

PRISM

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Policy Perspectives Foundation (PPF) is a non-profit, apolitical think tank on matters of national interest. PPF's activities focus on complex and interconnected challenges to peace, stability and development in India in cognizance of the external dimension. PPF is committed to spreading awareness, building capacity and promoting resilience.

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Unveiling the truth; Illusion Burnt with Hijab

- Tehmeena Rizvi

Iran is witnessing a nationwide rage with mass protests happening everywhere, after the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman from the north-western city of Saqez. who died in the hospital after spending three days in a coma. The details of the episode are both horrific and gut wrenching. She was visiting the capital city of Tehran with her family when she was arrested by morality police, who accused her of violating the law requiring women to cover their hair with a hijab and their arms and legs with loose clothing. She collapsed

after being taken to a detention centre to be "educated". There are horrifying videos of the incident doing rounds on the internet, the way Amini's head was beaten with a baton and banged against one of their vehicles is inhumane.

Iran has a goodwill otherwise when it comes to strategies in International affairs but they couldn't really tackle internal conflicts and discussion around women's free will. This one death has led to a series of deaths in the protests following this brutality. Though Iran has earlier witnessed the death of Neda Agha Sultan, Pouya Bakhtiari, Navid Afkari, the list goes on and on. The questions are many but answers very few. Iran has been a role model



for shia muslims in India but this behaviour towards the women is questionable. Worldwide, Hijab being forced on women or taken away are both injustices of the same nature. Infact Quran clearly forbids the use of force or any kind of pressure to implement religious and moral values.

The reality of current times remains that every nook and corner of Iran is currently protesting the death of Mahsa Amini and her death has become a symbol against the tyranny not just faced by the women of Iran but the women of the World. There have been protests in Iran before as well but this protest has the presence of people from different socio-economic backgrounds and male counterparts.

According to Reza Sayah, "Government is using a two pronged approach to quell these protests, on one hand they are trying to show sympathy for the death of Mahsa Amini and on the other hand there is a serious crackdown- security forces and statements from the revolutionary guard. Strategy hasn't worked in quelling the anger".

One can't reflect hypocrisy for protests selectively, the Muslim world also needs to understand that how women are being killed and face violence on daily basis from Afghanistan to Iran , Pakistan to Somalia for not wearing Hijab and other religious dress codes. First and foremost freedom of choice should be normalised and women are free to decide what to do and what not to. Males who make such draconian laws should really shun authoritative behaviour and stop assuming that they have rights over women. The Muslim introspection has to start to see these ugly acts that they perpetuate in the name of religion, which in contrast is un-islamic in many ways. The value of innocent human life is highest in Islam and other major religions of the world, and then come other things. Unfortunately many men feel emotionally hyper and draw sadistic pleasure whenever law and notions are thrust on women brutally, and this harsh reality needs to be looked at thoroughly.

It is no secret that men have hijacked sacred message of Islam to suit their vested interests and inflated egos throughout the centuries. It is worth mentioning here that the word 'burqa' was in Arabic, the Quran did not use it for women's purdah. In its complete essence, Hijab is not described in the same context in the Quran as the burqa. Burqa as a word and imposed concept later became a part of the Muslim culture. As we can see from the beginning of history, Islam granted women unlimited freedom. They participated in all activities during the time of the Prophet and his companions. But after a few centuries men through their acts and deeds made religion a tool to suppress women. The Holy Quran mentions an equivalent word that represents a barrier or a curtain and it is mainly used in the context of men.

There are some statements in the Quran about women's dress, they're taken one hundred percent from the style of the dress that existed at that time and place.

The word which occurs inside the text has nothing to do with women. We have to understand that hijab is a question of patriarchy since men have interpreted the Quran and they have interpreted that part as a barrier or curtain specifically for women.

This is the tip of the iceberg. While the death toll in Iran is mounting, resulting in the killing of protesters and law enforcement officers, 31 precious lives have already been lost. Morality police are exerting violence on women. Time has come for the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran to respect the wishes and sentiments of the women of Iran and also the marginalised minorities. These protests are only causing non peaceful co-existence in the country. The regime should understand that preserving human values comes first.

