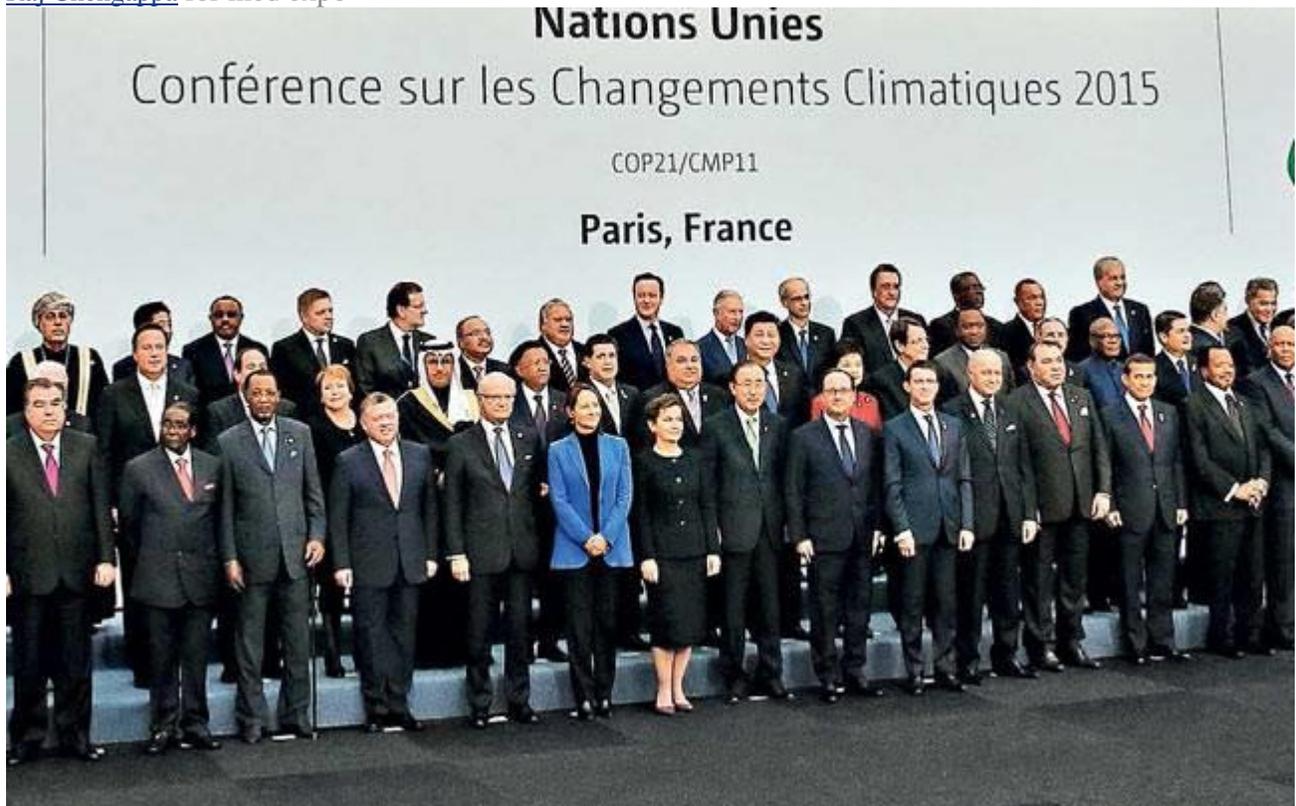


# Q= Why Won't the World Save the Earth??--- A= Money

The planet faces doomsday with nations falling far short of commitments to cut carbon emissions and cool global temperatures at the Climate Change Summit in Paris.

[Raj Chengappa](#) for med expo



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*Rock, stone, dust is this earth;  
this earth is supported, held together,  
To this golden-breasted earth I have rendered obeisance  
What, O earth, I dig out of thee,  
quickly shall that grow again  
may I not, O pure one,  
pierce thy vital spot, (and) not thy heart,  
- Atharva-Veda, 1500-1000 BC*

