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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

India's Climate Action — A Good Story That Needs Better Telling

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GS3

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"India has exceeded its renewable energy targets but global perception remains negative. How can India better communicate its climate action story?"

WHY IN NEWS

India achieved a landmark in **mid-2025** by reaching **50% of installed electricity capacity from non-fossil sources** — five years ahead of its **NDC target under the Paris Agreement**. As of February 2026, India's renewable energy capacity stands at **266.67 GW**, and total non-fossil capacity has crossed **51.93%** of installed power. Yet the **Climate Action Tracker (CAT)** continues to rate India's NDC as **"Insufficient"** and its non-fossil target as **"Highly Insufficient."** The Indian Express editorial argues that India has a genuinely good climate story — but is failing to communicate it effectively on the global stage.

THE ACHIEVEMENT — INDIA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY RECORD

India's renewable energy transformation over the past decade is one of the most significant clean energy transitions in the developing world. The numbers speak clearly.

Capacity Growth

METRIC	MARCH 2014	FEBRUARY 2026	GROWTH
Total installed power capacity	243 GW	~505 GW	2.1x
Non-fossil fuel capacity	79 GW (32.5%)	~262 GW (51.93%)	3.3x
Solar capacity	2.6 GW	136 GW	52x
Wind capacity	21 GW	~47 GW	2.2x
RE capacity (solar + wind + small hydro + biomass)	~35 GW	266.67 GW	7.6x

India's **solar capacity alone has grown 52 times** in a decade — from 2.6 GW to 136 GW. This is the **fastest solar expansion by any major economy** in absolute terms. India is now the **world's third-largest solar market** after China and the US.

NDC Targets — Achieved Early

India submitted two key 2030 targets in its **August 2022 NDC update**:

1. **Reduce emissions intensity by 45% below 2005 levels by 2030** — India is on track to achieve or exceed this
2. **Increase non-fossil power capacity to 50% by 2030 — achieved in mid-2025**, five years early

The government has set an ambitious trajectory of **50 GW annual renewable energy procurement** between FY2023-24 and FY2027-28, supported by the **Green Energy Corridor Scheme** for transmission infrastructure.

THE PERCEPTION PROBLEM — WHY THE WORLD DOES NOT SEE IT

Despite these achievements, India's climate narrative on the global stage remains defined by three persistent perceptions — all of which the editorial argues are either outdated or misleading.

Perception 1: "India Is a Top Emitter"

India is the **world's third-largest CO_2 emitter** (after China and the US). But this ranking ignores population. India's **per capita emissions are 1.9 tonnes CO_2/year** — well below the global average of **4.7 tonnes** and a fraction of the US (14.9 tonnes) and China (8.9 tonnes).

COUNTRY	TOTAL CO_2 EMISSIONS (GT/YEAR)	PER CAPITA (TONNES)	SHARE OF HISTORICAL CUMULATIVE EMISSIONS
China	~12.0	8.9	~13%
USA	~5.0	14.9	~25%
India	**~2.9**	**1.9**	**~3%**
EU-27	~2.8	6.3	~22%
Global	~37.0	4.7	100%

India's **share of historical cumulative emissions is approximately 3%** — compared to 25% for the US and 22% for the EU. The editorial argues that climate equity demands these numbers be central to any assessment of India's climate responsibility.

Perception 2: "India's Climate Targets Are Weak"

The **Climate Action Tracker (CAT)** rates India's NDC as **"Insufficient"** and its non-fossil capacity target as **"Highly Insufficient."** However, the CAT itself acknowledges that **India will over-achieve its current targets** with existing policies — meaning the targets are not driving additional action because India is already exceeding them.

The editorial calls this a **"ratings paradox"** — India is penalised for setting targets that are too modest relative to what it is already doing, while countries that set ambitious targets but miss them (like several EU members) receive better ratings.

Perception 3: "India Is Blocking Global Climate Action"

India has been characterised — particularly in Western media — as a "blocker" at COPs. The editorial notes that India's actual record tells a different story:

- **COP21 (Paris, 2015):** India was among the first major economies to ratify the Paris Agreement
- **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** Co-founded by India and France in 2015; now has **125 member and signatory countries** and **77 partner organisations**; celebrated its **10th Foundation Day in March 2026**
- **COP26 (Glasgow, 2021):** India committed to **net-zero by 2070** and 500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030
- **COP29 (Baku, 2024):** India pushed for **USD 1.3 trillion/year in climate finance** from developed countries; the final agreement was USD 300 billion — which India called "distressingly low"

INDIA'S CLIMATE POLICY ARCHITECTURE — SUBSTANCE OVER NARRATIVE

The editorial examines India's key climate programmes, arguing that each represents serious policy action — but none is effectively communicated internationally.