The bigger reality on the global level for the women is equally painful and scary. The societies ,families, Governments need to look at the girl child as a human being with views and aspirations rather than a commodity that has to.

It's time for women to fight back against the 'morality police.' We see the women protesting in the streets of Iran. The women of the world too should rise against all injustice. The so-called Guardians of religion should understand the choices of women and treat her equally human, and not brutalise.

Although some pro-government protests are also happening in Iran, still they can't brush aside the reality that the right to freedom of dress and whether to wear a Hijab or not should be the complete domain of women, and the Government of Iran should show willingness to accept this logic.

I as a Muslim woman believe that we aren't some other species who should be looked at differently and alienated from the mainstream. Muslim women can wear whatever they want; not wearing a hijab doesn't make "some of them" non Muslim.

Importantly, the interference of the state in the personnel affairs of humans, especially the choices of women related to dress and other things is among the biggest scar on human values and humanity. Be it Iran and Taliban imposing veil over dead bodies or France unveiling through forcible power both are condemnable. The civilised world needs to take a holistic view to get rid of these tyrant states and we as Muslims also need to do soul searching to not get overawed by the tyrant states being built by wrongfully using our sacred religion. State has no power to rule over personnel freedom if the world envisages a civilizational outlook of positivity.

The last shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, let the veil be a choice -- which ended when the Islamic republic imposed requirements for women's "modesty" in public.

The crux is that Hijab use or no use should be the choice of women, not a brute power infested chauvinistic man ridden with patriarchal hate of women , and the same principles applies to Iran or any other country of globe.

Personally, I don't wear a hijab and it's a choice which should be respected and not mocked. It's not because I wouldn't adore or respect hijab, but because I don't consider it to be a symbol of my beliefs. That's the thing about faith. It can't be proved like a maths theorem, it is the voice of your inner soul.

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आधी आबादी, प्रशासन, यायालय और देश

-पूजा कुमारी

राष्ट्रीय अपराध रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो कि रिपोर्ट बताती है की 2021 में रेप के 31,677 मामले दर्ज किए जो कि औसतन 86 दैनिक है। सार्वजनिक और निजी दोनों क्षेत्रों में महिलाओं के खिलाफ अपराध का खतरा ज्यादा है | जहाँ महिलाओं के लिए परिवहन और सार्वजनिक सेवा संगठन में असुरक्षा कि भावना इन सुविधाओं तक उनकी पहुंच और उपयोग को भी सीमित करती है।

निर्भया केस सर्वविदित है, इसको हुए दस साल से ऊपर हो गये है जिसके बाद रेप पर बने कानूनों को कठोर किया गया और साथ ही बच्चों से जुड़े पोक्सो एक्ट को आये भी अब दस साल पूरे हो गये है | गंभीर अपराधों के लिए कड़े कानूनों को लाने के बाद भी हर रोज महिलाओं और बच्चों के साथ हिंसा घटने का नाम नहीं ले रही है।

इस परिस्थिति में देश के अलग - अलग राज्यों में रेप जैसे गंभीर अपराधों में सजा पा चुके लोगों का अनायास जेलों से निकल पाना चिंताजनक है। महिलाओं के प्रति लगातार बढ़ते अपराधों के बीच देश कि शीर्ष अदालतों के कुछ ताज़ा निर्णयों ने महिलाओं के बीच असहजता और समाज में वाद - विवाद को जन्म दिया है। कुछ केसों के हालिया निर्णयों पर एक नजर डालने पर वर्तमान विवाद को आसानी से समझा जा सकता है: मध्य प्रदेश उच्च न्यायालय ने चार साल की बच्ची के साथ बलात्कार के एक दोषी कि उम्रकैद को कम कर दिया। संवाद पत्रों के अनुसार कोर्ट ने 27 अक्टूबर, 2022 को फैसले में संशोधन करते हुए कहा कि "आरोपी बच्ची को जिंदा छोड़ने के लिए काफी दयालु था " एक अनजाने में हुई गलती थी। कोर्ट कि टिप्पणी से कुछ विवाद पैदा हुआ क्योंकि ऐसे बयान सामाजिक स्तर पर अनुचित लगते है |

