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JOINT DECLARATION AT THE EAST ASIA SUMMIT EMPHASISING FREEDOM OF NAVIGATION

- Cooperation should be strengthened to protect marine resources. Marine pollution and marine debris should be removed. Important infrastructure such as underwater cables, pipelines and facilities located beneath the sea must be protected.
- Disputes should be resolved peacefully in accordance with international law.
- The oceans must be used freely in accordance with international law. The right to freedom of navigation at sea must be ensured.
- Regional cooperation should be strengthened in digital technology, artificial intelligence, science and innovation.
- A secure digital environment must be established to prevent online fraud.

FREE E-VISA FOR ASEAN COUNTRIES

- Tourists travelling to India from ASEAN member countries will be provided with free electronic visas without any charges. Measures should be taken to improve maritime connectivity, scientific research, disaster management, coast guard cooperation, maritime awareness and the safety of seafarers.
- Joint initiatives should be undertaken with ASEAN countries in nuclear technology transfer and training programmes, along with cooperation in cryptocurrency.
- Cooperation should be strengthened in the field of critical metals and minerals required for advanced technologies.
- Joint cyber forensic training programmes should be conducted to enhance cybersecurity capabilities in the region.
- Special programmes should be introduced to encourage new innovations by young people in India–ASEAN space technology and to apply these innovations in agriculture and resource management.
- Educational scholarships offered to ASEAN countries at Nalanda University should be increased.

COAL MINE PROJECT IN JHARKHAND

- The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has granted approval for establishing a coal mine over an area of 928 hectares in the dense forest region of Chatra district, Jharkhand.
- This project is an expansion of an already existing coal mine in the region. However, approval from the state government is required.

- The state government is likely to grant approval. This is because, according to a recent Supreme Court judgment, a state has the right to receive a share of the value of minerals extracted within its territory.
- Therefore, the state government would not want to lose revenue amounting to several thousand crore rupees. With this money, it could announce new schemes and distribute various freebies in the name of public welfare.
- If this project is implemented, approximately 5.6 lakh trees in the dense forest will have to be cut down.
- Among these, around 2.40 lakh trees are Sal trees.
- Since this is an open-cast mining project, coal extraction cannot be carried out without cutting down these trees.
- Human–elephant conflicts are already occurring in this dense forest region.
- Over the past few years, approximately 1,340 people have reportedly lost their lives due to elephant attacks.
- According to the State Forest Department, 20 people have died so far this year alone.
- These conflicts occur because elephant corridors have been blocked and their natural habitats have shrunk. As a result, elephants move into human settlements in search of food.
- If another 928 hectares of forest are destroyed, elephant habitats will shrink further.
- Consequently, elephants will have to travel over larger areas in search of food, and their movement into human settlements will increase.
- The destruction of trees will reduce the habitats not only of elephants but also of all other living organisms in the region.
- Bengal foxes, hyenas, rare mountain snakes and several rare bird species living in this forest will be forced to migrate to other places in search of suitable habitats.
- Furthermore, biodiversity will be affected, potentially leading to the extinction of certain species.
- Just as humans express concern about rising global temperatures caused by melting glaciers and increasing carbon dioxide emissions, polar bears in the Arctic region are also suffering from climate change.
- However, their suffering often goes unnoticed.
- Due to the loss of suitable habitats, polar bears are experiencing reduced reproduction and are gradually becoming an endangered species.
- According to the findings of a 2025 study titled "Distribution of Biodiversity," 91% of 196 species of terrestrial and aquatic organisms have moved beyond their original habitats in search of new places to live.
- As wildlife loses its natural habitats and moves into new regions, conflicts involving animals can occur over distances of up to 17 kilometres. In the case of bird species, this distance is approximately 11 kilometres.
- India's Coal Dependence and Climate Commitments
- India has proudly announced that it achieved its target of meeting 50% of electricity generation capacity requirements through non-fossil-fuel sources by 2025, five years ahead of its 2030 target.
- However, the use of coal for thermal power generation has not decreased. Instead, it has increased by 0.6%.
- India ranks third in coal consumption and carbon dioxide emissions from thermal power generation, after China and the United States.
- China occupies the first position, while the United States occupies the second position.
- India uses approximately 3.4 billion tonnes of coal in thermal power plants.
- India's share of global carbon dioxide emissions is approximately 8.4%.