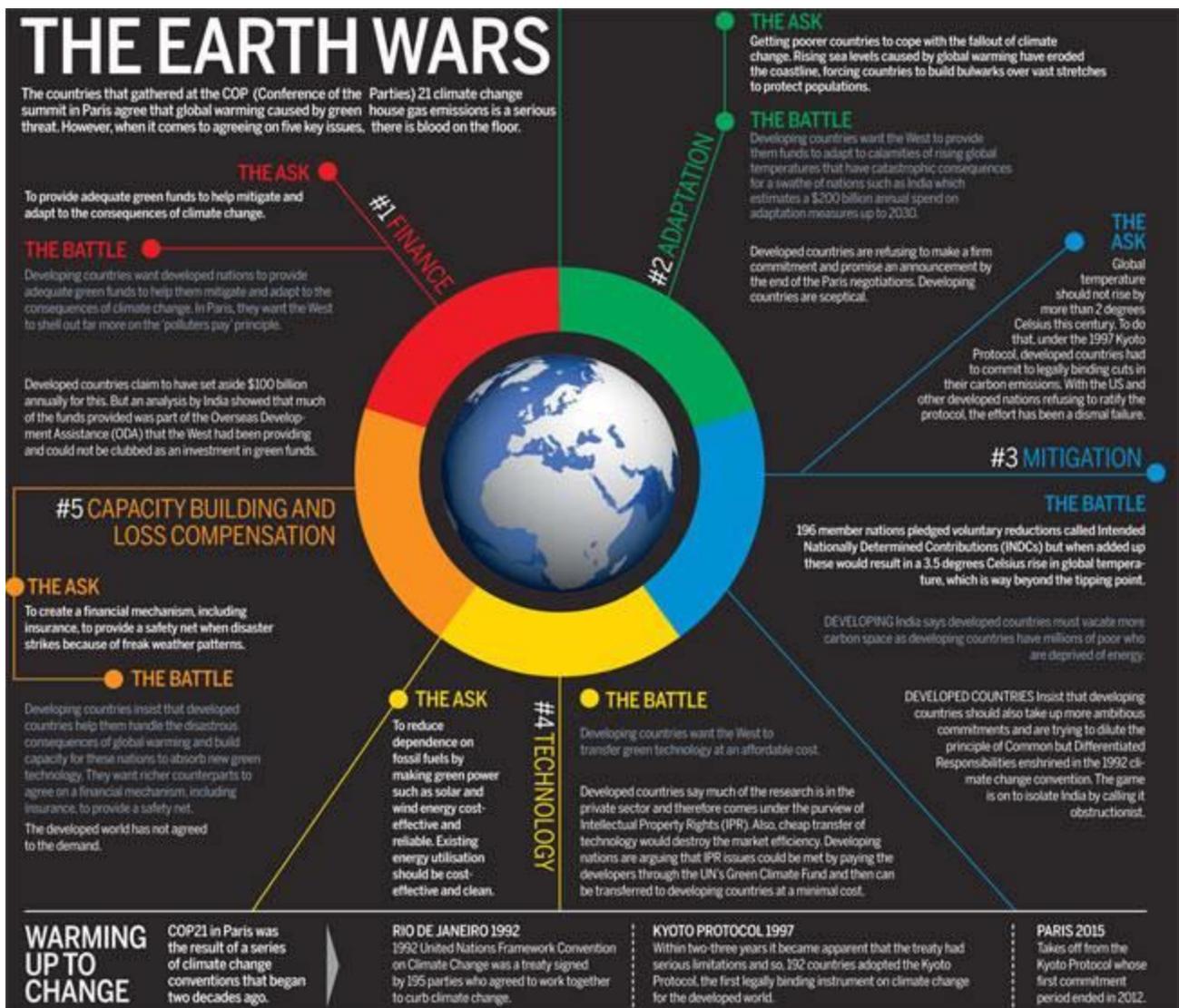
Some 3,000 years later, in Paris, when Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and French President Francois Hollande jointly released a book titled Ecology of Our Worlds at the Climate Change Summit on November 30, the two leaders must have appreciated the wisdom of our forefathers when they read this verse. Hours earlier, at the inauguration of the summit that saw the largest gathering of world leaders, Hollande sounded the alarm saying, "Never have the stakes of an international meeting been so high, since what is at stake is the future of the planet, the future of life itself."

