

## **Erik's World | Asia leads the green charge globally, India ahead of most Western nations on environment action**

### **Erik Solheim**

At the small but historical city of Omkareshwar in Madhya Pradesh a new India is being built. The largest floating solar plant not only in Bharat, but in the world, is under construction. When finalized next year it will produce 600 megawatt of green, clean energy. How much is that? It's four times the most controversial hydro power plant in my home country Norway.

When I visited recently I saw hundreds of workers from L&T, Hartek Solar and other companies creating the wonderful green Indian future.

By the dam in the sacred Narmada river, there are plans for a pumped storage hydropower plant which will act as a battery when the sun is not shining. The river reservoirs are built long ago, so the new developments come with no new impact on nature.

If anyone would have asked me ten years ago where to go to get inspired for green action, I would always answer: please go to the European Union, please visit Brussels, Paris and Berlin. If asked the same question today, my answer is: you should head for Beijing, Delhi and Jakarta. Asia is now leading the green charge globally. Bharat is well ahead of most Western nations on environment action.

### **Gujarat may also be a good place to start?**

At Khavda in the desolate and uninhabited desert at the Pakistani border, I recently saw thousands of hardworking Indians and hundreds of trucks putting up the world's largest combined solar and wind power plant.

When complete it will produce 30 gigawatt of wonderful clean and green energy. That is as much as the total hydropower production of my home country Norway! The Gujarat miracle is the work of the Adani Group. Adani is about delivery, not just talk.

Gautam Adani generously shared his childhood story with me. They were eight siblings living with parents in one room in Ahmedabad. There was no electricity so if he wished to study after dark he had to go outdoor, reading under the street lamps.

Adani initially made a lot of money in coal. Now he has enormous ambitions for renewables.

The stories of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat are being replicated all over India. I am a member of the Climate Council advising Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin. The state has promised to increase its tree cover with ten percent, it is establishing protected areas for mangroves and wetlands, for tigers and elephants. It has huge ambitions for offshore wind power.

In Telangana, the tree cover has increased 7% over the last decade. Hyderabad was awarded as world's green city thanks to its amazing urban forests and lake restoration.

### **Number of Tigers has Doubled**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is leading from the front. He is using the state as a vehicle to shape the market. The government is setting direction, vision and the rules. The private sector will innovate and take change to scale. Modi is following the success recipe of South Korea, may be the fastest developing nation in human history. He is making green missions for India by the day - green hydrogen mission, electric battery mission, rules for solar, offshore wind or the electric vehicle market.

He has catapulted India from the backseat on environment to global green leadership.

For the first time in human history a new development paradigm is possible. Modi has understood that better than most. The last 200 years the only way to prosper is through fossil fuels, now solar is cheaper. Solar energy in India today is probably the cheapest which has ever existed on the planet. The old debate on economy versus the environment is dead. It's replaced by green growth, economy and environment.

Going green is not only good for Mother Earth. It makes business sense. It saves money.

In Northern Tamil Nadu, Ola has established an impressive, all women, factory for electric scooters. Their slogan captured my imagination, it read: "Tesla for the West, Ola for the rest". Ola believes it can make high quality, low cost, scooters and later cars for global markets.

## **Challenges For India**

As India embraces this amazing opportunity, I see three main challenges:

First, make it in India. China is currently the dominating nation in all green industries. More than 60% of all solar, wind, hydropower, electric cars and batteries, metros or high speed rail are produced in China. More than 90% of all solar panels are made by Chinese companies, also those used in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Of course India wish to onshore this production creating jobs and prosperity at home. At the moment no one can go green without China, neither India nor the West. The best advice is to work closely with China, encouraging investment while gradually learning technologies and developing local industries and brands.

Second, a long-term vision is important. The Adani plant in Gujarat will cover huge lands with solar panels. It will look like an enormous dark blue ocean; you will see panels to the horizon in all directions. At a point the solar panels and wind mills will have to be recycled. It's better to start that process now, than to be taken by "surprise" later on.

And finally, the local communities must be put front and center. All nations should opt for a people centered approach to the green transformation. Local communities must feel that they are listened to, that they gain economically from the green transition and that it's fair.

In Norway we got it wrong and we are paying the price. Local communities oppose wind mills asking what is in it for us. The construction is brought to a halt.

## **Renewable Energy is The Future**

No energy comes without downsides, even if renewables are far better than fossils, we need to bring everyone on board. A farmer in Uttar Pradesh, a coal miner in Jharkand or an old nurse in Chhattisgarh they must all see benefits in their life. Going green cannot only be for the young and trendy in Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai.

Upon return to Delhi from the grand opening of the magnificent Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Modi made the point that Lord Ram is a force of energy. What better way to celebrate him than launching an innovative program for ten million Indian

homes installing roof top solar panels. The owner of the house registers the interest digitally. The utility company, the state and the banks cover the risk, not the owner.

The scale of the program is astonishing. India can now proudly claim to lead the world on our green road to the future.

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