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ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE MR. PRANAB MUKHERJEE, MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF INDIA ON 'INDIA AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES: CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY SECURITY' AT THE ASIA SOCIETY, NEW YORK ON SEPTEMBER 30, 2008



Mr. Victor J. Menezes, Ambassador Frank Wisner, Ambassador Ronen Sen, Ambassador Nirupam Sen, Consul General Prabhu Dayal, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank Asia Society for giving me an opportunity to share with you India's perceptions on two of the key issues of global concern in our times – climate change and energy security. We

meet at an extraordinarily turbulent and uncertain juncture in contemporary times. The world has barely come to grips with a growing energy crisis with oil and gas prices reaching unprecedented highs. This has been further compounded by increase in food prices. And now the financial markets have plunged into a volatile and high risk situation due to the cumulative impact of the US sub-prime crisis, a continuing

credit crunch, and a severe decline in investor and consumer confidence. As we are acutely aware, it is an interconnected world that we live in. Like it or not, along with all the advantages that this implies, we are all exposed, in different degrees, to the risks and uncertainties inherent in the situation.

Precisely for this reason, we need to keep our attention focused on the fundamentals. In fact, the very challenges that seem so overwhelming at the moment may well offer the opportunities that we are looking for to enable the world economy to regain its dynamism and restore a positive outlook for growth, in particular for developing countries.

It is against this background that I would like to speak to you today about the twin challenges of Climate Change and Energy Security, which are, in important ways, closely interlinked. The energy dimension of Climate Change is crucial, just as the Climate Change dimension is a decisive factor in the energy choices that we make.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

India has always been conscious of the need for global cooperation on environment protection. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was the only Head of State or Government, apart from the host country, to attend the first international conference on environment protection held in Sweden in 1972. India was among the first countries in the world to set up a separate Ministry of Environment. Prime Minister Rajiv

Gandhi spoke of the need to balance development and conservation in his address to the United Nations in 1987.

These leaders were not only pioneers in the global environment movement, but projected India's age-old conviction and commitment to environment protection. Their beliefs were deeply rooted in our civilizational legacy, which emphasized the need for harmony between Man and Nature, rather than Man triumphing over Nature. Indeed, from ancient times, Nature has been deeply revered as a source of Man's sustenance. The concept of sacred groves, sacred trees and sacred animals created a spiritual framework of conservation, which is still observed in many parts of our country.

It was this enduring philosophy, which was reflected time and again by our seers over the millennia. In Mahatma Gandhi's profound observation, which I feel should serve as our guiding principle in global efforts to preserve our planet; he said, and I quote, "The earth, the air, the land and the water, are not an inheritance from our forefathers, but a loan from our children. So we have to hand over to them at least as it was handed over to us". Far from heeding the Mahatma's plea, we have imperiled the very existence of our future generations. There is no longer any doubt that humanity faces a very real threat to its very survival due to the risks emanating from Climate Change.

The Fourth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has

been honoured with the Nobel Prize, has unequivocally confirmed that Climate Change is taking place, and that this has resulted from an accumulation of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere from intensified industrial activity in the last two centuries.

The risks from such Climate Change are real, serious and immediate. They must be addressed with a sense of urgency, if potentially catastrophic consequences are to be avoided. These consequences are no longer in the zone of the distant future; instead, we are beginning to see adverse consequences even in our own lifetime. The world has become susceptible to more frequent and extreme climatic events such as hurricanes, typhoons and heavy rains. There is a rapid decrease in the polar ice-caps, and even in our own Himalayas, there is evidence of glacial retreat. The risks of these climatic changes are greatest to developing countries, which are also the most vulnerable and least equipped to cope with climate challenge.

It is time that the world recognizes that Climate Change represents a classic example of a global cross-cutting issue, where only a timely multilateral and collaborative approach among nations will be able to provide the required response. I often hear people say that climate change is a truly extraordinary challenge and deserves an extraordinary response. I agree. Unfortunately, what we are witnessing at the multilateral negotiations on the Bali Action Plan is that attempts are being made to reach only the usual least

common denominator outcome at the Conference of State Parties scheduled in December 2009. There is no sign, whatsoever, that the negotiations are being undertaken with the spirit of seeking an extraordinary and ambitious outcome.

