

An Open Letter to Prime Minister over the issue of coal power related climate emergency for our country

To
Sri. Narendra Modi
The Honorable Prime Minister
Govt. of India, New Delhi

Dear Sri. Narendra Modi ji,

Greetings from Sagar, Western Ghats, Karnataka.

At a time when you and other party leaders in NDA may be very busy with the preparations for the forthcoming general elections to elect a new Parliament and govt. one can appreciate that you will be hard-pressed for time to objectively consider what may appear to you as mundane issues such as ' health implication of coal power' and the imperatives of 'Climate Change'. But in view of the ever escalating Climate Emergency and the need for an objectively prepared election manifesto, I would like to draw your attention to few critical issues so that your party may decide to consider including them in the election manifesto, whether your party feels obliged to consider them in the national interest or consider them as irrelevant to our society.

It is very unfortunate and deplorable that whereas the successive governments in the recent past have deliberately ignored the scientific and technical reasoning to the critical need to urgently start reducing the coal power capacities, the global climate emergency has reached a stage wherein a high school student from Sweden has found it a compelling reason to caution you to either take suitable action in that regard Or face the reality of being seen as a villain by the international community. So important has been the role of India in combating the impacts of Climate Change in 2019, basically because of its large GHG emissions foot print. People like me are not surprised by the political and image implications personally to you of such a call by a high school student, but are genuinely concerned by the overall implications to the true interests of our society and of the international image of the country. This timely caution by the the teen Climate Activist highlights the irony of the official stand of the govt. of India in seeking to take a leadership role in combating the Climate Change. Any adult too, who can take a rational view of the associated issues in proper perspective, may also echo what this student has said: ["Dear Mr Modi, you need to take action now against the climate crisis, not just talking about it](#)

because if you keep going on like this, doing business as usual, and just talking about and bragging about the little victories, you are going to fail. And if you fail, you are going to be seen as one of the worst villains in human history in the future. And you don't want that."

'Take Action Or You Will Be Seen As A Villain': Teen Climate Activist Greta Thunberg Tells Modi

https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/take-action-or-you-will-be-seen-as-a-villain-teen-climate-activist-greta-thunberg-tells-modi_in_5c6d146ae4b0e2f4d8a0ce09

May I also hope that your govt. will urgently take necessary steps to minimise the damage done to international image of the country, not just by the call of this high school student, but basically because of your government's refusal to appreciate various issues associated with the imperatives of the phenomenon called Climate Change? Because, the social, health, environmental and economic impacts of going on with the business as usual scenario will undoubtedly lead to irreversible damage to the interest of our country.

Whereas, there have been very many credible reports in recent years unambiguously stating the inalienable link of coal industry to multiple concerns of serious concern to our communities, out of which the health related issues are very serious for obvious reasons, and whereas many of the concerned individuals and NGOs in India have been steadfastly trying to draw the attention of the concerned authorities over the unacceptable levels of risk of the continuing policy of the govt. to rely on coal power, the latest study on "Global emission hotspots of coal power generation", as in the link below, has correctly focused on the issue how the dismal failure of Indian authorities to minimise the societal impacts of coal power has resulted in an alarming scenario where the Indian coal power plants are being associated with the highest health impacts, as quantified by regionalized life cycle assessment. It will not be out of place to highlight what this study has revealed:

"Coal power generation is a primary cause of greenhouse gas (GHG) and toxic airborne emissions globally. We present a uniquely comprehensive inventory of CO₂, methane, particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and mercury emissions for 7,861 coal-generating units including their supply chains. Total GHG and toxic substance emissions are largest from China, the United States, India, Germany and Russia (together >64% per

pollutant). Overall supply chain contributions are below 19%, but exceed 75% for individual units and pollutants. Methane emissions from underground coal mining offset Chinese coal power plant efficiency advantages in comparison to India. Health impacts, as quantified by regionalized life cycle assessment, are highest in India and parts of eastern and southeastern Europe due to lack of modern flue gas treatment, and in China due to widespread coal power generation. Deployment of state-of-the-art flue gas treatment, driven by local emission limits, can mitigate health impacts in India and parts of Europe while it is already largely used in China and the United States. Phase-out of the 10% most polluting coal power plants (by capacity) would reduce coal power GHG emissions by 16% or human health impacts by 64%, respectively."

India's coal power plants are the 'unhealthiest' in world: Study

<https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/coal/indias-coal-power-plants-are-the-unhealthiest-in-world-study/68093928>

"Global emission hotspots of coal power generation"

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgxwBVqMjCPNIDdNzxRJczJGmwNvb?compose=DmwnWsmDPkXjCkfqZfFxddLMLXBbrdxwMnFQQHCkBHrDTLGQsqwqNDfFSzxvBTdbnwwsNdpphVL&projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>

May I sincerely hope that these findings of global importance will not be brushed under the carpet by the concerned authorities in India (as has been the case generally in the past), and that the urgent suitable measures are taken to minimise the incalculable damage being done to the medium and long term interests of the country?

Also, may I hope that in view of the fact that the overall costs to our country from continuing to rely on coal power are very many times more than the meager benefits from it, and in view of the fact that there very many benign and techno-economically credible ways of meeting the legitimate electricity/energy needs of the country, the Union govt. will come up with urgent and appropriate measures not only to minimise our dependence on coal power starting immediately, but also to announce credible, sustainable and time bound action plan to completely eliminate the need for coal power plants in India by 2035-40, and to move over to a smooth energy transition scenario by deploying sustainable energy technologies such as renewable energy sources and efficient technological means to realise them?