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In Paris, leaders were confronted with the Unthinkable Truth. There is little doubt that human beings, as a collective, have ignored the warning of the ancients and pierced the very heart of the earth through over-exploitation of its resources. The effects of an overheated globe are already being felt across the world as the earth's climate shows signs of catastrophic and irreversible change. Freak and extreme weather strikes with metronomic regularity causing devastating cyclones, tidal waves, blizzards and droughts. Already the past 14 years have seen global temperatures rise to the hottest the world has recorded, and 2015 was the hottest year ever. Modi urged the gathering, "We want the world to act with urgency. We want a comprehensive, equitable and durable agreement in Paris, which must lead us to restore the balance between humanity and nature and between what we have inherited and what we will leave behind."

The time for action was now-leaders had to seize the moment. Rarely have so many people placed their trust in the hands of so few. Sadly, they would fail us. Paris, which marked the 21st round of climate change negotiations, saw no great departure from the past-the combatants and the zero-sum games. There was the global South vs North. Warmists vs Denialists. Conservatives vs Progressives. There were many who continued to believe that Green was the new Red. There was Big Government vs Big Corporation. Giant Green vs Gigantic Business.

Band-Aid vs Drastic Surgery. There were the NIMBYs (not in my back yard) vs POOLs (please on our land). And it was soon clear that Trade would trump the Planet, as it did in the past. The imperatives were there at the outset. Experts at the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a scientific body tasked to study climate change, had deduced that the tipping point for irreversible climate change was if global temperatures were to rise by more than 2 degrees Celsius in the coming years. Greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere have been rising sharply since the unbridled exploitation of fossil fuels such as coal and petroleum for industrialisation in the past 150 years. The rise in temperatures has seen the polar ice caps, the world's climate regulators, melt rapidly, leading to a dangerous rise in ocean levels and upsetting weather patterns.



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The Paris Climate Change Summit was to be the turning point. Nations, particularly developed ones, had to come up with commitments to reduce their carbon footprints. But as the summit got underway and torrents of commitments to cut emissions poured in, it was clear that these were not going to be enough to reverse the tide. The UN Climate Change Secretariat estimated that all the pledges of nations put together in Paris are capable of limiting the rise of global temperatures to only about a 2.7 degrees Celsius rise-way above the danger mark. Some experts say it may even rise by 3.6 degrees Celsius.

Worse, even if all the nations implemented their plans, they would use up three-quarters of the carbon budget available by 2030. They would then have to commit to even deeper cuts in their GHG emissions in the next 15 years to avoid devastating climate impacts. British Prime Minister David Cameron asked the right question at the summit: "Not what we need to succeed-we all know that-but what we would have to say to our grandchildren if we failed. We would have to say, it was all too difficult. They would reply, what was it that was so difficult when the earth was in peril? When the sea levels were rising in 2015, when crops were failing, when deserts were expanding, what was it that was so difficult?"

So what is it that is so difficult? Why do nations, particularly the prosperous ones, balk from taking the challenge head-on even as doomsday looms? In climate change, history has a habit of repeating itself. And since we don't learn from it, we are condemned to repeat it. Twenty-three years after the world first acknowledged the problem at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) became an international treaty, there is not much progress to show.

#### **Also read- Chennai rains: Chaos in low-lying areas**

In 1997, when leaders realised that emission reduction targets were insufficient, they agreed to what is now known as the Kyoto Protocol, that placed legally binding emission reduction targets on developed countries. The onus was on them because the protocol recognised that they were mainly responsible for the current high level of GHG emissions in the atmosphere caused by their past industrial development. Developing nations such as India and China successfully pushed through the "polluters must pay" approach apart from the central principle of "common but differentiated responsibility" for implementing the protocol. But it took several rounds of torturous negotiations and a complex ratification for it to come into force in 2005.

The protocol laid a stringent target of 5 per cent emission reduction compared to 1990 levels over a five-year period (2008 to 2012) as part of the first commitment. Another commitment period began in 2013 and ends in 2020. Experts admit that the protocol has largely been a failure because the US, the world's second-largest GHG emitter, pulled out on the pretext that it doesn't bind developing countries such as India and China to commit to cuts in their emissions.

Following the US lead, many developed nations including Canada, Japan and Russia also pulled out whilst others worked to dilute the stringent provisions.

## MODI'S SURYA NAMASKAR

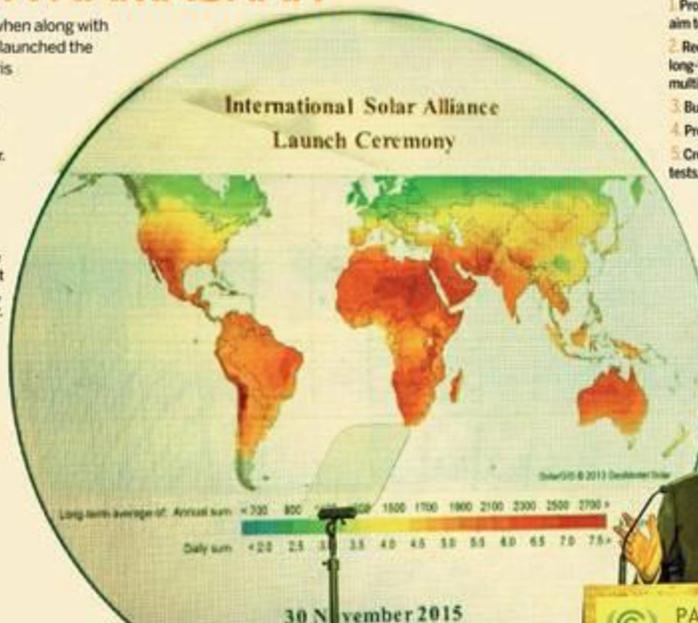
PM Narendra Modi made a big splash when along with French President Francois Hollande he launched the International Solar Alliance (ISA) at Paris.

### WHY THE ALLIANCE

- 121 nations, including India, located in or near the tropics with more than 300 sunny days in a year could benefit from cost-effective solar power.
- Most solar-rich countries dependent on agriculture have a large population with no access to electricity.
- The ISA provides a global platform to collaborate on developing solar energy. Covering half the world's population, it will provide the demand that would push the industry towards developing safe, affordable, equitable and sustainable solar power.

### KEY TECHNOLOGIES TO MASTER

1. More efficient solar photovoltaic panels for better absorption of sun's radiance.
2. Better power storage devices for solar photovoltaic plants and solar thermal plants.
3. Smart grids and green corridors to evacuate power.
4. Make solar power almost as cost-effective as coal-powered plants.



### MAJOR FOCUS AREAS

1. Promote solar technology and investment with the aim to help poor communities in member countries.
2. Reduce the cost of capital through low-cost, long-term financial resources from bilateral and multi-lateral agencies.
3. Build an e-portal for sharing best practices.
4. Promote R&D for solar technology.
5. Creation of expert groups for common standards, tests, monitoring and verification protocols.

India will host the ISA secretariat for an initial period of five years at the National Institute of Solar Energy in Gurgaon. Besides providing land worth Rs 400 crore, the government will invest Rs 175 crore in building infrastructure and meeting expenses.

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Developed nations then pushed for voluntary and self-regulatory cuts. That move firmed up into a plan for every nation to declare its "Intended Nationally Determined Contributions" or INDCs to reduce its carbon emissions. At the Paris summit, the stringent Kyoto Protocol is to be given a quiet burial by developed nations after it expires in 2020 and will be replaced by an agreement with non-binding, voluntary targets with only a weak pledge to do a "stock-taking" review after five years.

Developed nations have steadily reneged on two other major commitments to developing countries that had been agreed under the UNFCCC: to provide adequate finance and transfer technology. These were to help poor countries adapt to climate change and help them leapfrog into using renewable sources supplies such as solar and wind by transferring advanced technology to harness them.

On finance, after much haggling, the developed countries agreed to contribute \$100 billion annually to the UN's Green Climate Fund (GCF) from 2020 onwards. But India and other developing nations argue that for them to take mitigation and adaptation measures to address climate change would require 10 times the funds that are being provided. Moreover, as Union Environment Minister [Prakash Javadekar](#) points out, "developed countries' commitment of \$100 billion is obfuscation, double accounting and fudging", because they have included their existing Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) while the commitment was to provide "new and additional" resources. In Paris, there will be plenty of heartburn as effort will be made to squeeze more out of the developed countries which are unwilling to commit additional finances.

