

"The UN Climate Action Summit is likely to hand out hard lessons about climate politics in an era of nationalism."

Can global diplomatic jaw-boning backed by an upsurge of popular youth mobilisation shift the hard economic and political calculus of nations? Today's global Climate Action Summit, convened and energetically backed by the United Nations Secretary General, seeks to pull off just this feat. It seeks to spur national pledges and action to address climate change in the face of mounting information that the community of nations is doing too little, and too late. How likely is this effort to be successful? And what are India's stakes in this summit?

Visible signs and science

The summit occurs amid a steady drumroll of scientific alarm. The scientific advisory group to the summit (of which I am a member), reports that the five years since 2015 is set to be the warmest of any equivalent recorded period, sea level rise is accelerating, and oceans have become 26% more acidic since the dawn of the Industrial era. Recent weather events bring into focus the likely implications of a warming world. This summer saw Delhi-like temperatures across southern Europe, Hurricane Dorian rendered large parts of the Bahamas unliveable; and witnessed simultaneous raging fires in the Amazon, central Africa and even Siberia.

Scientists are increasingly able to link these individual events with climate change — the heat wave in France and Germany was made eight to 10 times more likely by climate change. Yet, concentrations of carbon dioxide continue to rise, and current country pledges would not stem this increase even by 2030.

The growing evidence of climate change — scientific and experiential — has spurred an upwelling of social action, notably among the youth. While more noticeable in the global North, young people are also mobilising in India and other countries in the global South, with The New York Times reporting that organisers estimate four million youth turned out in protest (on Friday) against inaction on climate change around the world.

A political disconnect

If science, experience and public alarm are increasingly on the side of action, unfortunately, national politics in country after country is trending in the wrong direction. A turn toward nationalism in multiple countries has created a short-term, look-out-for-our-own mentality that is inimical to the global collective action needed to address climate change. Thus, in the United States, President Donald Trump not only refuses to enhance actions, he has actively rolled back measures in the electricity sector and actions to limit methane emissions in the name of competitiveness. In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro has made it clear he sees environmental protections as limiting

Brazilian business. And nationalism in some countries makes it much harder to pursue aggressive action even in countries where the politics is more conducive.

Backed by popular mobilisation and scientific evidence, can the UN Summit swing the tide toward enhanced action? The Secretary-General is pinning hopes on a two-track approach.

First, in an exercise of diplomatic pressure, countries have been urged to enhance their pledges for action made as part of the Paris Agreement, committing to lower future emissions. The intention is to provide a platform for climate champions to step up and claim leadership of an important global agenda.

So far, the response is underwhelming. A number of small and mid-sized countries, including the United Kingdom, have already committed to achieving the objective of making their economies net carbon neutral by 2050 (that is, the sum of emissions and uptake of carbon through 'sinks' such as forests is zero). By contrast, several large countries, notably the United States, Brazil, Australia, Canada, Japan and Mexico are reportedly not even going to participate in the event at a high level. China and India have issued statements hinting that they are doing quite enough, and India has highlighted the need for enhanced finance if it is to do more. While there may be last minute surprises, the UN Summit does not look like shifting any entrenched positions — those willing to act are known, and those unwilling are unmoved. International suasion, even backed by science and popular mobilisation, seems unlikely to shift entrenched national politics.

The second track operates less in the realm of diplomacy and seeks instead to induce changes in real economies around a set of 'action portfolios'. These include, for example, furthering and accelerating an energy transition toward low-carbon energy, making cities more climate friendly and more resilient to climate disruption, and starting the process of turning energy intensive sectors such as steel and cement more carbon friendly. Notably, domestic objectives are central to these conversations: promoting solar energy for energy security reasons; making cities more liveable; and making industries more efficient and therefore competitive. These initiatives serve as a focal point for broader conversations including coalitions of business and researchers. If the UN Summit is to result in enhanced action, this may well be the more fruitful track.

A path for India

What does this canvas of global climate politics mean for India? First, that the prospects of effective global action required to address climate change are so weak is extremely bad news for India. We are a deeply vulnerable country to climate impacts. It would behove India not to be a status quo player in this context, but to argue for enhanced global collective action.

Second, India has the potential to show the pathway to accelerating action on climate change even while pursuing its development interests. A notable example is its energy efficiency track record, which helps limit greenhouse gases even while saving the nation energy. However, there are inconsistencies in India's story as a climate champion. India is justifiably recognised for promoting renewable energy, yet also muddies the waters by sending mixed signals on future coal use. The choice of Houston — the U.S. oil capital — for the Indian Prime Minister's recent public event, risks signalling that India sees its energy independence as tied to enhanced fossil fuel use. While some increase in fossil fuel is inevitable for India, the messaging is incoherent at best. India needs domestic energy policies that are more clearly and coherently tuned to a future low carbon world.

Third, such a domestic message would position India to be a true global climate leader, rather than a leader only among climate laggards. Could an India, firmly committed to a low-carbon future that brings development benefits, strike common cause with other powers? Could, for example, India and China, both jostling for influence

in African nations but also both losers from climate impacts, jointly help ensure that Africa's development is powered by renewable energy rather than fossil fuels and based on an energy efficient future? Such an agenda could bring together economic, environmental and political gains.

