India’s Climate Policy Shift: Prioritizing Adaptation Over Mitigation

February 7, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com

What’s in Today’s article?

India’s Changing Climate Strategy Latest News

- India has subtly but significantly shifted its stance on the global climate crisis, prioritizing adaptation over stringent emission reduction targets.
- This policy change reflects the nation's focus on rapid economic growth as a defense against climate change.
- The government has increasingly questioned the international climate regime's fixation on achieving specific temperature goals. Instead, India argues that developing countries like itself must focus on resilience and adaptation rather than aggressive decarbonization, which could hamper economic progress.
- This stance is not entirely new, but it is now being articulated more clearly and assertively. By doing so, **India is creating more flexibility in its climate policies**, ensuring that its national interests remain paramount while contributing to global climate efforts on its own terms.

Economic Growth as a Climate Shield

- India's reassessment of its climate policy stems from a pragmatic understanding of global realities.
- Despite international commitments, the world remains far from achieving its emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2035. In fact, global emissions are still rising, largely due to inaction by developed nations.
- Given this scenario, India sees little incentive to divert its limited resources toward aggressive mitigation efforts.
- The benefits of emission reduction are only realized when the entire world cuts emissions significantly, and even then, the impact is not immediate.
- On the other hand, adaptation offers direct and local benefits. Strengthening infrastructure, improving water management, and enhancing disaster resilience can protect communities from climate change's immediate effects.
- Additionally, economic prosperity plays a crucial role in resilience, reinforcing India's argument that development is the best shield against climate risks.

The Economic Survey 2024-25: A Blueprint for Growth and Sustainability

- The Economic Survey 2024-25 strongly supports this approach. It advocates that India must first reach the standards of a developed nation by 2047 before focusing aggressively on achieving net zero emissions by 2070.
- This recommendation aligns with India's efforts to balance rapid industrialization with long-term sustainability.
- **Lessons from China**
    - India appears to be following a trajectory similar to China's, which prioritized economic expansion and industrialization over emission concerns.
    - Since the mid-1990s, **China's emissions have quadrupled, yet it has simultaneously built the world's largest renewable energy infrastructure**.
    - Now, as its emissions approach their peak, China is in a position to transition to clean energy at an unprecedented pace.
    - India aims to replicate this model, ensuring that economic development is not compromised while also preparing for a future shift towards cleaner energy.

Reduced Global Pressure on India’s Energy Choices

- Another factor influencing India’s climate stance is the declining global focus on climate action. Despite 2023 and 2024 setting new temperature records, international priorities have shifted due to geopolitical tensions, economic challenges, and technological conflicts.
- Additionally, developing nations have grown increasingly frustrated with the international climate framework’s shortcomings.
- At the **COP29 summit in Baku, Azerbaijan**, the financial commitments made to assist developing nations in combating climate change were disappointingly low. This has further eroded trust in the global climate process, as developing countries feel their concerns are not being adequately addressed.
- Moreover, the **decision of U.S. President Donald Trump to withdraw from the Paris Agreement in January 2025 and his push for increased fossil fuel production have significantly altered the global climate landscape**.
- With major economies prioritizing their energy needs over climate commitments, India faces reduced pressure to phase out coal and other conventional energy sources.

A Unique Climate and Energy Pathway

- Despite this shift, India is not abandoning its decarbonization efforts. The government recognizes that long-term economic growth must align with low-carbon development to remain competitive in the global clean energy market.
- India asserts that its transition to cleaner energy should be determined by its own policies rather than external pressures.
- However, achieving this goal requires significant advancements in domestic clean energy manufacturing and technology.
- If India does not develop its own capabilities in renewable energy, nuclear power, and green hydrogen, it risks continued dependence on foreign supply chains, limiting its ability to make independent energy choices.

The Role of Nuclear Energy in India’s Future

- One of the key areas where India is looking to expand its energy portfolio is nuclear power. The country has been relatively slow in scaling up nuclear energy capacity despite having the necessary international agreements in place, such as the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal and the Nuclear Suppliers Group waiver.
- To accelerate nuclear energy adoption, **India is now focusing on Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)**. These reactors offer a viable alternative to traditional large-scale nuclear plants, enabling quicker deployment and integration into the national grid.
- Even with ambitious targets of achieving 100 GW of nuclear power by 2047, nuclear energy would still constitute less than 10% of India’s total electricity capacity. Therefore, India must also scale up other renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and hydrogen to meet its clean energy goals.

Balancing Development and Climate Responsibility

- India’s evolving climate stance is a strategic recalibration rather than a retreat from its commitments. By prioritizing adaptation and economic growth, the country aims to build resilience while maintaining flexibility in its approach to emission reduction.
- At the same time, India recognizes that transitioning to clean energy is inevitable and must be integrated into its long-term development strategy. Investments in renewable energy, nuclear power, and sustainable technologies will be crucial to achieving this balance.
- In essence, India’s climate policy shift is about exercising sovereignty over its developmental choices while ensuring that its long-term growth aligns with sustainability goals.
- The challenge ahead is to strike the right balance between economic prosperity and environmental responsibility, a task that will shape India’s future in the global climate landscape.

India’s Changing Climate Strategy FAQs

Q1. Why has India shifted its climate strategy towards adaptation?

Ans. India believes that adaptation provides immediate and local benefits, helping build resilience against climate change while ensuring economic growth is not compromised.

Q2. How does India view economic growth as a defense against climate change?

Ans. India argues that economic prosperity enhances resilience, making development the best shield against climate risks, similar to the model followed by China.

Q3. What role does the Economic Survey 2024-25 play in India’s climate strategy?

Ans. The survey emphasizes achieving developed nation status by 2047 before aggressively pursuing net zero emissions by 2070, prioritizing growth over premature decarbonization.

Q4. Is India abandoning its commitment to clean energy and emission reductions?

Ans. No, India remains committed to clean energy but wants to decide its pace and approach independently, focusing on domestic manufacturing and energy security.

Q5. How does India plan to balance economic growth with sustainability?

Ans. India aims to scale up nuclear energy, solar, wind, and hydrogen while gradually transitioning to a low-carbon economy without external pressures dictating its policies.

Source: IE