Benefits of organized coal phase-out clearly exceed transformation costs

<https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/energy-speak/benefits-of-organized-coal-phase-out-clearly-exceed-transformation-costs/3449>

It is not only the obsession of the successive governments with coal power and the other conventional technology power sources such as nuclear and dam based hydro which are the source of enormous concerns for our people, but also the callousness exhibited in respect of widespread diversion of forest and agricultural lands, the associated pollution/ contamination of air, soil and water, the extreme lack of sensitivity associated with the hardships associated with the forced ousting of many vulnerable sections of our society (such as the recent development wherein the govt. failed to protect the legitimate interest of lakhs of tribal people who have traditionally lived in forests) etc.. All these negative vibes about the policies of the present NDA govt. are seen as the consequences of the unholy persistence with the coal based energy reliance, which in turn is seen as inextricably linked to its unsustainable policy on high GDP growth rate paradigm, where the negative consequences for the vast majority of people are completely ignored just to favor the commercial interests of a tiny number of corporate houses and private individuals. The tall claims about the corruption free governance and statements such as 'sub ke saath, sub ka vikaas' are increasingly being seen as just empty rhetoric.

Some of the recent media coverage in this context, which have clearly identified very many serious concerns to our country, are as below:

14 of world's most polluted 15 cities in India, Kanpur tops WHO list

<https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/14-worlds-most-polluted-15-cities-india-kanpur-tops-who-list-1224730-2018-05-02>

Air pollution at crisis level in north India: NITI Aayog

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/air-pollution-at-crisis-levels-in-north-india-says-niti-aayog-spells-out-three-year-plan-4811988/>

Rising air pollution will impact rainfall patterns in India: UN report

<https://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/coal/rising-air-pollution-will-impact-rainfall-patterns-in-india-un-report/66432408>

Coal Plants Might Be Even More Toxic Than We Thought

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-08-08/coal-plants-might-be-even-more-toxic-than-we-thought>

Water costs, impacts of coal-fired power grossly underestimated in electricity planning

<https://cer.org.za/news/no-room-for-secrecy-environmental-organisations-publish-minimum-requirements-for-sas-overdue-integrated-resource-plan-for-electricity>

Surface And Groundwater Pollution Are Pushing India Towards A Water Crisis

<https://swachhindia.ndtv.com/world-water-day-2018-surface-and-groundwater-pollution-are-pushing-india-towards-an-irreversible-water-crisis-17882/>

Coal India plans to shut around 100 non-profitable mines over 2-3 years

<http://energy.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/coal/coal-india-plans-to-shut-around-100-non-profitable-mines-over-2-3-years/60000488>

52 coal mines opened in 5 years to fuel power drive

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/67652271.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Immediate fossil fuel phaseout could arrest climate change – study

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/15/immediate-fossil-fuel-phaseout-could-arrest-climate-change-study>

CEA study finds 200 new sites for thermal power plants of 428.9GW

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/power/cea-study-finds-200-new-sites-for-thermal-power-plants-of-428-9gw/articleshow/67214674.cms>

Modi Govt Violated Right To Life Of Tribals

https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/modi-govt-violated-right-to-life-of-tribals_in_5c6ecca0e4b0f40774cd02fc

The issues behind such media coverage cannot be anything but genuine concerns on the alarming situation facing our country, and hence a govt. touting to represent people's concerns must not ignore them, even if it chooses to ignore its international obligations.

The large number of totally unsubstantiated linear projects being planned and implemented across the length and breadth of the country, most importantly in the forests of Western Ghats and Himalayas, in the garb of 'development' to set up roads, railway lines, power lines and power plants, mines etc. have already been showing devastating impacts on our communities as exhibited by air pollution, water & soil contamination and unbearable local heat-island phenomenon. There are more than 20 such projects in the Western Ghats of Karnataka alone, which have the potential not only to create a recent Kerala like flood and devastation scenario for Karnataka and the adjacent states, but also to enormously feed to the primary cause of Climate Change phenomenon. So much for the government's claim to be a global leader in Climate Change efforts.

Can the people of this country hope that the above mentioned warning by a high school student from Sweden, which was long overdue, will be effectively heeded to by your government, even though it has been ignoring many such credible warnings since 2014 by various community leaders, media houses, domain experts, and others?

It is unthinkable that a govt. which claims itself to be representative of people's true interest will turn a blind eye to such harsh realities, and continue to favor few corporate houses and individuals to increase their vulgar levels of financial wealth.

The unfortunate combination of factors such as already stressed natural resources base and credible projection of unimaginably deleterious consequences of Climate Change to a vastly populous country like India indicate enormous concerns such as water and food scarcity, heat waves, nonseasonal rains and floods, droughts, health issues, environmental refugees, water wars etc.. Because of such genuine concerns there is an ever increasing feeling among many sections of the society that unless the concerned authorities take urgent and effective action to set right such policies and practices, the forthcoming elections may produce vastly different results than the party leaders of the present NDA govt. may be looking for.

May I hope that the concerned decision makers will take urgent and effective actions in this regard, and avoid unbearable hardships to our communities? Educated people of this country also expect to see many of such effective action plans getting adequate focus in the election manifesto of the major political parties for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Regards

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