साल 2012 में दिल्ली कि एक लड़की (19) के अपहरण, रेप

और हत्या के केस को निचली अदालत ने 'दुर्लभ से दुर्लभ' श्रेणी में रखते हुए तीन आरोपियों को मौत की सजा सुनाई थी। कोर्ट के अनुसार वे सभी आरोपी "शिकारी" थे और "शिकार की तलाश में सड़कों पर घूम रहे थे"। लेकिन सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने नवम्बर, 2022 को उन तीन दोषियों को सबूतों के अभाव में बरी कर दिया। सुप्रीम कोर्ट का यह निर्णय हैरान करने वाला है क्योंकि निचली अदालतों द्वारा आरोपियों को मौत कि सजा दी गई थी। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय के सेवानिवृत्त जस्टिस यूयू ललित ने एक न्यूज़ पोर्टल में दिए इंटरव्यू में कहा, 'सरकमस्टेंशियल एविडेंस के आधार पर इन तीनों व्यक्तियों को मृत्युदंड मिला। इस मामले में तथ्य इतने स्पष्ट नहीं दिखाई दिए। अगर सबूत पुख्ता नहीं है तो सिर्फ इसलिए मौत की सजा देना क्योंकि ट्रायल कोर्ट और हाई कोर्ट ने ऐसा किया है तो फिर मामला सुप्रीम कोर्ट में क्यों आए?'

यहाँ पर कई सवाल उठते हैं। अगर इस केस के आरोपी जो भारत के नागरिक है वो निर्दोष है तो उनके नागरिक अधिकार देखते हुए क्या इन्हें जेल भेजने वालों पर कोई कार्यवाही हुई ? जो लोग पिछले दस सालों से जेल में रहे, उनकी जिंदगी के ये दस साल जेल में बिताने कि जिम्मेदारी किसकी बनती है और इसका खामियाजा कौन देगा ? क्या इस सन्दर्भ में निचली अदालतों और तमाम जाँच एजेंसियों कि छानबीन पर सवाल नहीं बनता है ? सजा के लिए असली जिम्मेदार फिर कौन है? और उनको क्यों नहीं पकड़ा गया ? सर्वोच्च न्यायालय द्वारा पुलिस और बाकि कि एजेंसियों को क्या निर्देश है जिन्होंने सबूत और जाँच कार्य में लापरवाहियां दिखाई? क्या कोर्ट के दायरे में लापरवाही बरतने वालों के लिए सजा का प्रावधान नहीं आता?

2002, बिलकिस बानो गैंगरेप केस में दोषियों को 2017 में मुंबई हाई कोर्ट द्वारा आजीवन कारावास कि सजा मिली थी। लेकिन गुजरात सरकार द्वारा गठित एक पैनल द्वारा आरोपियों को अगस्त, 2022 में जेल बाहर आने पर उनका स्वागत माला पहना कर किसे रिहा कर दिया गया। आरोपियों के जेल से या गया मानो, वो कोई बड़ा काम करके आये हो। किसी रेप के आरोपी का स्वागत करना शायद सामाजिक गिरावट का द्योतक है। जहाँ आधी आबादी के साथ दुर्व्यवहार करने वालों का कुछ लोग उल्लास के साथ समर्थन कर रहे हैं, इस घटना से स्पष्ट है कि हम न केवल सामाजिक रूप से अपनी दिशा से भटक रहे हैं परन्तु जघन्य अपराधों का परोक्ष अनुमोदन भी कर रहे हैं। ऐसी घटनाएँ पीड़ित परिवार के साथ – साथ अन्य नागरिकों के भीतर भी डर और हताशा पैदा करती है जो अपेक्षित नहीं है। इसके विपरीत हैदराबाद (2019) एक वर्षीय पशु चिकित्सक के सामूहिक बलात्कार और हत्या में चार संदिग्धों का एनकाउंटर करने वाली पुलिस टीम का समाज के लोगों ने फूलों से अभिनन्दन किया था।

