

The Congress Party's unexpected strong victory in the 2009 elections has also brought [one of the strongest Cabinets in recent times](#). For those interested in the upcoming climate talks, however, it also presents some challenges. At the end of the day, climate policy will not be a focus of the government, but there are some important silver linings. None of [the biggest Cabinet players](#) seem to be what climate activists would like. But there appears to be significant action at the sub-Cabinet level. To me, this suggests that while India might not make big strides there may be play in the joints for important progress as long as we don't try to push New Delhi to make significant binding commitments.

Here are some of the key players on the issue.

Environment Minister: [Jairam Ramesh](#). Ramesh is a thoughtful, experienced legislator who has served in previous governments and really understands environmental policy. The bad news is that the environment ministry is quite weak: it is not even a full Cabinet ministry. If Ramesh wants a promotion to the big leagues, then he might take a hard line.

Commerce and Industry: Anand Sharma. [This appears to be something of a surprise](#), but a good one. C & I is an important ministry because the minister represents India at the WTO trade talks. Sharma did a very good job in the foreign ministry in a subordinate post, and this is quite a promotion. Unlike his predecessor, Kamil Nath, who seemed to take a highly defensive stance on everything, Sharma might actually be interested in opening up markets for Indian goods. This is important for climate because, as I have suggested in the past, it might give the United States an opportunity to trade across issue areas.

Renewable Energy: [Farooq Abdullah](#). Lots of people have made a big deal out of the fact that India has a renewable energy ministry. They make less of a big deal out of the fact that it also has a Power ministry unconnected to renewables, and a coal ministry. And it's even worse here, as Abdullah has no knowledge of or even any interest in renewables. He is the scion of the main political family of Kashmir; his father, the legendary [Sheikh Abdullah](#), the "Lion of Kashmir," led the province into India at independence, then was jailed by Nehru when he seemed to tilt toward independence. All very interesting and important — but it is clear that this is just a sinecure for an important person.

Foreign Minister: S M Krishna. Again, something of a surprise. Krishna is highly intelligent and experienced. He is also pushing 80, and doesn't figure to travel much. All of which might indicate that an important power behind the throne will be....

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs: [Shashi Tharoor](#). Yes, *that* Shashi Tharoor, former UN Undersecretary-General who nearly became Secretary General himself, prize-winning

novelist and historian, recipient of a PhD from the Fletcher School at age 22, Twitter-er and Facebook-user extraordinaire. I am intrigued about this potential relationship. Krishna might not like having Tharoor as his #2. What kind of deal was made? But Tharoor figures to bring a more internationalist perspective on Indian foreign relations than your typical foreign minister — how could he not?

So again — my sense is that at the Cabinet level, there isn't much here. Abdullah won't care, Krishna will have other things to worry about, Sharma will be intelligent and sophisticated but focused on economic development. But at the sub-Cabinet level, Tharoor and Ramesh might be able to work some important and creative changes as long as it doesn't require huge political heavy-lifting. Looking for the low-hanging fruit will be central, as well as issue trading. We'll see.