

Strengthening ties for climate action: India's climate diplomacy with Nepal planing for COP30

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ABSTRACT:

India's developmental prosperity in the last quarter of FY24 saw its GDP grow by 8.2%, reaching ₹47.24 lakh crore, as reported by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation and the National Statistical Office. As expected this economic growth has surged India's carbon emissions, accounting for 6.8% of global CO₂ emissions from combustible fuels in 2021, which is 156% higher than in 2000, and have reached 7.06% in 2024. As per India's commitment in INDCs (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions) in COP21 India is expected to achieve about 40 per cent cumulative electric power installed capacity from non-fossil fuel based energy resources by 2030, with the help of transfer of technology and low cost international finance, including from Green Climate Fund. And against the backdrop of COP21 and COP26 commitments to decarbonize energy by 50% and achieve 500 GW of fossil fuel-free generating capacity by 2030, India has taken a significant step by partnering with Nepal to promote clean energy. During Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's recent visit to Nepal, the two countries signed a 25-year energy trade agreement under which Nepal will export 10,000 MW of electricity to India over the next decade. This collaboration, needs to intensified along with investments in mega hydro projects, that represents a crucial aspect of contemporary climate diplomacy aimed at mitigating the climate emergency. Also this needs to be indicated to the international arena specially for the COP30 summit to activate climate fund.

Keywords: *India's GDP growth, carbon emissions, COP26, clean energy, Nepal, energy trade agreement, hydropower, climate diplomacy, international finance, including from Green Climate Fund.*

INTRODUCTION:

As the world grapples with the escalating climate crisis, the urgency for nations to collaborate on sustainable solutions has never been more pronounced. In this context, India and Nepal have emerged as pivotal players, demonstrating that regional cooperation can significantly contribute to global climate goals. The forthcoming COP30 summit presents an opportune moment for these neighboring countries to showcase their joint commitment to combating climate change. India's robust economic growth, marked by an 8.2% GDP increase in the last quarter of FY24, juxtaposes a significant rise in carbon emissions, highlighting the pressing need for clean energy transitions. Nepal, with its vast hydropower potential, stands as a vital partner in this endeavor. Recently, a landmark 25-year energy trade agreement was signed during Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Nepal, under which Nepal will export 10,000 MW of electricity to

India over the next decade. This collaboration not only underscores the strategic importance of hydropower in the region but also aligns with India's COP26 commitments to decarbonize its energy sector. As COP30 approaches, the strengthened ties between India and Nepal signify a promising path towards achieving sustainable development and climate resilience in South Asia. By deepening its climate diplomacy with Nepal, India stands to achieve several critical objectives. Firstly, securing a steady supply of clean energy from Nepal's hydropower resources will significantly aid India in reducing its carbon footprint, thereby aligning with its ambitious goal of achieving 500 GW of fossil fuel-free generating capacity by 2030. This move not only enhances India's energy security but also diversifies its energy mix, making the country less reliant on coal and other polluting fossil fuels. Moreover, such a partnership can bolster India's leadership role in regional climate initiatives, setting a precedent for other South Asian

nations to follow. Economically, the influx of clean energy can spur green investments and create new job opportunities in both countries, fostering economic resilience. Additionally, this collaboration underscores India's strategic focus on sustainable development, which can enhance its standing in global climate negotiations and international forums. By taking proactive steps in climate action through regional cooperation, India not only strengthens its bilateral ties with Nepal but also paves the way for a more sustainable and resilient future for the entire region.

'Climate change is literally an existential threat to our nation and to the world.' [1]. In echoing Joe Biden's sentiment, the characterization of climate change as a "code red for humanity" reinforces the urgency of addressing its profound impacts. The use of "existential threat" underscores the severity of the situation, emphasizing that climate change poses a direct risk to the very survival of nations and the global community. By stating that it is "literally" an existential threat, Biden emphasizes that the danger is not merely abstract or distant but is actively unfolding and affecting lives worldwide. This framing suggests that failure to act decisively on climate change could lead to irreparable harm, including widespread environmental degradation, extreme weather events, and socio-economic disruptions. Thus, Biden's statement calls for immediate and concerted action on a global scale to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and secure a sustainable future for all.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND INDIA'S TARGETS:

In the worldwide fight against climate change, India's pledge to obtain 40% of its total installed capacity for electric power from non-fossil fuel-based energy sources by 2030, as stated in its INDCs (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions) during COP21, is essential. This goal demonstrates India's leadership in the global arena and demonstrates its commitment to the objectives of the Paris Agreement. Reaching this challenging goal will require substantial assistance in the form of technology transfer and low-cost international financing, including funds from the Green Climate Fund.