कोर्ट द्वारा दिए कुछ निर्णयों ने जिसकी चर्चा ऊपर कि गई है, एक धुंधलापन बढ़ाया है। इन मामलों पर आए फैसलों का प्रभाव न केवल कोर्ट में लंबित रेप के अन्य मामलों को प्रभावित करेगा बल्कि अपराधी तत्वों को हौसला भी देगा। यह व्यक्तिगत रूप से हर महिला के सम्मान को भी ठेस पहुंचाता है। इन पर सामाजिक या न्यायिक चुप्पी आने वाली पीढ़ियों को सही राह से भटका सकता है। न ये रेप के पहले मामले है और न ही शायद आखिरी। लेकिन अपराधियों के प्रति अभी का सामाजिक व्यवहार और निरापराधियों का जेल जाना ये सोचने पर मजबूर करता है कि क्या अपराधिक न्याय प्रणाली सही दिशा में जा रही है?

वैसे हमारा समाज स्थिरता और समावेशिता का समर्थन करता है, लेकिन महिलाएं और लड़कियां अभी भी असुरक्षा का अनुभव करती हैं जो उनके मानसिक विकास को भी प्रभावित कर सकता है। इस सन्दर्भ में कुछ दिन पहले महिलाओं के अधिकार पर सर्वोच्च न्यायालय के मुख्य न्यायाधीश धनंजय यशवंत चंद्रचूड़ के मंतव्य का आशय है, कि महिलाएं व्यक्तिगत रूप से अपने बारे में निर्णय लेने के लिए स्वतंत्र है जिसका सम्मान होना जरूरी है। अतः ऐसी स्थितियाँ और भौतिक वातावरण बनाने की आवश्यकता है जहाँ डर के बिना महिलाएं, पुरुष, लड़कियां और लड़के एक साथ रह सके। यह कठिन कार्य नहीं है किन्तु कानून अकेला महिलाओं कि सुरक्षा सुनिश्चित नहीं कर सकता। इसके लिए समाज को महिलाओं के खिलाफ हिंसा को बढ़ावा देने वाले नजरिए और नीति - निर्माताओं पर दबाव डालने कि जरूरत है।

लेखिका पीपीएफ में शोधकर्ता हैं।

India - Central Asia Relations: The Future

The Centre for Neighbourhood Studies of the Policy Perspectives Foundation (PPF) organised a talk on India - Central Asia Relations: The Future. The discussion aimed at contemporizing historical and people to people links between India and Central Asia in the present day context. Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar was the keynote speaker at the talk.

Address by Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar: The Central Asia region comprises five countries



Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Little is known about these countries in India because they are victims of their own success. Since the time these countries got independence in 1991 from the Soviet Union, they have by and large remained stable and peaceful and are moving in their own trajectory of becoming prosperous. Due to absence of violence, crises and turmoil a lot is not reported on these countries. Unfortunately, in 2022 four out of the five countries viz., Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have witnessed violence. For the first time, violent clashes between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan resulted in more than 100 casualties.

The war between Russia and Ukraine is having a significant impact on the region. This throws up both challenges and opportunities in terms of greater cooperation between the region and India.

These nations did not actively seek independence when they became independent in 1991. The people in these countries were happy to be a part of the USSR. While other countries shed blood and toiled hard to get independence, these countries were given their freedom on a platter.

All the five countries are landlocked and Uzbekistan is doubly landlocked as its neighbours are also landlocked. One would imagine that their geographical position would put these countries at a disadvantage but they have been able to translate it into strength and assets by building expressways, highways, pipelines and railways. The connectivity initiatives in the region precedes the much talked about Belt and Road initiative of China. In fact, the Chinese aimed at incorporating the earlier efforts to connectivity in the region into the Belt and Road initiative.