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- At a time when countries across the world are discussing the need to reduce coal consumption, permission has been granted to establish a new coal mine for electricity generation using coal-based technology.
- India participates in international climate conferences and continues to make commitments to increase electricity production from non-coal sources.
- Under these circumstances, why is approval being granted for a new coal mine?
- There are several difficulties in transitioning to non-conventional methods of electricity generation.
- Although constructing new dams for hydroelectric power generation may not directly cause pollution, it can still damage the environment.
- The construction of such dams may require the destruction of several acres of forest land.
- As a result, the living organisms inhabiting these forests may be pushed towards extinction. Therefore, biodiversity may also be severely affected.

COP31 CLIMATE SUMMIT IN TÜRKIYE

- Countries around the world have been joining hands to address the impacts of climate change. Under the coordination of the United Nations (UN), international climate summits are held every year.
- Currently, the 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31) is being held in Antalya, Türkiye, from November 9 to 20, 2026, according to the given text.
- Generally, these conferences discuss and make decisions on issues such as the responsibilities of countries in tackling climate change, financial contributions and measures to reduce carbon emissions.

» What is Climate Change?

- Climate change refers to long-term changes in the Earth's overall climate system caused by changes in the Earth's average temperature.
- These changes lead to natural disasters and severe environmental consequences.
- In particular, the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, crude oil and natural gas releases large quantities of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide (CO_2) and methane, into the atmosphere.
- These gases trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere instead of allowing it to escape into space. This is a major cause of global warming.
- In addition, deforestation, modern agricultural practices, industrial activities and vehicle emissions reduce natural carbon-absorbing systems and contribute to rising temperatures.
- As a result, glaciers in polar regions and mountains melt rapidly, causing sea levels to rise.
- Consequently, low-lying coastal areas are submerged by rising seawater.
- Furthermore, ocean acidification, changes in plant and animal habitats and biodiversity loss have emerged as serious environmental problems.
- Climate change also increases the frequency of extreme weather events such as severe heatwaves, unexpected floods, prolonged droughts and powerful cyclones.
- In order to control greenhouse gas emissions from industries, the increasing number of vehicles and electricity-generating stations in different countries, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was established at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992.

- Based on this agreement, annual conferences of member countries have been conducted since 1995. These conferences are known as the Conference of the Parties (COP). At the conference held in Paris, France, in 2015, the historic Paris Agreement was adopted.
- Under this agreement, countries agreed to keep the increase in global average temperature well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the temperature rise to 1.5°C.
- Another important decision was that every country should submit its own national plans to reduce carbon emissions. These national climate action plans are known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

» Climate Finance

- Climate finance refers to the financial resources required to prevent climate change and protect people and natural resources from its impacts.
- For example, huge investments are needed to reduce coal-based electricity generation, increase renewable energy production through solar and wind power, develop infrastructure to tackle floods and droughts, protect coastal regions and promote climate-resilient agricultural practices.
- The basic principle behind climate finance is that developed countries, which have historically emitted large quantities of greenhouse gases through industrialisation, should provide financial assistance to developing countries that are severely affected by climate change.
- Climate finance can be provided in the form of grants, low-interest loans or technological assistance.
- Several important issues are discussed at international climate conferences, including how much financial assistance each country should provide, how it should be distributed, whether the funds and their benefits actually reach affected countries, and whether the resulting improvements are properly measured.
- New decisions taken at these conferences are communicated to the countries participating in the Conference of the Parties (COP), with an emphasis on their implementation.

» Significance of the Baku Climate Summit

- The 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29), held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2024, established a new target for climate finance.
- Under this agreement, developed countries agreed to increase climate finance for developing countries from US$100 billion per year to US$300 billion per year by 2035.
- Furthermore, countries agreed to undertake efforts to mobilise US$1.3 trillion annually by 2035 through various sources, including public and private investments.

» Current Situation

- At the COP31 conference described in the text as taking place in Türkiye, discussions focus on implementing earlier commitments and establishing mechanisms for providing climate finance.
- Particular attention is being given to ensuring that developing countries can easily access financial assistance and improving the credibility and reliability of carbon credits.
- The impacts of climate change affect the entire world, regardless of whether a country is developing, poor or economically advanced. However, all countries do not possess equal economic strength to address these challenges.
- Therefore, climate protection is not merely an environmental responsibility; it is also closely connected with global equality, economic justice and the right of future generations to live.
- The real success of international climate conferences can be ensured only when the commitments made by countries are translated into concrete actions.

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