

Speeches

Extracts from Introductory Remarks by Prime Minister at the Meeting of PM's Council on Climate Change on the National Mission on Sustaining the Himalayan Eco-system

October 26, 2009

Let me thank you for being present for a very important meeting of this Council, since we are considering a long-term policy framework to deal with one of the most serious ecological challenges facing our country, in fact, facing the entire subcontinent. To my mind, the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Eco-System is one of the most critical of the various Missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change. It impacts directly on Water Security as well as Food Security and, therefore, involves the livelihood of hundreds of millions of our people. We all know that the entire Himalayan zone, including the high mountains, the foothills and the terai area, constitute an extremely fragile ecological zone. Over the years, there has been steady degradation of this sensitive zone as a result of deforestation, demographic pressures, rapid and often uncontrolled urbanization and road building and construction with only marginal attention being paid to environmental safeguards. Now, however, these stresses and strains are already beginning to be accentuated by the adverse consequences of Climate Change. While the larger challenge of global Climate Change has to be addressed, we need to prepare our country and people to anticipate and respond to its consequences. And part of the adaptation response lies in halting and reversing the ecological degradation that has already taken place in the Himalayas.

I am happy to see that the Mission document has come out with a long-term plan to carefully and comprehensively monitor all the key indicators of climate change phenomena in the Himalayan zone. We have anecdotal evidence that glaciers may be receding, but we need precise and carefully vetted data, both through satellite imaging and ground surveys. The establishment of a Centre for Glaciological Studies is welcome. I would also like to compliment the Minister of Environment and Forests, for the initiative he has taken to commission a study on Himalayan glaciers in collaboration with ISRO. This initiative must become an integral part of this National Mission and must be institutionalized so that the longer-term trends are monitored and analysed. Only then would it be possible to formulate appropriate and effective adaptation strategies.

I am happy that the National Mission has a section devoted to socio-economic challenges with a set of concrete immediate and long term measures to deal with them. The involvement of local communities is indispensable in ensuring the successful implementation of this Mission. The reference to drawing upon local and traditional knowledge and practices is laudable. We must find ways to institutionalize this. It is

extremely important that we lose no time in implementing the practical measures that have been identified. While the State Governments have been sensitized to the need for such measures, I will invite the Chief Ministers of the Himalayan States to join in a national effort to safeguard the Himalayan eco-system. My intention is to institutionalize this interaction by making it an annual feature.

While a large part of the Himalayan range lies within Indian territory, there are other countries who share the mountain ranges with us. These include Nepal, Bhutan, China and Pakistan. Any comprehensive Climate Change Action Plan for the entire Himalayan zone will, of course, require coordinated action among all stakeholder countries. Some bilateral initiatives are being taken, for example, with China and with Bhutan. But we have to recognize the need for much greater engagement and coordination with all our neighbours which share the Himalayas.

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