National Green Hydrogen Mission

Launched in **January 2023** with an outlay of **Rs 19,744 crore**, the mission targets **5 MMT annual green hydrogen production by 2030**. India's current hydrogen demand is approximately **10 MMTPA** (accounting for ~10% of global demand), growing at **4% year-on-year**.

The **Green Hydrogen Standard** notified by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy defines emission thresholds for hydrogen to be classified as "green" — a regulatory framework that few developing countries have established.

The **ISA Green Hydrogen Innovation Centre (GHIC)**, backed by the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**, was included in the **G20 Delhi Declaration** as a global accelerator for clean hydrogen transitions.

Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) Scheme

India's **PAT scheme** — under the National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE) — is one of the world's largest **market-based energy efficiency programmes**, covering over **1,000 designated consumers** in 13 energy-intensive sectors. It uses tradable **Energy Saving Certificates (ESCerts)** — a cap-and-trade mechanism for energy efficiency that has delivered measurable emissions reductions since 2012.

Forestry and Carbon Sinks

India has committed to creating an **additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent** through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. India's forest cover stands at **71.38 million hectares (21.71% of geographical area)** — per the **India State of Forest Report 2023**.

THE CLIMATE FINANCE STRUGGLE

The editorial's strongest critique is reserved not for India's domestic action but for the **global climate finance architecture** that it argues systematically disadvantages developing countries.

The COP29 Disappointment

At **COP29 (Baku, November 2024)**, India — as part of the **Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs)** bloc — pushed for climate finance of **USD 1.3 trillion per year until 2035**. The final **New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG)** was set at **USD 300 billion** — less than a quarter of what developing countries demanded.

India called this outcome a **"betrayal"** and argued that the finance offered was inadequate, non-transparent, and predominantly in the form of **loans rather than grants** — effectively adding to developing country debt burdens.

Loss and Damage

The **Loss and Damage Fund**, operationalised at COP28 (Dubai, 2023), offers partial relief but India has pushed for:

- **Compensation-based framing** (not credit or loan-based)
- **Clear access conditions** that do not exclude large developing countries like India
- **Governance reform** to give recipient countries more voice

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BOTH SIDES OF THE ARGUMENT

Those Who Say India Is Doing Enough

- India achieved **50% non-fossil capacity five years early** — a rare case of a major economy over-achieving its climate pledge

- India's per capita emissions (**1.9 tonnes**) are less than half the global average and a fraction of developed country levels
- India co-founded the **ISA** (125+ members), launched the **Green Hydrogen Mission**, and established one of the **strictest trans-fat regulations** globally
- India is the **world's third-largest renewable energy market** and the fastest-growing major solar market
- The **"common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR)** principle requires developed countries to lead — not India, which contributes only 3% of historical emissions

Those Who Say India Must Do More

- India is still the **world's third-largest coal consumer** — coal provides **~70% of electricity generation** (even though capacity share has fallen)
- India's **net-zero target of 2070** is 20 years after most major economies — China (2060), US (2050), EU (2050)
- The CAT rates India's **policies and actions** as "Insufficient" — meaning current policies will lead to emissions **8-11% higher** than earlier projected
- India has not submitted a **long-term low-emission development strategy (LT-LEDS)** with specific sector-wise decarbonisation pathways
- **Coal capacity additions continue** — India added ~10 GW of new coal capacity in 2024-25, undermining the renewables narrative

WAY FORWARD — BETTER ACTION AND BETTER COMMUNICATION

Strengthening Domestic Action

- **Submit an ambitious 2035 NDC** — the CAT notes India is already on track to meet its new 2035 target by or before 2030; set a stretch target that reflects actual capability
- **Accelerate coal retirement** — publish a time-bound coal phase-down plan (not phase-out) for the oldest and most polluting plants, starting with pre-2000 units
- **Operationalise the carbon market** — the **Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)**, notified in June 2023, needs an active exchange and robust MRV (measurement, reporting, verification) framework

Improving Global Communication

- **Reframe the narrative around equity** — India should lead a coalition of developing countries to demand that climate assessments use **per capita and historical emissions** as primary metrics, not absolute totals

- **Publish an annual India Climate Action Report** — a professionally produced, data-driven document (like the Economic Survey) that is released at major international forums
- **Leverage the BRICS presidency** — use the 2026 chairship to advance a **"Climate Equity Compact"** within BRICS that challenges the developed-world framing of climate responsibility
- **Partner with ISA for climate diplomacy** — the ISA's 125+ member network is an untapped soft-power asset; India should use it to build a coalition for reformed CAT/CCPI methodologies