All the five countries are extremely rich and well provided with natural and mineral resources such as oil, gas, uranium and lead among others. In the times to come, water is going to become a precious and scarce resource.

Two of these countries namely Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are rich in water resources as they have snow clad Pamir mountains. In terms of development, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are rich in mineral resources as a result they have prospered much more than others. Turkmenistan is rich in gas reserves, however the policies pursued by them were not prudent and have not reaped good economic returns. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the poorest of the lot as they do not have mineral resources. They have water resources but have not been successful in harnessing them in economic terms.

Presently, these countries are facing challenges of religious fundamentalism and extremism and terrorism. Particularly, the threat has become more visible with the Taliban assuming power in Afghanistan last year. Many other terrorists groups such as Al-Qaeda, Islamic State - Khorasan Province, Daesh, Lashkar are active in the region. Three of these countries share borders with Afghanistan. Thus, the situation in Afghanistan is a cause of concern for them. Kazakhstan is the largest among the five republics with an area of 2.8 million square km with a population of 19 million. It shares a 7000 km long boundary with the Russian Federation. This is the longest border shared by any two countries in the world. It also has a 1600 km long boundary with China. These are the aspects which Kazakhstan keeps in mind while following a multi-vector foreign policy. Resultantly, it tries to keep excellent relations with Russia and China - the two of the big powers in the vicinity. Kazakhstan also maintains good relations with the USA, EU, India, Turkey and others. It is rich in mineral resources with reserves of more than 100 minerals available in commercially viable forms. As a result, it has grown well economically. The country's total GDP is 572 billion USD, its per capita GDP in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) is high at 27000 USD. It contributes to 60% of the GDP of the region. However, the World Bank has identified corruption as the biggest challenge to the country. Kazakhstan was the last

country to declare independence from the former USSR. Since independence, Kazakhstan's important policy decisions include giving up on nuclear weapons, it set up the National Reserve Fund to keep earnings from mineral resources. The reserve has been of great use to Kazakhstan.

Despite these efforts, the country recently faced violence. A series of mass protests began in Kazakhstan on 2 January 2022 after a sudden sharp increase in liquefied gas prices following the lifting of a government-enforced price cap in 11 out of 14 provinces. During the week-long violent unrest and crackdowns, 227 people were killed and over 9,900 were arrested. The Government had to resort to calling reserve troops from Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) - a military alliance of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan - agreed to deploy troops in Kazakhstan. To the credit of Russia, within a day forces came in, they did not have to fire a single shot and stayed in the country for about 10 days. The incident emphasised the role of Russia as a security provider to Central Asia.

Uzbekistan is much smaller in size as compared to Kazakhstan and is spread over an area of 450,000 sq km. It is doubly landlocked and very rich in mineral resources such as gas, uranium, gold etc. It has the highest population of 35 million people among the five Central Asian countries. The per capita GDP at PPP is not very high, it is about one-third of Kazakhstan. The new President came to power recently and has launched a slew of reforms in social, political and economic areas giving more freedom to the people. The country also shares a small border of 157 km long with Afghanistan but has been engaging with the Taliban regime.

Turkmenistan is slightly larger in area than Uzbekistan. It has the fourth largest reserve of natural gas in the world. This is important in view of current circumstances where gas from Russia is not coming to Europe. In such a situation can Turkmenistan supply gas to the

region. The country has not been able to use its resources prudently. Consequently, it has been plagued by food shortages and other items of necessity. The country also shares a border of 700-800 kms with Afghanistan.

The Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India (TAPI) Pipeline is being developed but due to instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan its construction has been delayed. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have little mineral resources. Kyrgyzstan has some coal reserves. These countries have hydropower resources but they are not able to take full advantage of these resources. The per capita income at PPP is not very high.