The context of the COP21 and COP26 agreements, which call for 500 GW of fossil fuel-free generating capacity and a 50% decrease in carbon emissions by 2030, puts further pressure on these targets. These pledges are essential for guiding India toward a future with sustainable and carbon-free energy. India's partnership with Nepal in advancing sustainable energy is a major strategic move in this area. India can strengthen its own clean energy capabilities and support regional sustainability initiatives by collaborating with

its neighbors. These kinds of collaborations are crucial to accomplishing the larger goals of the Paris Agreement because they allow information, technology, and resources to be shared, which promotes a group effort to combat climate change.

Branko Bosnjakovi discusses the two dimensions of addressing climate change: mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation focuses on limiting human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, while adaptation deals with coping with the impacts of climate change. Climate change predictions indicate clear trends, with regions facing diverse impacts such as increased arid areas in Africa, decreased crop yields in India and China, and heightened risks of coastal flooding in Asia. The effects of climate change are particularly pronounced in water and land systems, making water management critical for adaptation efforts [2].

DECARBONIZATION DURING CLIMATE CRISIS:

Decarbonization is one of the major solutions to climate change which refers to the process of reducing or eliminating carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from various sources, particularly from human activities such as burning fossil fuels for energy, industrial processes, transportation, and agriculture. The goal of decarbonization is to transition away from carbon-intensive activities and technologies towards cleaner and more sustainable alternatives, ultimately mitigating climate change and reducing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Decarbonization efforts involve a variety of strategies and initiatives aimed at curbing CO₂ emissions across multiple sectors of the economy. This includes increasing energy efficiency, transitioning to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydropower, electrifying transportation systems, improving industrial processes to minimize emissions, and implementing carbon capture and storage (CCS) technologies to capture CO₂ emissions before they are released into the atmosphere.

The article "Climate Change and International Relations: A Five-Pronged Research Agenda," published in the Journal of International Affairs in January 2020 by Ole Jacob Sending and Indra Overland, proposes a comprehensive research agenda to address the intricate intersections between climate change and international relations. The authors argue that climate change is a multifaceted global challenge that necessitates interdisciplinary approaches to understanding its implications for international politics and governance. They outline five key areas for research to deepen understanding and inform policy responses [3].

The interactions between climate change and security, including the risks of conflict and instability arising from environmental pressures, such as water scarcity and displacement. Fourthly, they advocate for research on climate-induced migration and displacement, focusing on the implications for human security and the potential for cooperation or conflict between affected countries.

The confluence of security and climate change presents multifaceted challenges, particularly in countries like India, where the impacts reverberate across various sectors and spill over into foreign relations, including its dynamic with neighboring Nepal. Climate-induced phenomena such as food scarcity, water shortages, and disruptions in irrigation systems pose significant threats to national security by destabilizing livelihoods and exacerbating social tensions. For India, heavily reliant on agriculture to sustain its vast population, fluctuations in food production due to climate variability directly undermine food security and economic stability. Additionally, the influx of migrants from neighboring countries, such as Nepal, fleeing environmental disasters like floods or droughts, places immense strain on resources and infrastructure, further intensifying security concerns.

To address these intricate challenges, a comprehensive approach is imperative, integrating domestic policies with foreign relations strategies. In navigating its relationship with Nepal, India could prioritize collaborative efforts aimed at mitigating climate risks through joint adaptation measures, equitable water-sharing agreements, and robust disaster management frameworks. By proactively engaging in climate resilience initiatives at the regional level, India not only bolsters its own security but also fosters stronger ties with neighboring nations like Nepal, fostering mutual stability and sustainable development amidst the uncertainties posed by climate change.

Sending et al. argues the need to examine the political economy of climate change, including the distributional impacts of mitigation and adaptation measures, as well as the role of vested interests in shaping policy responses [3]. Overall, the proposed research agenda seeks to address the complex challenges posed by climate change from a multidimensional perspective, integrating insights from various disciplines and informing more effective policy interventions at the international level. By addressing these key research areas, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersections between climate change and international relations, ultimately facilitating more informed decision-making and cooperation in tackling this urgent global issue.

