation and sufficient energy for all of this with controlling emissions. This is where vision and differentiation will be critical. Keep pushing for technology and financial transfers from developed countries, and create new economic opportunities around these. For example, we will remain dependent on coal in the foreseeable future but we can shift from 'dirty' to 'clean' coal. Reverse coal nationalisation and encourage sophisticated overseas mining companies. Be visionary not dogmatic, enterprising instead of faint-hearted.

India's challenge is how to reconcile targets like economic growth, manufacturing revolution, job creation and sufficient energy for all of this with controlling emissions. This is where vision and differentiation will be critical. Keep pushing for technology and financial transfers from developed countries, and create new economic opportunities around these. For example, we will remain dependent on coal in the foreseeable future but we can shift from 'dirty' to 'clean' coal. Reverse coal nationalisation and encourage sophisticated overseas mining companies. Be visionary not dogmatic, enterprising instead of faint-hearted.