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Q20

## **Clean energy is the order of the day.' Describe briefly India's changing policy towards climate change in various international fora in the context of geopolitics.**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · GS II · 15 marks · India and its Neighbourhood

India and its neighborhood - relations.

### **Core demand of the question**

- Clean energy is the order of the day. Describe India's changing climate policy in international fora in the context of geopolitics

### **Revision summary**

UNFCCC and Kyoto framed India as a developing party without Annex I quantified targets, under CBDR.

Paris (2015) brought India into universal NDCs while keeping equity and CBDR-RC.

COP26 Panchamrit added 500 GW non-fossil, 50 per cent renewable energy share, intensity and billion-tonne language, and net-zero by 2070.

The International Solar Alliance is India's agenda-setting club from COP21, hosted in India.

Geopolitics now includes critical minerals, green subsidies and carbon borders, not only COP texts.

Clean energy is domestic development plus bargaining power; coal and climate finance remain the continuity.

### **Introduction**

India's international climate policy has moved from a defensive reading of common but differentiated responsibilities to an offer of targets, clubs, and clean-energy diplomacy, without abandoning climate justice. Clean energy is now both a domestic development need and a geopolitical currency in a world of critical minerals, carbon borders, and great-power green industrial policy.

### **Body**

#### **From UNFCCC and Kyoto to Paris**

- India joined the **UNFCCC (1992)** as a developing country: historical responsibility lay with the industrial North, and the right to development was the political core.
- **Kyoto (1997)** placed quantified emission commitments on Annex I parties, not on India; New Delhi's line was CBDR, not a shared peaking year.
- The Paris Agreement (2015) replaced Kyoto's split with nationally determined contributions for all parties, still under equity and CBDR-RC. India accepted that form and filed NDCs, which is the first big procedural change: India became a pledging party, not only a demander of Northern finance.

## Panchamrit and the Glasgow shift

- At COP26 in Glasgow, India announced **Panchamrit**: 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030, 50 per cent of energy requirements from renewables by 2030, a reduction of one billion tonnes of projected carbon emissions by 2030, a 45 per cent cut in emissions intensity from 2005 levels by 2030, and net-zero by 2070.
- That package moved India from intensity-only language toward a net-zero date and a non-fossil capacity number, which partners could put on a slide even while India refused a 2050 net-zero aligned with Europe.
- Updated NDCs later reflected parts of that political announcement; the legal heart remains Paris, not a press conference.

## Clubs, solar diplomacy, and issue-linkage

- The **International Solar Alliance**, launched by India and France at COP21 in Paris and headquartered in India, is New Delhi's attempt to set an agenda for sunshine countries rather than only receive one.
- The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the later LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) framing try to export a development-compatible climate language against a purely carbon-price Western template.
- Clean energy is now tied to technology transfer, green hydrogen, and critical minerals; climate fora overlap WTO-style fights on subsidies and the EU's carbon border adjustment, which India reads as protectionism unless accompanied by finance.

## Geopolitics of the new climate policy

- The United States and the EU use green industrial policy (including large domestic subsidies) while asking emerging Asia to peak faster; India answers with equity, coal-phase-down rather than phase-out language at Glasgow, and a demand that methane and oil-gas producers not hide behind India's coal.
- China's scale in solar manufacturing and minerals is both a supply opportunity and a strategic vulnerability; India's climate diplomacy therefore has an Atmanirbhar and friend-shoring edge, not only a COP speech.
- For the Global South, India still claims leadership by refusing to let climate become a barrier to energy access; for the Quad and G20, it claims leadership by being a large renewables market and a solar-alliance convenor.
- The order of the day is clean energy because fossil import bills, air pollution, and investor screens now coincide with COP pressure - a geopolitical sandwich, not a conversion on the road to Kyoto.

## Continuity that has not changed

- Finance and adaptation for the vulnerable remain India's test of Northern seriousness; changing policy does not mean dropping CBDR.
- Coal remains in the domestic mix even as non-fossil capacity grows; international description should not pretend a full phase-out that India has not pledged.

## Flow diagram

UNFCCC CBDR -> Kyoto no Indian QELRC  
Kyoto no Indian QELRC -> Paris NDCs  
Paris NDCs -> COP26 Panchamrit net zero 2070  
Paris NDCs -> ISA and CDRI  
COP26 Panchamrit net zero 2070 -> Geopolitics minerals CBAM

## Conclusion

India's climate policy in international fora has shifted from Kyoto-era exemption to Paris NDCs, Glasgow's **Panchamrit**, and institutions such as the **International Solar Alliance**, while still arguing equity. In geopolitics, clean energy is industrial strategy and alliance politics as much as environmental ethics. The change is real; the justice line is not abandoned.

## Facts & figures

### UNFCCC, 1992

Parent climate convention; India is a party as a developing country under common but differentiated responsibilities.

### Kyoto Protocol, 1997

Quantified emission limitation commitments for Annex I parties; India had no such quantified reduction target.

### Paris Agreement, 2015

Universal NDCs for all parties, on the basis of equity and CBDR-RC; India's policy shift to pledging targets sits here.

### Panchamrit (COP26, Glasgow)

Five Indian announcements including 500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030, 50 per cent energy from renewables by 2030, 45 per cent intensity reduction from 2005 by 2030, one billion tonnes less projected carbon by 2030, and net-zero by 2070.

### International Solar Alliance

Coalition launched by India and France at COP21, with its headquarters in India, to promote solar deployment among member countries.

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