

Be ambitious at Lima

Larger promises of emissions reduction would benefit India. But any agreement must also be fair

JYOTI PARIKH AND KIRIT PARIKH



THIS WEEK, the climate community gathered in Lima, Peru, for two-week-long deliberations on what to do about climate change on the heels of the US-China declaration last month. Hailed by *The New York Times* as a landmark agreement and denounced by environmental lobbies as window dressing, the joint declaration by the US and Chinese presidents has accomplished one of its unstated goals: that of reducing pressure on themselves and putting pressure on other countries, especially India. Thus, the conference of parties (CoP) at Lima is of considerable importance to India.

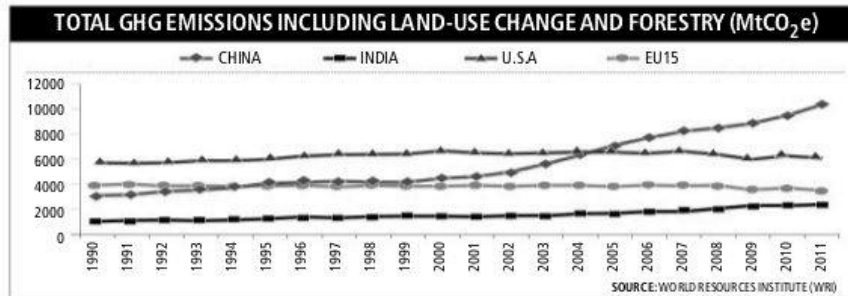
The US-China declaration says that the US will, by 2025, reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 26-28 per cent over 2005 levels, while China will peak its emissions by 2030 or before,

and 20 per cent of its energy will come from non-fossil sources.

Let's consider what the Chinese declaration implies. China's emissions in 2011 were 10.55 gigatonnes (Gt). Over 2010 and 2011, it added 0.87 Gt annually to its already high emissions. By a conservative estimate, China's emissions will reach about 18 to 20 Gt per year when it peaks by 2030. With a projected population of 1.39 billion in 2030, this implies emissions of 13.25 tonnes per capita, a substantial increase over its current level. So China has promised to be a considerable burden in the carbon space in future.

Now for what the US has promised. America's emissions in 2005 were 6.9 Gt and with a population of 296 million, the per capita emissions were 23.3 tonnes. With a 28 per cent reduction in 2030, emissions will be around 5 Gt, and with its projected population of 355 million, per capita emissions will be 14 tonnes. Since the EU has promised to reduce its emission by 40 per cent by 2030, the per capita emissions of China would be more than that of the US and EU combined.

Also, declaring a peaking year is a half-measure. How would China's emissions decline after 2030? What



would China's emissions in 2050 be? China has said nothing on the subject, and neither has the US. For a serious attempt to constrain the impact of climate change to 2 degrees Celsius by 2050, both need to reduce per capita emissions to 2 to 3 tonnes by 2050. In fact, China's total emissions in 2030 may well be twice as large as that of the US and EU combined. Also, the total emissions of China, the EU and the US in 2030 will be more than their emissions in 2011. Thus, no progress towards reducing the threat of climate change will have been made.

All we can be thankful for is that things could have been worse. Both the US and China need to make stronger commitments. The US should target a reduction of 40 per

cent by 2030, as the EU has done, and China should peak by 2020. More importantly, they need to announce dates when their per capita emissions will come to 2 to 3 tonnes — which would still be more than India's current per capita emissions.

In international forums on climate change, India is often painted as obstructionist, whereas China is lauded as a good guy taking many steps, despite the fact that China is the largest emitter in the world, its total emissions are nearly five times that of India's and its per capita emissions exceed the global average.

India has certain concerns about taking action on climate change which need to be addressed. First, there is the fear of the loss in value of coal, which is our major energy re-

source. This is not only due to concerns over local pollution levels, but also the increasing global pressure to not use it. Second, in terms of access to energy, we still haven't ensured sustained energy access for all, either in terms of electricity or cooking fuel. Delayed development is costly. Finally, adaptation costs are also a concern. We already bear the burden of the extreme events we face today. The floods in Uttarakhand, Kashmir and Assam cost thousands of crores of rupees. We need to propose a global fund and/or measures for adaptation.

India also needs to do a better job at telling others about all we have done in terms of mitigation. The timing of such announcements is an important aspect. Had China

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made its announcement that its emissions will keep growing for another 16 years at the ongoing COP-Lima, where so many countries, including several industrialised ones, with lower per capita emissions than China's 9 tonnes per capita are gathered, it would have raised hackles. India's announcement of 100 gigawatts of solar power by 2020 could have raised the already high stock of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the level of a climate hero had it been announced at, say, the G-20 summit.

We could choose a number of options for our announcements: One, the peaking level. The US peaked at 23 tonnes per capita and China, if it achieves its target, will peak at some 14 tonnes per capita, at a level that is 70 per cent of the US peaking level. India can offer to peak its emissions 10 years after China does and at a per capita level

that is no more than 70 per cent of China's peaking level.

Two, our share of non-carbon sources. We could offer to have the same share of non-carbon sources in electricity generation 10 years after whatever level the US achieves, provided that technologies that reduce costs of renewable power and of electricity storage are made available on reasonable terms of royalty payment and compulsory licensing. The target of 100 GW of solar power by 2020 is good, but we have already announced that without fanfare.

Three, the level of emissions. We can also promise that India will not exceed China's current emissions till 2040.

Should we choose the time of US President Barack Obama's visit early next year to announce our intentions, we could at least request the US, and China, to be more ambitious in their targets of reduction and more than that promised in Beijing. India needs an ambitious climate treaty for its own good — but any agreement has to be fair, too.

Jyoti Parikh is executive director and Kirit Parikh is chairman of Integrated Research and Action for Development, New Delhi

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