

Green over brown: On India's climate goals

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India's climate goals are on track, but future investments must be sustainable

India asserted at the [virtual Climate Ambition Summit](#), co-convened by the [UN to mark five years of the Paris Agreement](#), that it is well on its way to not just fulfilling its national pledge on emissions reduction, but exceeding the commitment. The performance, [outlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#), rests primarily on the estimated present reduction of emissions intensity by 21% over 2005 levels (the goal is between 33% and 35% of GDP by 2030), and the twin pillars of renewable energy and higher forest cover. Indeed, the Emissions Gap Report 2020 of the UNEP includes India among nine G20 members who are on track to achieve their unconditional commitments under the Paris pact, based on pre-COVID-19 projections. Significantly, the G20 bloc as a whole, responsible for 78% of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), was not expected to meet its pledges, but some countries and the EU as a group announced higher ambition at the summit. The brief reduction in global GHG emissions brought about by the pandemic has given all countries an opportunity to review their development trajectories. The unprecedented event has enabled them to deploy an extraordinary fiscal stimulus for rehabilitation of economies – estimated at \$12 trillion globally – making green growth a possibility. India faces a particular challenge, in moving its pandemic rehabilitation spending away from traditional brown sector policies aligned with fossil fuel use to green territory.

At the recent summit, Mr. Modi took credit for expansion of forests, which, according to the national pledge under the Paris Agreement, will serve as a carbon sink of 2.5 bn to 3 bn tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. This is a key goal, given that it has multiple benefits, protecting biodiversity, influencing the climate system and providing resources for communities. But it is fraught with uncertainty. The Centre has questioned the veracity of State afforestation data and said only a fourth of the claims they made were deemed credible. Clearly, without a cohesive policy on verifiable afforestation, the carbon sink approach may yield poor dividends, with questions hanging over the spending. Achieving 100 gigawatts of solar power capacity within the overall renewables goal, from 36 GW now, needs a steep scale-up that must actively promote rooftop solar installations. There is little evidence that this is a high priority for most States. Transport-related emissions, which are a major component of the whole, have risen sharply in the unlock phase of the pandemic as people prefer personal vehicles, but the issue received little support from States which failed to reorder cities for cycling and

pedestrianisation. Large-scale agriculture insurance against climate disasters also needs attention. In the year that remains before countries meet at the UN Climate Change conference in Glasgow in 2021, India needs to focus on future emissions and plan green investments that qualify for global climate funding.

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