The relations between five countries of Central Asia and India are ancient, historical and civilisational. The two regions have shared deep cultural linkages with each other over two millennia in terms of people to people contact, trade, and commerce. More recently during the soviet period there was intense interaction between these five countries as constituents of the USSR and India. There were good relations between these countries and India in political, economic and social matters. Presently, India considers Central Asia as part of its extended neighbourhood and is working to leverage its historical relations with this region to strengthen the relationship in the current modern context. India realises that its stability, security and peace is intimately linked to this region. The biggest challenges to India and Central Asia relations is lack of geographical connectivity as it does not share borders with any of the five countries and Pakistan comes between the two regions. It refuses to provide access to Indian goods and cargo to the region. India has been trying to sidestep this blockage by going to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The discussions on the corridor started in the late 90s to provide connectivity through India through Iran and Azerbaijan but it did not move fast because Iran has always been under sanction because of its nuclear programme. Things have now started to move and Central Asian countries are becoming part

of the INSTC. India has also signed the Multimodal Ashgabat Agreement and also as far as the Chabahar project is concerned where we have cooperation with Uzbekistan and other countries. Chabahar port has been accepted as part of INSTC.

Another aspect of the functioning of these countries is that any action is taken or the project moves forward only when orders come from the top authority such as the President's office. Therefore, ministers might engage but unless the head of the state is not engaged on a particular project nothing moves forward. India has started exceedingly well to engage with these countries. India was one of the first countries to recognize their independence, before 1995 the then Prime Minister visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. However, between 1995-2015 only four prime ministerial visits were made to these countries. This was true for other countries as well. For instance, not a single US president has visited any of these countries. The lack of focus on the region was unusual; it is extremely important not only for India but for the world as propounded by Halford John Mackinder in heartland theory and many other thinkers in their subsequent theories. Thus, the region was neglected. But things are now changing, India has stepped up efforts to engage with the region. In 2015, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited all the five countries of the region, the only Indian Prime Minister to do so. The Prime Minister hosted the first India-Central Asia Summit in a virtual format which was attended by Presidents of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan on 27th January, 2022. It has been decided the summit will take place every two years. Under the rubric of this summit, there will be meetings of foreign ministers, cultural ministers, commerce ministers and national security advisors. This is likely to take Central Asia and India relations forward in a strong way. The Prime Minister has laid special focus in the region.

Since India became a member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Shri Narendra Modi has been attending all the dialogues of this forum and engaging with his counterparts of other countries. India has assumed chairmanship of SCO, this would help in taking forward our relations with Central Asia. Apart from SCO, from 2015-2020, the Prime Minister has been meeting the leaders of Central Asia on various forums. In 2022, he visited Samarkand in Uzbekistan.

In 2019, the India-Central Asia Dialogue was launched. In 2020, it was organised virtually and in 2021 it was organised in person and foreign ministers of all Central Asian countries visited India for the dialogue. The next edition of this dialogue will take place in March, 2023. The national security advisors of both sides are also meeting. These are steps signifying India's sharp focus on the Central Asia region.

While the political engagement has risen, the trade and economic ties with the region have not been up to the mark because India does not have connectivity with this region. There has also been an information divide between the two sides. To offset these challenges, there has been much more emphasis on investments, joint ventures and subcontracting for major infrastructure projects in all these countries. Three major Indian universities have established themselves in Uzbekistan.

The two sides are also cooperating in terms of dealing with terrorism, religious extremism and fundamentalism. There is convergence of interest in terms of dealing with rise of Taliban in Afghanistan. Both Central Asia and India are working to ensure there is an inclusive and representative government in Afghanistan. Apart from above concerns, the Central Asia region can also play a crucial role in meeting India's energy security needs. In fact, Kazakhstan was the first country from which India imported Uranium.

There are a large number of areas where both sides can work together such as people to people contact industrial relations and soft power.

Presently, the Central Asia region looked at Russia as a security provider. However, after the Russian-Ukraine war, the importance and sway of Russia in the region is declining. President Tokayev of Kazakhstan attended the Economic Forum in Russia in 2022 where he categorically mentioned that they did not recognize the independence of people of Luhansk and Donetsk (regions declaring independence from Ukraine). In the same year, the foreign minister of Uzbekistan also declared to the senate that they would not recognize independence of these regions. There have been a large number of other statements which demonstrate that Russian influence in the region is declining. Resultantly, China is exploring areas of expanding its influence in the region. However, the elite and the ruling classes in these countries may not say anything against China but common people have apprehensions about increasing Chinese influence. The region is now looking at other countries to fill the void created by Russia's diminishing influence in the region. These include Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan but these countries are also looking positively at India as it is a rising global, economic and political power. This international position of India provides it myriad and robust opportunities to engage with the Central Asia region. To utilise and make the most of these opportunities Indian Government, think tanks and civil society would need to step up efforts to strengthen, diversify and deepen their relations, ties and partnerships with Central Asia.

Some Reflections on the Strategy to Reach Net Zero Emissions Goal

-By Vaishali Basu Sharma

One year after announcing its intention to achieve a net-zero emission status by 2070, India released its Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy (LT-LEDS) at the Conference of the Parties (COP27) held in Sharm el-Sheikh last month, outlining the

broad framework of how it proposes to meet its net zero emissions goal.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) through its various initiatives has established that in order to combat "dangerous human interference with the climate system", reduce the impact of climate change caused by human activities and emission of carbon dioxide the CO2 emission by human activity must fall by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 reaching net zero around 2050. The bulk of the emissions are coming from fossil fuels which have to be replaced by cleaner, renewable fuels. At the 2015 Paris conference of parties (cop), the annual UNFCCC conference, it was decided that every nation would come up with its own targets for carbon reduction, to be reviewed every 5 years and the developed western countries will provide the funds for developing countries to achieve the targets. In absolute terms India is the third largest carbon-producing country, emitting a net 2.9 gigatonnes of carbon-dioxide equivalent (GtCO2e) every year as of 2019. Limiting emissions is one of the most feasible solutions to deal with global warming. At COP-26 Glasgow India pledged to become net zero by 2070. This is not an easy task as 70% electricity generation in India is still done through coal, and there is massive consumption of petroleum based products for the transport industry.

Submitting the policy and programme options that India is plans to undertake in order to achieve carbon neutrality, at COP-27 environment, forest and climate change minister Bhupendra Yadav said, "The journey to net-zero is a five decade long one and India's vision is, therefore, evolutionary and flexible, accommodating new technological developments and developments in the global economy and international cooperation." In terms of strategy the In order to progress on the transition to net zero emission objectives, the detailing of the decarbonization strategy is an important step.



LT-LEDS document takes a sectoral approach – focusing on seven thematic areas, namely, electricity, transport, economic and financial aspects, carbon dioxide removal, industry, urban, and forests. Critically India’s strategy for combating climate change envisions reducing the emissions intensity of its GDP by 45% by 2030 from 2005, and to achieve around 50% cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy sources by 2030, i.e. 500 GW of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources.

With a compound annual growth rate of over seven percent, power generation capacity of India stands at over 390 gigawatts. Last year the government announced that it has achieved the target of 40 percent of its installed electricity generation capacity being from non-fossil energy sources, with renewable energy (RE) capacity at 150.05 GW and nuclear energy-based installed electricity capacity is 6.78 GW, totalling 156.83 GW or 40.1 per cent of the total installed electricity capacity of 390.8 GW. Finance for renewable energy projects on the other hand has seen a 39 per cent year-on-year increase from 2020. In order to meet its 2030 targets of 450 GW installed capacity, RE will need to be deployed at 2.5 times the current rate.

Although India’s record on rolling out renewables has been exceptional, the country would need access to financial capital in the form of grants, equity and concessional loans. According to an estimate by BloombergNEF – to meet the wind and solar build out for net zero by 2030, financing to the tune of \$223 billion is required.

The Overwhelming case for a Carbon Tax:

The Indian transition involves huge domestic challenges because its energy sector is dominated by fossil fuels, in particular coal, which produces about three-quarters of the country's electricity. Climate Action Tracker states that coal makes up for over half the installed energy capacity in the country and is

expected to touch around 266 gigawatts by 2029-2030. In ten years, from 678 million tonnes MT in 2021-2022, domestic coal requirement is expected to rise to 1,018.2 million tonnes, according to the draft National Electricity Plan by the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) released in September 2022.

The financially crippled the cash reserves of state-run electricity-distribution networks, due to free electricity for farmers, have led to debts of ₹2.5 trillion. One of the difficult things that India faces is the politics around cheap energy prices. Yet if it is going to achieve the transition it has to get out of low electricity prices in various distribution companies, probably in the long term impose some kind of carbon tax. The need for this carbon tax is that much greater because the transition is going to involve more public investment in certain types of energy infrastructure, transmission etc, and as we phase out of both coal diesel and petrol there is going to be a loss of revenues. From an economic textbook the right policy is carbon pricing, and yet the political case for it is not clear. Governments around the world have not been willing to impose carbon prices at the levels you need to see. The IMF recommends, “Where carbon pricing is not politically feasible, regulations can be used to limit emissions—but these would likely come with higher economic costs.” Meanwhile, gaps remain in terms of doing things in practice which will bring us to the energy transition and the political constraints that governments face.

Clean Energy Technology:

One ground for optimism is that technology we need for global reductions in CO2 emissions through 2030 already exists. A combination of wind solar bio and hydrogen may well be sufficient cover to reach net zero emissions. The challenge isn't a technology challenge, it's a scaling challenge. Innovation both through research and development (R&D) and also through

deployment – needs to be accompanied by the large-scale construction of the infrastructure the technologies will need. For instance, new pipelines to transport captured CO2 emissions and systems to move hydrogen around and between ports and industrial zones.

Financial Commitments Fall short:

According to a report by the the Asia Society Policy Institute, ending new coal as soon as possible by 2023 and transitioning from unabated coal power by 2040 would be particularly impactful to get India to net zero emissions sooner. In terms of financing the transition, the onus lies on the west to deliver which it has not thus far.

The developed west has not even met the financial commitment of \$100 billion it made in Paris 2015. Now that transition will cost trillions. The report overseen by former Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, also estimates that India's net zero emissions targets by 2070 would require an economy-wide investment of \$10.1 trillion from now. 2050 calls for \$13.5 trillion, nearly half of the U.S. GDP, from developed nations and investors. At COP26, India sought \$1 trillion in funding from the developed world to help meet its net-zero goal by 2070.

The Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ), a global coalition of leading financial institutions committed to accelerating the decarbonization of the economy, represents a huge amount of money committed to investing into the energy transition. But that too seems to have run into problems. Recently Vanguard, the second-largest global money manager after BlackRock, pulled out Net Zero Asset Managers initiative of the GFANZ alliance on tackling climate change. Vanguard's sudden exit from the could prompt other US fund groups to walk away, dealing a major blow to

to the \$66tn global alliance trying to combat climate change.

Global emissions fell in 2020 because of the Covid-19 crisis but are already rebounding strongly as economies recover. The number of countries that have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions has grown rapidly over the last year and now covers around 70% of global emissions of CO2. This is a huge step forward. However, most pledges are not yet underpinned by near-term policies and measures. even if successfully fulfilled, the pledges to date would still leave around 22 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions worldwide in 2050. The continuation of that trend would be consistent with a temperature rise in 2100 of around 2.1 °C. Further delay in acting to reverse that trend will put net zero by 2050 out of reach.

Although as the name suggests India's LT-LEDS is a long term energy transition plan it is unfortunate that it is being set in motion at a time when short term energy crises seem hopelessly in disarray. The Ukraine war has shown that developed countries such as Germany and Japan are reverting back to fossil use. But even if the war wasn't there it is not clear that there would be a political response on the scale that is needed.

Are advanced countries willing to accept the financial and technological support required by developing economies for whom the transition costs are more difficult to bear, due to fast-growing energy needs and less fiscal space to finance green investments are not yet forthcoming. A lot of work needs to be put in towards how and what forms of blended finance can work towards easing energy transitions. When examined from a granular point of view, delivery of international public finance, critical to energy transitions in developing economies, falls far short of the promises made by the West.

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