

India's Climate

In a little more than a month, India will be signing the Paris Climate Agreement. This agreement sets out a global action plan to limit greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and thus reduce the rising temperature to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Climate change as a social phenomenon endorses risk-averse behaviour amongst nation-states, thus the manner in which its effects will pan out raises important and hitherto neglected issues of equity and economic factors within and amongst nation-states. Climate change is considered to be a complicated problem in social science, where standard tools of decision-making in uncertainty may not be fully applicable to understand and solve persisting environmental problems.

According to the Zero contribution thesis, the logic of collective action will fail to deliver unless there is some form of coercion or binding agreement because under usual circumstances “rational, self-interested individuals do not act to achieve their common or group interests”. In the global playhouse of power politics, rational and self-interested nations too may not act to limit their greenhouse gases; very few amongst them have the technological knowhow and juridical understanding to find the best means to mitigate and thus adapt to the fast changing climate. Unseasonal rains, forest fires and drought are not just a developing country's rigmarole, but have come to encompass most of the countries in the global south.

In India, technological solutions and carbon markets ought to be the government's priority. With more investment in renewable sources of energy, solar and wind, India can lower its carbon footprint and move away from coal. The Union Power Ministry has appealed to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that it be granted rights to buy solar technology from Indian companies. The United States has contested India's position, claiming it to be an infringement of WTO rules, and therefore wants Indian and foreign companies to be at par when selling solar power equipment to government-sponsored programmes. The WTO has ruled in favour of the United States; although India has decided to appeal against the decision.

The United States, a venerable technological giant, has not done much to limit its emissions; one of its principal political parties even refuses to acknowledge climate change as a threat to the existence of life on the planet. The US has the technological capacity which would be better utilised in terms of cooperation with nations that need them. The WTO conflict is one example of how nation-states ignore the threat from anthropocentric climate change; precious time is being lost when it should be used in implementing practical

solutions for the communities and groups that are most vulnerable and need urgent assistance so that they can adapt.

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