The UN Summit is likely to teach us hard lessons about climate politics in an era of nationalism. The pathway to enhanced action is unlikely to override entrenched national politics, powered by international suasion. Instead, the aim should be to make accelerated climate action congruent with an enlightened notion of national interest by focusing on key actions in rapidly changing areas such as energy and urbanisation. Such a pathway holds enticing prospects for India. But it requires that India can build a diplomatic approach on a firm domestic foundation that takes seriously climate change as a factor in its future development pathway.

GS World Team...

United Nations General Assembly

Why in discussion?

- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that the issue of climate change will be raised prominently when world leaders discuss public issues during the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly at the United Nations headquarters in New York.
- "We will pay special attention to the issue of climate change posing a threat to every person and object," the UN chief told reporters at a press conference on Wednesday.
- Guterres will host the 2019 Climate Action Summit at the United Nations headquarters in New York on 23 September to address the current climate challenges.
- Heads of countries and governments, high-level representatives of member states, and representatives of the private sector and Teen Age activist Greta Thunberg will consider measures to deal with the issue currently to be decisive by the United Nations.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the United Nations Climate Action Summit 2019 in New York on 23 September.

What is it?

- Its General Assembly, was established in 1945 under the United Nations Charter.
- The General Assembly works as a representative body on issues such as deliberations and policy making in the United Nations.
- The UN General Assembly, made up of 192 members, provides an excellent forum for multidisciplinary and multilateral discussions on international issues covered under its charter.

Election of president

- The President of the House is elected three months before each session of the General Assembly. Till the year 2003, the Speaker was elected in the first conference of the session.
- For the first two weeks, general disputes continue, with each delegate after the Secretary-General and the Speaker being given the opportunity to speak in front of the House.

Functions of the General Assembly

- In 1940, the General Assembly set up an interim committee, called 'Minority Assembly', to redress the inaction of the League arising out of the prohibition exercise of permanent members of the 'United Nations Security Council'.
- During the prorogation of the General Assembly,

the work of the General Assembly can be convened by the Ministers and the General Assembly can call a session. Accordingly, in the absence of a uniform vote on questions of peace and security in the Security Council, a special session of the General Assembly may be called on 24 hours' notice, which may propose collective measures and direct military action.

- The 'United Nations General Assembly' considered various complex problems of the world in previous years and took appropriate action on the question of Korea, Greece, Palestine, Spain etc.
- In 1959, the General Assembly was successful in stopping the invasion of Suez by Britain, France and Israel.

Main point

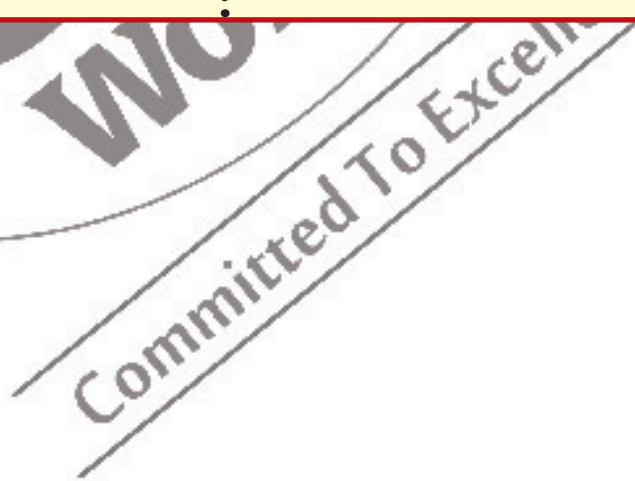
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will speak at this important UN meeting on the issue of climate change. Apart from this, he will also address the United Nations General Assembly.
- Union Minister Prakash Javdkar gave this information in a press conference.

During this, he said that the United Nations is going to have an important meeting on climate change.

PM Modi will have two speeches in the United Nations, which are awaited by the whole world. The work that India has done in the field of climate change has gained a lot of popularity all over the world whether it is change in BS6 forest area increase.

Representatives of the governments, private sector, civil society, local administrations and international organizations will participate in this conference and efforts will be made to find ambitious solutions in six areas: -

- Moving to Renewable Energy Globally
- Sustainable and strong infrastructure and cities
- Sustainable agriculture
- Management of forests and oceans
- Strength and resilience to withstand the effects of climate change
- Allocation of public and private financial resources
- with a net zero carbon economy



Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

1. The year 2019 has been recorded the hottest year compared to any equivalent recorded period since 2015. Consider the reasons responsible for this-

1. The sea level is rising rapidly.
2. Due to the development of the industrial age, the oceans have become 28% more acidic.
3. Methane concentration has continued to decrease worldwide.

Which of the above statements are incorrect?

- (a) 1 and 3 (b) 2 and 3
(c) 1 and 2 (d) All of the above

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

Q. 'The biggest obstacle to fighting climate change at present is the withdrawal of collective responsibility by various nations in self-interest.' Analyze this statement.

(250 Words)

Note: Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 21 Sept. is 1 (d)

