

'Hop-on, hop-off' – the state of climate governance

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
General issues on Environmental ecology, Biodiversity and Climate Change

Mains: General Studies - 3
Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

1. Background and Context:

- Global climate governance functions like **"hop-on, hop-off" buses**, where **negotiations continue without any binding obligation** to deliver outcomes.
- Consensus-based decision-making gives **every country an effective veto**, weakening enforceability.
- Climate ambition remains **largely rhetorical**, confined to preambles, while operative decisions reflect hesitation and delay.
- The system is characterised by **drift, inadequacy, and absence of leadership**, rather than institutional collapse.

2. Challenges in Global Climate Action

- **National interest overrides global urgency**, delaying collective climate action.
- Markets benefit from political delay, as **short-term profits are prioritised over long-term environmental protection**.
- **Future generations are excluded** because they are neither voters nor market participants.
- **Citizens prioritise immediate needs** like food, health, and jobs, making climate action politically low-priority until disasters occur.
- **Scientific uncertainty is politicised** to justify inaction and delay.

- UNFCCC- COP30 promoted cooperation through a **"global mutirão"**, but all measures remained **voluntary**, weakening **common but differentiated responsibilities**.

Global Mutirão

- Global Mutirão is a **collective global approach** to climate action declared at **COP30 in Belém, Brazil**, inspired by traditions of working together.
- It emphasizes **solidarity, shared responsibility, and turning Paris Agreement commitments into concrete action**.

- Claims of **"keeping 1.5°C alive"** lack credibility as **political space for such ambition does not exist**.
- Global emissions reached around **57.4 GtCO₂e in 2024**, the highest ever recorded.
- At current trends, **1.5°C is likely to be crossed in the early 2030s**.
- Developing countries need **\$2.4–3 trillion annually**, while actual climate finance remains **under \$400 billion**.
- Adaptation finance pledges **lack baselines and binding sources**, making them aspirational.
- The **Loss and Damage Fund** is **under-capitalised**, far below projected needs.
- **Technology transfer, capacity building**, and just transition remain non-binding, with **frameworks but no assured resources**.

4. Way Forward

- Across all seven pillars, COP30 added **language, platforms, and processes**, not action.
- The **gap between climate science requirements and political delivery** continues to widen.
- Despite chronic inertia, the UNFCCC-COP process remains the **only legitimate, inclusive global forum for climate action**.

- Abandoning it would worsen outcomes, but **continuing without reform risks irrelevance.**
- **Humanity may exit negotiations, but cannot exit the planet,** making meaningful action unavoidable.

The India-EU trade deal is also a strategic turning point

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Political Breakthrough in India-EU Trade Relations

- **India and the European Union (EU)** are moving closer to concluding a long-pending trade agreement.
- The agreement reflects **years of negotiations, stalled talks, and renewed efforts.**
- **Summit diplomacy and leadership engagement** since 2016 helped build political trust.
- India addressed **domestic protectionist concerns,** while the EU showed **greater flexibility in negotiations.**

2. Geopolitical Drivers Behind the Agreement

- The agreement is **shaped by global geopolitical uncertainty.**
- **Key factors include:**
 - ➔ U.S. trade policies
 - ➔ China's economic coercion
 - ➔ Russia's strategic pressures
- Both India and the EU see cooperation as **necessary for economic security and strategic autonomy.**
- The deal represents a **strategic realignment, not just a trade negotiation.**

3. Expanding Cooperation Beyond Trade

- To make the **partnership durable, cooperation must expand into multiple sectors:**

Defence and Security

- Cooperation on **maritime stability, joint exercises, and Indo-Pacific security capacity building.**

Energy

- Collaboration on **green hydrogen, renewable energy, and energy infrastructure.**
- Alignment between **Europe's decarbonisation goals and India's energy needs.**

Technology

- **Cooperation in:**
 - ➔ Semiconductors
 - ➔ Digital public infrastructure
 - ➔ Artificial intelligence
 - ➔ Data governance

Mobility

- Improve **student mobility, research collaboration, and skilled worker movement.**
- Resolve **visa and professional recognition issues.**

4. Strategic Significance for the Global Order

- India-EU cooperation could **support a multipolar international system.**
- Partnership can **deliver growth, security, and development cooperation** across:
 - ➔ The Indo-Pacific
 - ➔ The Global South
- Success depends on **multi-sectoral cooperation, not just trade.**
- The trade agreement is only the foundation, and the **real test lies in implementation.**

Distressing regularity: On Meghalaya's rat-hole mines

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1. Context

- The February 5 explosion in an illegal rat-hole coal mine in Meghalaya, which killed at least 18 workers, **highlights the failure of governance in curbing illegal mining.**

- It shows that **judicial oversight alone cannot replace effective administration and enforcement.**

Rat-Hole Mining

It is a **primitive method of coal mining where miners (often including children) dig narrow, horizontal tunnels (3-4 feet high) into hill slopes to reach thin coal seams and extract coal, often without structural support.**



2. Nature of Illegal Coal Mining in Meghalaya

- Despite a ban by the National Green Tribunal in 2014, mining continues in Meghalaya due to:
 - ➔ **Small, private or community-owned landholdings**
 - ➔ **Thin coal layers suited to rat-hole mining**
 - ➔ **Weak local enforcement**
 - ➔ **Laundering illegal coal into legitimate markets through intermediaries.**
 - ➔ **Local income dependence**

3. Human, Environmental, and Labour Costs

- Rat-hole mines are **highly unsafe, lacking engineered supports and prone to collapse.**
- **Operators hide accidents, keep workers off formal records,** and underreport injuries.
- Environmental damage such as **polluted water, acid drainage, unstable terrain, degraded roads,** and the use of child labour remain largely invisible.

4. Supply Chain & Enforcement Gaps

- **Poor enforcement of the MMDR Act** [Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957] allows illegal coal mining and trade to continue.
- **There is no clear way to distinguish illegally mined coal from legally mined coal,** they get mixed together in the supply chain
- This is due to **weak monitoring and tracking mechanisms.**

5. Way Forward

- **Community-based monitoring should be strengthened** by involving local bodies
- **Take strict action on intermediaries through coal seizure, licence cancellation,** prosecution, and auction bans.
- **Promote alternative livelihoods** in horticulture, construction, manufacturing, and tourism.
- **Shift mining workers to public works by reshaping infrastructure** and development programmes.
- **Improve regulation** by protecting worker whistleblowers, punishing contractors and checking permits regularly.

KEYWORDS

Sahyog Portal

- The Sahyog Portal is a **centralized digital platform launched in 2024** by the **Union Home Ministry** to expedite the blocking and takedown of unlawful online content.
- Maintained by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, it automates the issuance of notices to intermediaries under **Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, 2000.**
- Recently, stand-up comedian **Kunal Kamra** has challenged the Sahyog Portal before the **Bombay High Court,** alleging it violates freedom of speech .

African Union (AU)

- The African Union (AU) is a **continental organisation comprising 55 member states** from across the African continent.
- It was **formally established in 2002, succeeding the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)**, which existed from 1963 to 1999.
- The AU is guided by its vision of **“An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.”**
- To achieve this goal and advance the Pan-African vision, the Union adopted **Agenda 2063**.
 - ➔ A long-term strategic framework aimed at Africa’s socio-economic development, regional integration, and overall transformation.

