

Prime Minister's speech

I am delighted to welcome all the Heads of Government and distinguished representatives of various countries who are all here today. Delhi is unusually cold, for the time of the year, but I do hope the warmth of our hospitality will make your visit a very comfortable and memorable one.

I compliment my friend Dr Pachauri for the tenacity with which he has been organizing this very important annual summit on sustainable development for several years now. This Delhi Summit has become an important event in the annual calendar for all those who are committed to finding a globally acceptable and socially inclusive solution to the problems of climate change and outlining pathways to sustainable development.

I believe that the good work of institutions like TERI, groups like yours and individuals like Dr Pachauri have created the necessary climate for change on climate change. Societies all over the world are challenging their governments to do something, to do it now and do it right. I assure you that India would be in the forefront of that effort.

This effort by TERI is a glowing example of that emerging trend of thought leadership that brings together ideas and people from across the world to collectively engage in this new struggle of human imagination over human predicament. The environmental crisis that manifests as climate change makes us realise that we have a common predicament. It is a collective human crisis but, if imaginatively handled, it offers a collective opportunity to reinforce human solidarity in the face of natural forces.

I have often said that the Indian approach to such global problems is defined by the ancient Sanskrit saying, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam the Whole World is One large Family. In his very first address to the nation as India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru said, Peace has been said to be indivisible; so is freedom, so is prosperity now, and so also is disaster in this One World that can no longer be split into isolated fragments. These were the words of Jawaharlal Nehru on the eve of India's Independence on 15th August, 1947.

So we take our responsibility seriously. The Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change is now working on a National Plan of Action for Climate Change. Even as we engage internationally in creating a global strategy to address climate change we would in parallel, work on local, sub national and national action to meet the challenges of climate change. The impact of climate change falls differently on people and the poor are the worst hit. They have the least resources to cope. Action on climate change can then become an action for poverty reduction to reduce the vulnerabilities of the poor people everywhere.

We need technology innovations for reduction of energy use by industry and other user sectors. We need massive action for afforestation, drought proofing and flood protection. We need to act to protect our coastal areas. We need action to protect the glaciers that feed our river systems. A whole gamut of development action needs to be planned and funded. Our 11th Five Year Plan which has been launched this year has articulated strategies in many of these areas for our Nation.

Our National Plan of Action on Climate Change will be released in June later this year. An area that needs immediate attention is that of public transport. We have asked the Planning Commission to come up with a comprehensive policy in this regard.

We need to create knowledge partnerships across countries to collaborate on climate change action. India has decided to link all academic institutions that work on climate change on a national knowledge net and also identify key knowledge institutions that become centres of excellence in climate change related research. We are also considering setting up a Venture Capital Fund to promote green technologies.

At the international level we will continue to engage with all nations to strengthen global initiatives in the area of climate change. At the last G-8 Summit at Heiligendamm I made a commitment on behalf of India on carbon emissions. India is prepared to commit that our per capita carbon emissions will never exceed the average per capita emissions of developed industrial countries. Moreover, as developed countries take measures to bring down their per capita carbon emissions, our threshold would come down too. This is our solemn commitment.

I am sure participants at this Summit will endorse India's stand because you are all concerned about poverty eradication and reducing global disparities in income and wealth. We cannot continue with a global development model in which some countries continue to maintain high carbon emissions, while the development options available for developing countries get constrained.

We therefore need to ensure an acceptable standard of living for all our people but would choose a sustainable path for that development. Climate justice must, therefore, inform all efforts at international collaboration in act of human solidarity. This then becomes an opportunity for a new global compact. Such a compact has to be based on the well-established principle of common but differentiated responsibility so ably articulated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This was reiterated at the recent conference in Bali.

By climate justice we mean a fair, equitable and transparent global regime for technology transfers. It is in the interests of people living in developed and developing countries to facilitate such transfers. We in the developing world desperately need access to environment friendly technologies, especially in energy, transportation, manufacturing and agriculture. Such technology transfer provides new opportunities for resource transfers to countries for adaptation. Nations of the world will have to engage in the next two years to create a consensus on a new architecture for cooperation that involves both finance and technology support to countries for adaptation.

When we felicitated Dr. R.K. Pachauri on the Nobel Prize to the Climate Change Panel, I had said that I would like TERI to present before the people of our country a global vision on energy security. What is it that we must do and must not do to address the challenge of energy security. What are the technology choices available and what public policy choices do we have that will enable Governments to address the challenges we face in making clean and affordable energy available to all our people. Can we afford persisting with the distortions that have long crept in to our energy pricing policies? Are we contributing to environmental degradation through some of our energy pricing policies? Are we encouraging over use of resources through misdirected subsidies? What are the long term costs of the short term benefits we seek from such policies? Are we hurting our future energy security by shirking the responsibility to grapple with the political challenges at hand? We need a much wider national debate on such issues.

I sincerely hope that Summits like these will encourage such a public debate. I would like to see larger participation in these events of our young people, especially from our political parties. I would like our young people to be more vocal on these issues. After all, tomorrow is theirs. If the youth of today do not worry about tomorrow, who will then? I assure you that we in Government of India are seized of the matter and India will adopt a responsible and forward looking stance, aimed at promoting sustainable development. I look forward to being appraised of the conclusions of your Summit. I wish your deliberations all success.