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by

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on

“The role of parliaments in combatting climate change”

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I. Introduction

Climate change has already made its mark on every part of the world, including India. It poses a key threat to sustainable development. If proactive measures to adapt and reduce the impacts of climate change are not taken, it has the potential to further exacerbate vulnerabilities. India is among those nations which are most susceptible to the effects of climate change. In fact, climate change has already begun to affect India in several ways, such as water stress, heat waves and drought, severe storms and flooding and its deleterious consequences on human health, wildlife, food production and the economy as a whole.

II. India – A Key Player in Climate Action

India has a crucial role to play in the fight against climate change, not only because the country experiences the worst of its effects, but also because it is one of the largest and most rapidly expanding economies in the world. Additionally, with almost a fifth of the world's population, India's success in tackling climate change can have far reaching consequences for the rest of the planet. India has become a focal point in the global push for cleaner energy and it is increasingly seen as the next frontier in the transition towards renewable energy.

As we stand witness to the severe consequences of climate change, it is imperative to take urgent collective action to combat it. Although individual actions, such as using reusable items, conserving energy and minimizing waste are crucial, we must also acknowledge the vital role that Governments and Parliaments worldwide play in addressing this global emergency, both individually and collectively.

In this communication, besides touching upon the role of Governments in general and Indian Government in particular, the role of Parliaments in the formulation of the country's climate action has been discussed.

III. Role of Government in Tackling Climate Change

It is widely acknowledged that Governments play a vital role in addressing climate change by implementing policies to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, endorsing sustainable land use practices and promoting renewable energy sources. Governments can also contribute to global climate change negotiations and establish a framework for combating climate change while raising awareness and educating the public to generate support for action. Additionally, Governments can promote climate change education through public awareness and by incorporating it into school curriculums.

The Indian Government acknowledges the significant role the country can play in addressing the worldwide crisis of climate change and as such has been proactively implementing measures to combat it. The country aims to achieve 500 Giga Watt of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, reduce the total projected carbon emission by an additional one billion tones, reduce the carbon intensity of the economy by less than 45 per cent, fulfil 50 per cent of energy requirements through renewable waste by 2030, and achieve net zero

emissions by 2070.¹ These objectives demonstrate India's sincerity in tackling climate change, although they are challenges and ambitious.

IV. Adaptation and Mitigation Responses by Indian Government to Tackle Climate Change

India's updated Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), submitted to the UNFCCC in August 2022 further reaffirms our commitment to work towards a low carbon emission pathway. The Indian Government has established ambitious goals to decrease the country's greenhouse gas emissions intensity by 33-35 per cent by 2030 in comparison to 2005 levels. Moreover, the Government aims to achieve 40 per cent of its installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030 and to expand its forest coverage to 33 per cent of its overall land area.

No doubt these targets are ambitious and formidable, nevertheless, India has already made significant strides towards transitioning to a green economy. The Indian Government has implemented various initiatives in recent years to transform its economy and adopt low carbon development path. The country is rapidly increasing its use of renewable energy sources like wind, solar and hydro power.

As is evident, India already has numerous policy measures in place that could accelerate the shift to cleaner and more efficient technologies. In 2021, India was ranked fourth in the world in terms of installed renewable energy capacity.² The country is implementing measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change, such as developing climate-resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable agriculture practices.

The Indian Government has been actively participating in international climate negotiations as well and has committed to working with other countries to address climate change. India is also a member of the International Solar Alliance, which aims to promote solar energy deployment. The Government's "LiFE" movement calling climate-friendly behaviors among individuals, communities and organisations has the potential to make a big difference.

V. Parliamentary Action on Climate Change

While the Executive does its part, Parliaments around the world also have its task cut out for combating the serious threat of climate change. Their role is also central to any successful strategy to tackle climate change.

Firstly, Parliaments play a vital role in combating climate change by developing policies and laws that promote sustainable development, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the transition towards renewable energy. Secondly, their oversight role requires them to seek Government assurances on matters of critical development or climate concerns on the floor of the House, raising issues or asking for special discussions pertaining to country's planned trajectory for

¹ National Statement by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at COP26 Summit in Glasgow, Press Information Bureau, dated 1 November 2021 available at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1768712>

² Year-End Review 2022 – Ministry of New and Renewable Energy available at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1885147#:~:text=408.71 GW as on 31.10, Renewables 2022 Global Status Report>).

green economy or attainment of SDG. In addition to policy-making, they can assess the effectiveness of Government policies and programs in addressing climate change and ensure that the necessary resources are allocated towards the implementation of these initiatives, both aspects being important in ensuring a country's response and resilience to climate change.

