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Modest accord better than enviable: PM

Post-Copenhagen, India May Be Underplaying Kyoto

Our Political Bureau
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INDIA appears to have begun underplaying the importance of the Kyoto Protocol. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who backed the Copenhagen Accord at a TERI event on Friday, said, "a modest accord that is fully implemented may be better than an ambitious one that falls seriously short of its targets. This is the lesson that was learnt with regard to the Kyoto Protocol."

Prime Minister Singh, however, made it clear that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change must continue to be the "centrepiece of global co-operation on climate change."

It would appear that this lowering of ambition and a more pragmatic approach is in part the outcome of the Copenhagen conference. "I share the disappointment of many with the limited achievements of the discussions that took place at Copenhagen. At the same time, it is important to ensure that we can deliver what we promise to do," Prime Minister Singh said. India's concession on an ambitious

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deal may be understood as the upshot of the lack of global consensus on burden sharing. This, Prime Minister Singh, described as "an even greater barrier to securing an agreement". Taking the opportunity accorded by the TERI conference Beyond Copenhagen: New Pathways to Sustainable Development, the prime minister said that industrialised countries "need to recognise more clearly their historical role in the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere." The emission reduction targets submitted by the rich countries to UNFCCC have been described as inadequate. He said that rich countries should

with "bolder initiatives to contain their future emissions." He also urged for greater financial and technical assistance to developing countries both for adaptation measures to cope with the consequences of these emissions; and for mitigation to reduce their contribution to future emissions. As part of India's effort to mend fences with the rest of the developing world, Prime Minister Singh reiterated the government's commitment to vulnerable countries. "The least developed countries and small island states deserve special attention due to their greater vulnerability to climate change. India will support all mea-



ures to assist them, both bilaterally as well as in the context of a global climate change regime."

Recalling the meeting of environment ministers of Brazil, China, South Africa and India, he said the four countries wished to contribute, together with our G-77 partners, to a comprehensive, balanced and equitable outcome in Mexico based on the principles of common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities.

Less this be understood as consent to converting the Copenhagen Accord into a legal agreement, Prime Minister Singh made it clear that the Copenhagen Accord was "a catalogue of voluntary commitments and not a negotiated set of legal obligations." In unambiguous terms, the prime minister stressed that the Copenhagen Accord was not a substitute for the UN-man-dated climate talks. The government reiterated its position that the Accord was an input to the two-track negotiation process under UNFCCC. "The purpose of the Copenhagen Accord is

to contribute to the negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol and on Long Term Co-operation. It is not a substitute but a complement to these core international agreements. There is much in the Copenhagen Accord that can bring consensus on the two-track negotiating process."

Reiterating environment minister Jairam Ramesh's request to his Danish counterpart Ms Lykke Friis, the prime minister said that the negotiating process needs to "recommence in earnest" as early as March. On Thursday, UNFCCC executive secretary Yvo de Boer indicated that the earliest that the meetings can begin is late April.

India's push for resuming the two-track negotiating process under the UNFCCC comes even as suggestions are being made to undertake climate talks in smaller fora like the Major Economies Forum (as suggested by the US), EU's proposal of the G-20 or French president Nicolas Sarkozy's idea of a G-29. India and other developing countries want the negotiations to be anchored in the multilateral, decisions by consensus forum of the UN.