[Also read- Chennai rains: 5 images of before and after](#)

Developed countries have also been parsimonious in transferring advanced green technology to developing nations to enable them to lessen their carbon footprint. The US and other developed countries argue that much of their cutting-edge research on green technology is done in private-sector laboratories and there are Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues that they cannot violate. Also, by transferring green technology cheap, they would destroy the market mechanism and dissuade industries from investing in this sector. India has said on IPR issues the royalty can be paid through the GCF coffers and the technology bought could be then subsidised to all developing countries. On this vital demand, again there is unlikely to be a breakthrough. Meanwhile, developed countries have over the years worked to systematically break the unity of developing countries on climate issues. With China emerging as the world's largest emitter of GHGs, President Xi Jinping smartly collaborated with US President Barack Obama to announce major commitments to reduce its carbon footprint before Paris. With China in the bag, guns are now focused on India, which is seen as recalcitrant and a game-spoiler by developed countries. India points out that its annual per capita energy consumption is one of the lowest-a third of the world average and 20 times less than the US. And while it may be the world's fourth-largest emitter of GHGs, it contributes only 6 per cent as compared to China's 25 per cent, the US's 13 per cent and Europe's 10 per cent.

The big gorilla is not India but the US. It has steadfastly foot-dragged on commitments. Obama admitted as much when he said: "I come here as the leader of the world's biggest economy and second-biggest emitter to say that America not only acknowledges its role in climate change but embraces doing something about it." But US commitments are treated with scorn and scepticism. Delhi-based think tank Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) pointed out in a report sarcastically titled 'Captain America' that Obama's announcement that by 2025 the US would reduce its GHG emissions to 26-28 per cent below 2005 levels was a fudge. In reality, this was much lower than its earlier commitments and represented a 13 per cent cut on a 1990 baseline. The US and the rest of the world have been attacking India's stance and expressed concern that its INDCs have made it clear that it will increase its carbon footprint. Secretary of State John Kerry termed India as "a challenge". A smarting Javadekar narrates how at lunch at a recent sustainable development summit in New York the delegates were served dishes put together using waste food like 'Landfill Salad' and 'Spent Grain Bread'. But Kerry was served a special chicken dish. Javadekar pulled Kerry's leg but he continued to tuck into his meal. Using the incident as an analogy, Javadekar remarks, "The US expects us to take on commitments while it does not commit to anything major despite being responsible for much of the world's GHG emissions."

**[Also read- Man-made disaster: Look how Chennai built its way to floods](#)**

In Paris, Modi smartly turned the tables on the West by announcing the formation of an International Solar Alliance of 121 countries that are located between the tropics and have abundant sunshine. The ambitious alliance would provide the requisite demand and economies of

scale to drive the price of solar technology down and make it competitive with coal-fired thermal plants. When he presented India's INDCs to the summit, Modi committed that by 2030, 40 per cent of its installed electric power capacity would come from non-fossil-based energy resources. He demanded that the West vacate carbon space it occupies for developing countries such as India as thermal power plants are still the cheapest way to generate electricity. Terming it "climate justice", he said such plants were needed to supply 300 million people, or a fourth of India's population, who still have no access to a reliable source of energy.

So what will the outcome be at Paris? All the four key pillars-mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology-that a win-win agreement could stand on are weak. With Kerry clear that the US would not agree to a legally binding protocol like Kyoto, the Paris agreement will be feeble and infirm. On providing finance and technology, developed countries will stick to their miserly stand. Watching the whittling away of commitments in Paris, CSE Deputy Director General Chandra Bhushan predicts, "Currently, it's a zero-sum game. We will be back in five years negotiating another protocol." Such band-aid efforts would only push the world faster towards disaster. As Prince Charles, who spoke at the summit, said: "We don't have a Plan B to save the earth."

Away from the Le Bourget airfield, where the summit was being held in modified hangars, Paris was still in mourning after the recent terror attacks. The fear had not abated and the country was in a state of emergency. Protesters who were a norm for such climate change events were confined to the picturesque Place de la République and were not allowed to spill onto the streets. It was apparent that the world was facing two of its greatest challenges-growing terror and rapid climate change. As Hollande put it: "I can't separate the fight with terrorism and the fight against global warming. These are two big global challenges we have to face up to, because we have to leave our children more than a world free of terror, we also owe them a planet protected from catastrophes."

Neither of these twin threats is being handled with any degree of comfort. Asked about the outcome of the Paris summit, Ashok Lavasa, Union environment secretary, and India's chief negotiator at the summit, prefers to quote from a Matthew Arnold poem:

*Wandering between two worlds, one dead,*

*The other powerless to be born,*

*With nowhere yet to rest my head,*

*Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.*

*Their faith, my tears, the world deride.*