Does India want an ambitious outcome at Copenhagen? We most certainly do. We are prepared to make our own contribution, with a sense of global responsibility. But, it must be recognized that no outcome will be viable and command a global consensus, unless it is seen as being fair and equitable. Equity demands the acknowledgement, indeed acceptance, of the principle that each citizen of the globe has an equal entitlement to the global atmospheric space. This would eventually lead us to a per capita convergence of greenhouse gas emissions. We recognize that this cannot happen overnight. But this is a principle which should inspire our ongoing negotiations.

In the context of Climate Change, historical accountability is often conveniently ignored. On the other hand, the current discourse, particularly in developed countries, has focused almost entirely on current GHG emissions, virtually side-stepping the scientific fact that it is accumulated GHG emissions in the atmosphere - collected over a hundred years - that are responsible for climate change. Current emissions only add to the problem, particularly as they accumulate for the future.

As I had mentioned earlier, our present crisis is the result of activity over the past two centuries, where the contribution of developing countries had been minimal. It is, therefore, completely one sided to target countries like India, whose emissions, though modest, are rising, but fail to bring to account those who have been responsible for more than 70% of the accumulated emissions in the atmosphere.

And, incidentally, despite the targets for reductions in emissions that these countries assumed under the Kyoto Protocol, there are few signs that these will be met. And if they are not met, will there be any accountability? The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which was agreed to by consensus in Rio in 1992, recognizes this historical responsibility. It is for this reason that emission targets were confined to developed countries and the Framework Convention accepted the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities".

Developing countries are committed to sustainable development, to be supported by transfer from developed countries of new and additional financial resources and technology on preferential and concessional terms. Emission reductions would follow as a result of sustainable development and not be the vehicle for sustainable development. This is an important distinction, which is largely being ignored in the debate today.

Even if we were to focus on current emissions, India's record is impressive. Despite being a continental-sized economy with a billion plus population, India's total emissions of carbon dioxide, the most important of the greenhouse gases, constitutes only 4% of the global total, while the U.S., for instance, accounts for 20% and Europe for around 15%. India's per capita level of emission is only 1.1 ton, as against 20 tons in the US, and that of Europe is over 10 tons. Additionally, during the past decade, while our economy has grown at 8% per annum, our energy growth has been a modest 3.7%, thus keeping the rise in emissions considerably low.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite this excellent track record of responsibility, India has taken major steps to further enhance the sustainability of its growth. This is not because we are under pressure to reduce our emissions, but because we genuinely believe that it is in India's best interests to pursue environmentally sustainable growth. As Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has said "Our people want higher standards of living, but they also want clean water to drink, fresh air to breathe and a green earth to walk on".

The challenge for India is to reconcile its development imperatives with environmental responsibility. In order to eradicate poverty and bring about a modest increase in the living standards of our people, India needs to significantly increase its energy

consumption. The Report of the Expert Committee on Integrated Energy Policy envisages an increase in power generation from a current level of 1,60,000 megawatts to about 8,00,000 megawatts by 2030-31.

In order to meet this magnitude of power requirement, we will need to pursue all available forms of energy. Our energy mix currently is 51% based on coal, 36% on oil, 9% natural gas and only 2% from hydropower and nuclear energy respectively. If this energy mix remains unchanged over the next 25 years then our dependence on fossil fuels will continue and much of our energy requirement will have to be sourced from abroad. It is estimated that in 2030-31, we would have to import 66% of our coal, 90% of our oil and 60% of our natural gas. This is obviously not good news for India's energy security, particularly at a time when the prices of fossil fuels are steadily increasing. Unless this is effectively addressed, India's growth is likely to confront a major energy constraint.

Needless to say, even if there were no climate change arguments, considerations of energy security alone would require a medium-to-long term strategy of implementing a strategic shift from fossil fuels to non-fossil fuels, from non-renewable to renewable sources of energy, and from conventional to non-conventional sources of energy.

