

The government must translate intent into action

The PM appears sensitive towards the environment. Policies must reflect it
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The Covid-19 experience is a reminder that the country should aim for not just socio-economic recovery, but a green socio-economic recovery (HT)

On August 15, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a raft of measures to ensure that India can maintain the delicate balance between its development priorities and the need to keep its environment healthy. The priorities of the government, PM Modi said, included saving Gangetic dolphins and Asiatic lions along the lines of Project Tiger, making Ladakh carbon-neutral, reducing pollution in 100 cities, and prioritising renewable energy.

PM Modi's endorsement of the need for a healthy environment is significant because only a strong political push can nudge both the bureaucracy and citizens towards opting for a green path, make it a mainstream issue, raise awareness levels, and increase funding for it. An excellent example of what political support can do to a neglected issue is the Swachh Bharat Mission — the PM's interest raised the programme's profile; sanitation became a key national issue; and additional resources were allocated.

But there are other issues which merit attention. The Modi government is embroiled in controversy over a critical piece of green policy (the Environmental Impact Assessment). It has been criticised for opening up pristine forest blocks for coal mining, since this could adversely affect forests, critical biodiversity and forest-dependent communities, and undermine efforts to mitigate the climate crisis. The government is also seen as not doing enough to strengthen institutions that safeguard the environment. And even though renewable energy has been the top agenda, coal continues to be the mainstay of India's power mix (50%). The Covid-19 experience is a reminder that the country should aim for not just socio-economic recovery, but a green socio-economic recovery. The PM's intent is correct. Translate it into action.

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