Thirdly, Parliamentarians can also raise awareness and educate citizens about the impacts of climate change and the steps they can take to contribute to a sustainable future. They can engage with various stakeholders such as NGOs, businesses, and academic institutions to collaborate on sustainable initiatives that benefit both the environment and the economy. It is the duty of legislators to generate awareness among their constituents regarding the varied development initiatives taken by the Government for ensuring their overall progress particularly to ease the brunt of climate change and global warming.

VI. Role of Indian Parliament in Combating Climate Change

Reinforcing India's commitment to the national development agenda and to propel the implementation of the SDGs, the Indian Parliament has been playing a crucial role in combating climate change by formulating legislations that promote sustainable development and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It has enacted several laws that promote the use of clean energy, such as solar and wind power and provide incentives for businesses and individuals to invest in renewable energy sources.³ The Parliament has strengthened environmental protection laws and regulations to protect ecosystems and biodiversity.⁴ Usually it is the Government that proposes legislation, but in the Indian Parliament, Members have also brought Private Members' Legislation to deal with environmental issues.⁵

The procedure of parliamentary questions has also been extensively used by Members to elicit information about Government actions to deal with environmental problems. Parliamentary questions have often been concerned about the impacts of climate change on agriculture, coastal areas and health and mitigation issues related to energy, agriculture and aviation.

The issue of climate change and related issues have also been discussed extensively in our Parliament. Our Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committees on Science & Technology, Environment & Forests⁶ has provided recommendations on policies related to air pollution, water pollution, waste management, and biodiversity conservation, among other issues and has helped to

³ The Energy Conservation Act, 2001, the National Renewable Energy Act, 2015.

⁴ The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972; the Forest Conservation Act, 1980; the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; the Biological Diversity Act, 2002; the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

⁵ Private Members' Bill titled 'Climate Change Bill, 2012' introduced by Shri K.N. Singh in Lok Sabha to mitigate emissions and improve energy efficiency (available at <https://m.economictimes.com/news/economy/policy/private-members-bill-on-climate-change-presented/articleshow/12607012.cms>); Private Members' Bill titled 'The Ocean Thermal Energy Utilization Bill, 2022' introduced by Shrirang Appa Barnein Lok Sabha to provide for promotion of use of ocean thermal energy to produce clean environment friendly renewable energy at all times and substitute traditional electricity generation methods of fossil fuel burning (available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/topic/fossil-fuel-burning>); Private Members' Bill titled The Climate Change (Net Zero Carbon) Bill, 2021 introduced by Shri Jayant Sinha in Lok Sabha to achieve net zero target by 2050.

⁶ 193rd Report on 'Global Warming and its Impact on India'.

strengthen environmental governance in India by providing recommendations on laws and regulations related to environmental protection. Likewise, Committee on Energy has been instrumental in promoting the development and use of renewable energy in India. It has provided recommendations on policies and programs related to renewable energy, such as the National Solar Mission, and helped to shape the country's energy transition.⁷

Indian Parliament has been taking steps to encourage international cooperation on climate change by participating in global climate negotiations, sharing knowledge and expertise with other countries and collaborating on research and development on research and development of clean energy technologies.

VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is not only the responsibility of every individual and Government to the fight against climate change, Parliaments also have a significant role to play in addressing this global crisis. In recent years, the Indian Government has taken several steps to address climate change, which have helped to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and move towards a low carbon economy. The Government has made commitments to mitigate climate change and the current G-20 Presidency provides an opportunity to further advance global climate action and find lasting solutions to the vexed issue.

They have the power to enact legislations and enforce policies, hold Governments accountable, raise awareness, and promote global cooperation towards achieving a sustainable future. Overall, the Indian Parliament has been playing a significant role in combating climate change. However, there still room for further raising the level of parliamentary debate on climate change.

While the efforts of individual Parliaments remains critical to achieve effective action, it is essential that Parliaments work together on a global level to develop unified policies and strategies that address the root causes of climate change. International cooperation is crucial in mitigating climate change, and Parliaments can play an essential role in facilitating such cooperation.

We need to work together with our Parliaments towards building a more resilient and sustainable planet.

VIII.

⁷ 28th Report on 'National Solar Mission – An Appraisal'.