It is because we recognize the linkages between climate change and energy security that we have adopted a

National Action Plan on Climate Change, which focuses on the need for the strategic shift which I referred to earlier. This Plan was released by the Prime Minister on the 30th of June this year and, in reality, constitutes India's plan for sustainable development. The Plan gives priority to Eight National Missions, of which two directly impact on energy security. The Mission which occupies pride of place among the 8 missions is the Solar Mission. The Sun is the original, inexhaustible and renewable source of energy. This Mission has the following objectives:

Firstly, to disseminate as widely as possible, existing applications of solar energy, such as solar lanterns. We currently have a nation-wide programme for the distribution of solar lanterns, particularly in rural areas where there is still no electricity. There are also plans to promote the use of solar photo-voltaic panels for larger, commercial buildings and solar heaters for urban residential buildings.

Secondly, there will be a focused effort to bring about improvements in efficiency and lowering of costs through technical innovations. We intend to do this through public-private partnerships. This includes not only promotion of new solar photo-voltaic technologies, such as thin film, but also solar thermal applications, which would help in providing both grid as well as distributed power.

Thirdly, to launch a major R&D effort to develop applications that can

provide convenient, cost-effective and large-scale applications of solar energy. The key here would be the development of storage systems that could make solar energy grid compatible.

Our Government is currently engaged in a series of brainstorming sessions with stakeholders, such as business and industry, scientific and technical institutes, non-governmental organizations and concerned government agencies to evolve an ambitious, but practical, plan to develop solar energy as the chief source of our energy over time. We would seek greater international collaboration in this area. This is an exciting adventure, because if India succeeds in this Mission, it would basically overcome energy constraint on its growth, and on global growth, while avoiding negative consequences for environmental sustainability.

Another Mission in this context relates to energy efficiency. India has already scored impressive results in this regard. The energy intensity of India's growth has been virtually halved over the past three decades, from over 0.30 kg of oil equivalent per US Dollar of GDP to the current 0.18 kgoe. This is already equivalent to the OECD average. Our experts say that this could be further improved by about 25%, bringing us closer to 0.12 kgoe, which is currently the best in the world. India enacted the Energy Conservation Act in 2001 and a Building Code in 2005, the implementation of which will bring about significant improvement in energy efficiency in high energy sectors, such as steel, paper and pulp and commercial

buildings. Here again, a number of activities are planned with several stakeholders, particularly business and industry.

I would also like to add that, in our energy plan, nuclear energy occupies a prominent part. Nuclear energy is also a clean source of energy. We have, over the years, developed an impressive and comprehensive infrastructure for our nuclear industry, despite the fact that the country has, since its Peaceful Nuclear Explosion in 1974, faced a virtual isolation from the international civil nuclear energy market.

With the success that we have achieved in obtaining a waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and the pending US Congressional approval of the India-US civil nuclear agreement, we will not only close a chapter of over three decades of global nuclear apartheid against India, but open a new chapter in India-US and international cooperation in addressing shared interests in energy security, combating climate change and preventing non-proliferation in weapons of mass destruction. India is now also poised for a major expansion of its nuclear power sector. Our current estimates are that we can scale up nuclear power to at least 63,000 MW by 2030-31.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

To conclude, India is meeting the twin challenges of climate change and energy security by pursuing a strategy of sustainable growth. In multilateral

negotiations on climate change, it will be our effort to evolve a global regime which does not unduly restrict our energy options, nor imposes significant costs of adjustment to a low-carbon economy. A shift to a low-carbon economy is critical to prevent climate change. But this can only be possible if the global regime is fair and equitable. India will contribute to this effort as a responsible global citizen, through its own ambitious Climate Change Action Plan. This sense of responsibility is obvious from our Prime Minister's solemn commitment that India's per capita emissions will never exceed that of developed countries, even as the country traverses a high growth trajectory.

As the Prime Minister recently reiterated in the UN General Assembly on 26th September 2008, "we in the developing countries do not have the luxury of time. Political compulsions force us to meet the aspirations of our people quickly even as we subject ourselves to newer and more rigid international standards and norms. We owe it to our future generations to make strong efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals. There is a mutuality of interest in this between the developed and the developing countries. We hope the world will act in this spirit of enlightened self-interest".

Thank you.

[BACK TO HOME PAGE](#)