Securing Climate Finance

- **Push for a reformed NCQG** at COP30 (Belem, November 2025) — demand grant-based, transparent climate finance with simplified access for large developing countries
- **Establish a sovereign green bond programme** — India issued its first sovereign green bond in January 2023 (Rs 16,000 crore); scale this to Rs 50,000 crore annually to fund domestic climate action while building credibility in global green finance markets
- **Advocate for Loss and Damage Fund reform** — ensure the fund operates on compensation (not credit) principles with governance structures that give developing countries proportional voice

UPSC RELEVANCE

India's RE capacity figures, ISA membership and founding, NDC targets (45% emissions intensity reduction, 50% non-fossil capacity), Green Hydrogen Mission outlay, PAT scheme and ESCerts, NFSA forest cover data, Carbon Credit Trading Scheme, COP29 NCQG outcome.

MAINS GS-III:

Climate change mitigation and India's policy architecture; renewable energy transition; carbon markets; climate finance and equity; India's role in international climate negotiations.

📌 FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

INDIA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY CAPACITY (FEBRUARY 2026):

Total installed power capacity: ~505 GW

Non-fossil capacity share: 51.93% (target was 50% by 2030 — achieved mid-2025)

Solar capacity: 136 GW (up from 2.6 GW in March 2014)

Wind capacity: ~47 GW

Total RE capacity (solar + wind + small hydro + biomass): 266.67 GW

Annual RE procurement target: 50 GW/year (FY2023-24 to FY2027-28)

INDIA'S NDC TARGETS (AUGUST 2022 UPDATE):

Emissions intensity reduction: 45% below 2005 levels by 2030

Non-fossil fuel capacity: 50% of installed power by 2030 (achieved mid-2025)

Net-zero target: 2070

Additional carbon sink: 2.5-3 billion tonnes CO_2 equivalent through forest cover by 2030

CLIMATE ACTION TRACKER (CAT) RATINGS FOR INDIA:

Overall NDC rating: "Insufficient"

Non-fossil capacity target: "Highly Insufficient"

Key finding: India will over-achieve current targets with existing policies

Policies and actions: "Insufficient" — 2030 emissions projected 8-11% higher than last assessment

INDIA'S EMISSIONS PROFILE:

Total CO_2 emissions: ~2.9 Gt/year (world's third-largest)

Per capita emissions: 1.9 tonnes (global average: 4.7 tonnes)

Share of historical cumulative emissions: ~3% (US: ~25%, EU: ~22%)

Coal share in electricity generation: ~70%

INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE (ISA):

Co-founded by: India and France (COP21, November 2015)

Headquarters: Gurugram, Haryana

Member/signatory countries: 125+

Partner organisations: 77

10th Foundation Day: March 11, 2026

Green Hydrogen Innovation Centre (GHIC): Backed by ADB; included in G20 Delhi Declaration

NATIONAL GREEN HYDROGEN MISSION:

Launched: January 2023

Outlay: Rs 19,744 crore

Target: 5 MMT annual green hydrogen production by 2030

India's current hydrogen demand: ~10 MMTPA (~10% of global demand)

Growth rate: 4% year-on-year

Green Hydrogen Standard: Notified by MNRE (emission thresholds defined)

COP29 (BAKU, NOVEMBER 2024) — CLIMATE FINANCE:

India/LMDCs demanded: USD 1.3 trillion/year until 2035

Final NCQG agreed: USD 300 billion/year

India's position: Finance is "distressingly low" and predominantly loan-based

Loss and Damage Fund: Operationalised at COP28 (Dubai, 2023)

PAT SCHEME (PERFORM, ACHIEVE AND TRADE):

Under: National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency (NMEEE)

Covers: 1,000+ designated consumers in 13 energy-intensive sectors

Instrument: Tradable Energy Saving Certificates (ESCerts)

Operational since: 2012

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

India's forest cover: 71.38 million hectares (21.71% of geographical area) — ISFR 2023

Sovereign Green Bond: First issued January 2023 (Rs 16,000 crore)

Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS): Notified June 2023

CBDR principle: "Common But Differentiated Responsibilities" — Article 3 of UNFCCC

India ratified Paris Agreement: October 2, 2016 (Gandhi Jayanti)

COP30 venue: Belem, Brazil (November 2025)

CCPI 2026: India ranked among top 10 performers in Climate Change Performance Index

Sources: Indian Express , PIB , Climate Action Tracker , ISA , MNRE

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