

COP28 in Dubai: Standing firm

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Introduction:

In the first two days of COP28 in Dubai, India has affirmed its global warming mitigation commitments while underlining abiding principles of its climate diplomacy — equity and justice.

India's stand in the COP28:

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi summed up the country's standpoint in his speech at the UNFCCC meeting on Friday: "For global good, it is important that the rights of everyone are protected, and everyone has equal participation."
2. India achieved its emission intensity-related target 11 years ago and is on track to achieving its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) towards the Paris Pact, he said.
3. Prime Minister Modi also reiterated the country's renewable energy commitments.
4. At the same time, the government has been unequivocal about coal's important role in the country's economy.
5. "Coal is and would remain an important part of India's energy mix," Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra said on the eve of the PM's visit to Dubai.
6. These statements send an important message that India will not buckle under pressure to raise its climate ambition — certainly not at the cost of its development priorities.

The quagmire of 'phasing down coal' and alternatives to coal:

1. Eliminating the use of coal is sure to be among the contentious issues at the Dubai COP.
2. Two years ago, at Glasgow, a last-minute push by India, China, and other emerging economies led to a change in the final text of the COP26 declaration — from a "phase out" of coal to a "phase down" of the fossil fuel.
3. The debate at Glasgow also framed the challenge faced by countries seeking to reduce emissions while attempting to improve growing populations' living standards.
4. The share of renewables in India's energy basket, for instance, has been increasing for at least five years.
5. However, coal provides more than 70 percent of the country's energy needs.
6. With the economy bouncing back from the Covid-induced crisis, power demand in the country has been growing at a healthy pace.
7. Their natural gas reserves allowed the US and several European countries to move away from coal.
8. India, China, and other emerging economies like Indonesia and South Africa, on the other hand, do not have that alternative.
9. However, while natural gas is less polluting, it is still a fossil fuel and the jury is out on whether it's an effective transitory clean energy source.
10. India has, therefore, been insisting on a nuanced approach to eliminating the use of all fossil fuels — not just coal.

What world can do to curb the use of coal?

1. **Policy Implementation and Regulations:** Governments must implement stringent policies and regulations to discourage coal usage and incentivize renewable energy sources. This includes setting ambitious targets for coal reduction, imposing carbon pricing mechanisms, and providing subsidies for renewable energy projects.
2. **Accelerated Renewable Energy Deployment:** Investing heavily in renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, geothermal, and hydropower, is essential to replace coal's role in power generation. This includes promoting research and development, streamlining permitting processes, and providing financial support for renewable energy infrastructure.
3. **Energy Efficiency Measures:** Improving energy efficiency across all sectors, from buildings to transportation, can significantly reduce overall energy demand, thereby reducing reliance on coal. This includes implementing stricter building codes, promoting energy-efficient appliances, and encouraging public transportation usage.
4. **Just Transition for Affected Communities:** Transitioning away from coal must be accompanied by measures to support communities and workers that rely on the coal industry. This includes providing retraining programs, job placement assistance, and economic diversification initiatives to ensure a smooth and equitable transition.
5. **International Cooperation and Collaboration:** Global cooperation is crucial for achieving a successful coal phase-out. International agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, provide a framework for coordinated action, while multilateral institutions can facilitate knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and financial assistance to developing countries.
6. **Public Awareness and Education:** Raising public awareness about the environmental and health impacts of coal is essential to garner support for a coal phase-out. Public education campaigns, community outreach programs, and media engagement can effectively communicate the urgency and benefits of transitioning away from coal.
7. **Economic Incentives and Market Mechanisms:** Creating a market environment that favors renewable energy sources and penalizes coal usage can drive the transition. This includes carbon pricing mechanisms, preferential tariffs for renewable energy, and subsidies for clean energy technologies.
8. **Harnessing the Power of Finance:** The financial sector plays a critical role in mobilizing capital for the transition away from coal. Encouraging green investments, divesting from coal-related assets, and adopting sustainability principles can steer financial flows toward renewable energy and sustainable development.

Conclusion:

India has done well to affirm its climate commitments while underlining its development priorities. The greater expectation from the world to phase down coal will put more pressure on India and like-minded countries. Having taken principled positions, they must stand their ground.