COP31: Key Issues, India's Stand and Global Climate Challenges

Mains: *GS-III – Environment*

Why in news?

The next chapter of global climate action will unfold in Antalya, Turkey, at the 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

What is a COP?

- **COP** – It is the annual meeting of countries that signed the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- **Focus in Antalya** – There will be three meetings in focus
  - COP 31,
  - The 21st session of the COP, serving as the meeting of parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP21), and
  - The 8th session of the COP, serving as the meeting of the parties to the 2015 Paris Agreement (COP21).
- **Demands of Paris Agreement** – It asks every country to submit a nationally determined contribution (NDC), essentially its own climate plan, every five years, with the shared ambition of holding warming well below 2°C while pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C.
- Because decisions require consensus, a single country can hold up an agreement.

How is COP31 different from previous COPs?

- **Competition to host COP 31** – COP venues rotate among the UN's regional groups, and 2026 was the turn of the "Western European and Others" group to host.
- Turkey bid with Antalya, and Australia bid with Adelaide, in partnership with Pacific Island nations.
- **Unique power-sharing agreement** – The resulting standoff led to an unusual power-sharing deal last year, making COP31 the first summit where one country hosts the meeting while another runs the negotiations.
- Turkey is the formal COP31 president and host, responsible for the venue, logistics, and the "Action Agenda" of voluntary pledges and initiatives, whereas
- Australia has "exclusive authority" over formal talks, drafting of texts, and steering decisions.
- **Unprecedented leadership model** – This *dual leadership model* is untested, and

questions remain about who would have the final word if there were disagreement in the closing hours.

What are the major issues and challenges expected to shape negotiations at COP31?

- **Exit of the USA** – As the first COP since the United States' exit from the Paris Agreement earlier this year, COP31 removes the largest historical emitter from finance conversations, sharpening developing countries' demand that Europe and others fill the gap.
- **Concerns over energy security** – Rising geopolitical tensions, particularly the war in Iran, have pushed up oil and gas prices, raising the cost of fuel and food.
- **Debate over fast energy transition** – Supporters of a faster energy transition argue that this shows the risks of fossil-fuel dependence, while importers such as India face more immediate pressure to keep supplies affordable.
- **Uncertain climate finance** – The questions that matter are how much finance will actually flow to developing countries, how adaptation will be measured and paid for, and whether mounting pressure on coal and emission targets will respect the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" (CBDR-RC).

What's on the table?

- **Focus on implementation** – COP31 is not expected to produce a landmark treaty text, but the real fight is over delivery:
  - Mobilising finance,
  - Measuring progress, and
  - Accelerating the energy shift.
- **Mitigation discussion** – In terms of co-chairing consultations, India and Germany must decide on mitigation, including how to press countries whose 2035 plans fall short of 1.5°C and what "transitioning away from fossil fuels" actually requires.
- **Climate finance** – France and the Philippines will work to build consensus on delivering existing finance commitments.
- **Adaptation** – UK and Sierra Leone must chart a credible path to tripling adaptation finance and make enough headway for the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) to be finalised at COP32.
- **Supporting a just transition** – Mexico and Poland must work out how the just transition mechanism will function and what money and technical help it will give affected workers and communities.
- **Ocean action** – Palau and Canada handle the ocean, where Pacific Island countries want commitments written into formal decisions.
- **Turkey's target** – Turkey wants countries to pledge to raise electricity's share of global final energy use from about 23% today to 35% by 2035.
- **Developing countries push** – Further, developing countries, including India, have pushed to include Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, the clause that obligates developed countries to provide finance, in the provisional agenda.

What Belém left behind?