Studies carried out in 2002 by the European National Council on Peace and Order (ENCOP) predict that disputes over environmental degradation will probably turn into interethnic conflicts and result in millions of migrants. As noted by Haldén in 2007, this migration wave may strain ties between the nation and its neighbors and could have an effect on the recipient states as well. This scenario has already played out in recent history with conflicts arising from Middle East refugees, causing division within European Union members, and also with Rohingya refugees affecting ASEAN member states [4]. As climate change continues to displace large populations, these conflicts are expected to become more frequent and on a larger scale, as noted by Sending et al. in 2020.

Murari Lal, James Nickum, and Purna Bahadur Shrestha undertook the "Project on Water and Security in South Asia" (WASSA) in October 2003. The study examines the intricate connection between water resources and security in the South Asian region. The project explores a number of topics, including the distribution, availability, and management of water, and how these relate to socio-political processes, especially with regard to regional security. Through an examination of the complex relationships that exist between water scarcity, conflict, and collaboration, WASSA seeks to shed light on possible approaches to resolving water-related issues in South Asia [5].

The policy brief discusses India's evolving climate diplomacy, highlighting its positive role in global climate politics post-Paris Agreement. India is active in multilateral, minilateral, triangular, and bilateral tracks, advancing climate goals while balancing economic development. Key priorities include securing climate finance and enhancing private sector involvement.

Institutional innovations like the International Solar Alliance are noted, but India needs better coordination and capacity to meet 2030 and 2070 targets. Recommendations include appointing a special envoy for climate cooperation and establishing dedicated climate divisions within the Ministry of External Affairs.

INDIA'S CLIMATE STRATEGY:

New Priorities and Policy Options, as outlined in the document from the Center for Security and Emerging Studies (CSEP), encompasses several key themes and considerations. It emphasizes India's evolving approach towards climate diplomacy, highlighting the need for strategic engagement with global partners and a shift towards proactive participation in international climate negotiations. Central to India's stance is the balancing act between climate goals and sustainable development imperatives, wherein climate action is seen as integral to addressing developmental priorities such as poverty alleviation and economic growth [6]. Moreover, India

aims to assert its leadership in the global climate arena by advocating for the interests of developing countries while contributing to global climate solutions. Additionally, the document underscores India's focus on adaptation and resilience-building measures to address climate change impacts, alongside its emphasis on leveraging technology and fostering innovation to transition towards a sustainable, low-carbon economy. These themes collectively delineate India's multifaceted approach to climate diplomacy, reflecting its commitment to addressing climate challenges while advancing its national interests and global leadership aspirations.

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Institutional innovations like the International Solar Alliance are noted, but India needs better coordination and capacity to meet 2030 and 2070 targets. Recommendations include appointing a special envoy for climate cooperation and establishing dedicated climate divisions within the Ministry of External Affairs [7]. Secondly, India can leverage its diplomatic influence to advocate for ambitious climate targets on the international stage while simultaneously implementing robust domestic policies to achieve these goals. By actively participating in global climate negotiations and alliances such as the Paris Agreement, India can demonstrate its commitment to combating climate change while also advocating for the needs and concerns of developing nations. Domestically, India can introduce incentives and regulations to promote renewable energy adoption, such as subsidies for solar panel installations and carbon pricing mechanisms to incentivize emission reductions. By aligning its international advocacy with concrete domestic actions, India can enhance its credibility as a responsible global climate leader.

Lastly, India can employ innovative communication and education strategies to engage its citizens in climate action and foster a culture of sustainability. This could involve launching nationwide awareness campaigns, integrating climate education into school curricula, and incentivizing eco-friendly practices through tax incentives or public recognition programs. By empowering citizens with the knowledge and tools to mitigate climate change in their daily lives, India can mobilize a grassroots movement towards carbon reduction and sustainable living [8]. Ultimately, by combining proactive diplomacy with targeted domestic policies and citizen engagement initiatives, India can strengthen its position as a global leader in climate action

and drive meaningful progress towards a greener and more sustainable future. India's approach to global climate action encompasses four key tracks: multilateral adaptation, minilateral innovation, trilateral bridging, and bilateral expansion.

CLEAN ENERGY AND MUTUAL BENEFITS:

Any storage project built in Nepal will increase the river's lean season flows and lessen floods. Since Nepal has a limited amount of arable land, India will eventually gain from this. Nepal has been requesting that India take into account the advantages that flow downstream and base its accounting on specific guidelines. India, on the other hand, is hesitant to acknowledge such benefits since it believes that Nepal is claiming them in light of its ownership rights to flowing water. India believes that natural waters are yours to utilize and that nobody other may claim ownership of them in this situation [9].

In this scenario it seems imminent that the relationship between resource use and climate change may be complicated by socioeconomic and political factors. For example, modifications to hydrological systems in water-stressed areas may have an adverse effect on social and political structures as well as economic development. India and Nepal could develop robust geopolitical strategies to address climate change by prioritizing cooperation on various fronts. Firstly, focusing on river water management for irrigation purposes can ensure sustainable agricultural practices in both countries, mitigating the impact of climate change-induced droughts and floods. Additionally, joint efforts in disaster preparedness and response can help mitigate the effects of natural calamities such as landslides and earthquakes, which often affect both nations. By addressing these climate-related challenges together, India and Nepal can safeguard their respective territories and populations. Moreover, enhanced collaboration in climate resilience measures can foster trust and stability in the region, positively impacting India's security by strengthening diplomatic ties and promoting regional stability. Such cooperation would underscore India's commitment to international relations and its role as a responsible global actor in tackling shared environmental challenges. Overall, by advocating for these modifications to the Paris Agreement, India can work towards creating a more comprehensive and inclusive climate change policy that not only advances its national interests but also compels developed countries to take greater responsibility and action in combating climate change. Through diplomatic engagement and coalition-building efforts, India can help shape a more ambitious and effective global framework for climate action that promotes collective responsibility, shared prosperity, and environmental sustainability.

A research by Branko Bosnjakovi find that the EU, USA, Russia, China, and India are the main governmental entities whose stances and actions regarding climate change are discussed in this study. The EU's aggressive climate policy, which includes its 20-20-20 targets, places a strong emphasis on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and carbon reduction. But problems like carbon leakage, over-allocation, and inadequate carbon markets still exist. Decarbonizing the economy is necessary to reduce emissions, but efforts are hampered by contrasting opinions on nuclear power and clean coal [10]. Widely differing national strategies on renewables are impeded by things like public opposition and grid constraints. By promoting global carbon pricing, the EU might be a keyplayer in closing the gap between wealthy and developing nations. However, nations that depend on the export of fossil fuels would oppose the implementation of policies like import levies on high-carbon items.

AGENDA'S FOR COP30:

Investment in clean power has the potential to yield significant benefits for India, particularly in light of the impending COP30 summit. India can improve air quality and minimize greenhouse gas emissions by reducing its reliance on fossil fuels by a large margin by strengthening its renewable energy infrastructure. Through organizations like the Green Climate Fund, worldwide money and cutting-edge technology may be brought to bear on renewable energy projects more quickly and affordably, increasing their efficiency. This change not only complies with India's obligations under the Paris Agreement but also presents business prospects, including the creation of jobs in the renewable energy industry and the advancement of environmentally friendly technologies. In addition, India may establish itself as a global leader in climate action by meeting its renewable energy ambitions, which will improve its geopolitical stature and promote closer ties with other countries. India has the perfect opportunity to highlight its achievements, draw in further funding, and inspire group efforts toward a resilient and sustainable energy future during the COP30 conference. Whereas keeping special focus to EIA (Environment Impact Assessment) while constructing such hydropower projects are impacting local ecosystems and failing to address water management and climate change concerns [11]. Despite hydropower's potential, both countries neglect climate change discussions in bilateral talks, focusing instead on energy trade. Additionally, Nepal struggles with domestic power distribution despite its hydropower capacity, leading to frequent outages.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, India's impressive economic growth, marked by an 8.2% GDP increase in the last quarter of

FY24, has been accompanied by a significant rise in carbon emissions, accounting for 7.06% of global CO2 emissions in 2024. This underscores the urgent need for India to fulfill its commitments under the Paris Agreement by transitioning to non-fossil fuel energy sources. The country's pledge to achieve 40% of its electric power capacity from renewables by 2030, supported by international finance and technology transfer, is a critical step towards sustainable development. The strategic partnership with Nepal, exemplified by the recent 25-year energy trade agreement, highlights India's proactive role in regional clean energy collaboration.

Intensifying such initiatives, particularly through investments in mega hydro projects, will not only bolster India's climate diplomacy but also set a powerful example for global climate action. As India prepares for the COP30 summit, showcasing these efforts and advocating for increased climate funding will be pivotal in driving forward its ambitious decarbonization agenda and addressing the global climate emergency.

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