- **COP30 outcomes passed on to COP31** – The COP30 in Belém, Brazil, closed with a package called the "Global Mutirão" (meaning, collective effort), and Antalya inherits this "to-do" list.
- **Increase the finance** – Countries called for adaptation finance to be at least tripled by 2035, five years later than developing countries had wanted and without a clear baseline.
- **Roadmap for climate finance** – More broadly, it endorsed the Baku-to-Belém Roadmap to scale climate finance for developing countries to at least $1.3 trillion a year by 2035 from public and private sources, building on the $300 billion-a-year goal agreed at COP29 in Baku (Azerbaijan).
- **Indicators & new mechanism** – It adopted
    - A set of "Belém indicators" to measure progress on the GGA,
    - Created new vehicles for delivery, namely a Global Implementation Accelerator and
    - A "Belém Mission to 1.5" to help countries carry out their plans, alongside work on a just transition mechanism.
- **Lack of agreement on fossil fuels** – The most conspicuous gap concerned fossil fuels, despite more than 80 countries backed a roadmap to move away from oil, coal, and gas, yet the final text left fossil fuels out entirely, referring only to the 2023 Dubai "UAE Consensus".
- **New initiatives to phase out fossil fuels** – To keep momentum alive,
    - Brazil is leading a voluntary roadmap process outside the formal COP negotiations, while
    - Colombia and the Netherlands launched the Santa Marta Process in 2026 to explore pathways for reducing and eventually phasing out fossil-fuel use.

Where does India stand on its climate goals?

- **Goes with New climate plan** – India goes to Antalya with a new climate plan and a central seat at the table, co-chairing mitigation consultations.
- **Stronger target** – India's third NDC, covering 2031-2035, was approved and submitted in April raises the target for reducing the emission intensity of gross domestic product (GDP) to 47% below 2005 levels by 2035, up from 45% by 2030.

***Emission intensity of GDP**, which measures the volume of greenhouse gases (usually carbon dioxide, or CO2, equivalent) emitted for each unit of economic output or GDP, acts as a key indicator of how carbon-efficient an economy is as it grows.*

- **Higher share of clean energy** – The plan increases the non-fossil share of installed power capacity from 50% by 2030 (already met) to 60% by 2035.
- India expands the promised additional carbon sink from forest and tree cover from 2.5-3.0 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent to 3.5-4.0 billion tonnes.

*A **carbon sink** refers to any natural or artificial system that absorbs more CO2*

from the atmosphere than it releases, helping reduce the greenhouse gases responsible for global warming.

- **Greater ambition linked to climate support** – The NDC, however, ties any further ambition to "new and additional" finance and technology from developed countries.
- **Emphasises finance and technology** – At the Pre-COP meeting in Fiji, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change stressed that climate action should give equal importance to
  - Mitigation (reducing emissions),
  - Adaptation (coping with climate impacts), and
  - Means of Implementation (finance, technology, and capacity building).
- **Defence of climate equity** – India has strongly supported the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), arguing that all countries should not be expected to follow the same climate pathway.
- **Focus on delivery rather than new promises** – India supports discussions on Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, which requires developed countries to provide climate finance.
- It also argues that success at COP31 should be judged by how well existing commitments are fulfilled, rather than by announcing new targets.

What are the five questions that will determine how Antalya is remembered?

- **Climate finance commitment** – The first is finance, and whether developed countries put numbers and a timeline behind tripling adaptation finance and give the $1.3 trillion roadmap a monitoring system.
- **Future of fossil fuels** – The second is fossil fuels, and whether the negotiated text will include a transition away from them.
- **Turkey's electrification pledge** – The success of Turkey's proposal will depend on how many countries sign on to the 35%-by-2035 target.
- **Testing the shared presidency model** – The fourth is the split presidency itself — the real stress test of a model that future COPs may copy.
- **Global South bargain** – India and other developing countries secure the Article 9.1 discussion and reforms to finance access in return for engaging on mitigation.
- **From promises to action** – Ultimately, Antalya will be judged less on headline pledges and more on whether the promises of Paris, Baku, and Belém translate into meaningful action.

Reference

Indian Express | COP31: What's at stake at UN climate summit in Antalya

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering