

Editorial of the Day – 11.11.2025

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1. New horizons – On COP30 in Brazil

General Studies 3 – Environment

Topic – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

COP 30 – Implementation, Geopolitics, and the Role of Developing Nations

Introduction

The 30th Conference of Parties (COP 30) in Belém, Brazil, represents a crucial decade-milestone since the 2015 Paris Agreement. It convenes at a time of significant global disarray, marked by geopolitical tensions and the U.S. withdrawal from the accord. Amidst concerns of inadequate progress on emission targets, COP 30 aims to pivot from negotiation to action, focusing on "implementation" by strengthening climate finance, forest preservation, and carbon markets.

1. Overview of COP 30 (Belém, Brazil)

Pivotal Timing – The conference marks 10 years since the Paris Agreement (2015), serving as a critical assessment point.

Core Objective – To formally assess global progress against the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting temperature rise to well below 2°C, while pursuing efforts to keep it "as close as possible to 1.5°C."

Challenging Atmosphere – The summit begins amidst a backdrop of global uncertainty and disarray, undermining the spirit of multilateral cooperation.

2. U.S. Withdrawal and its Global Implications

Policy Reversal – The United States has once again withdrawn from the Paris Agreement (though it remains part of the broader UNFCCC).

Shift in Tone – The current U.S. stance is noted as being more hostile and confrontational than its previous break from the agreement in 2017.

Disruptive Tactics – The U.S. is reportedly using threats of tariffs and political brinkmanship as tools to actively derail international emission reduction efforts.

Immediate Impact – This approach slows global cooperation on vital areas like clean technology sharing and climate finance mobilization.

Examples of U.S. Disruption

International Maritime Organization (IMO) – The U.S. actively blocked a resolution aimed at the decarbonization of the global shipping industry.

Political Symbolism – When Bill Gates softened his public stance on climate urgency, the U.S. President (Donald Trump) cited this as "vindication" of his administration's withdrawal policy.

Broader Power – Despite global clean energy investments now outpacing fossil fuels, the U.S. still retains formidable power to destabilize international climate progress, forcing negotiators at COP 30 to navigate these political undercurrents.

3. Brazil's Presidency – A COP of Implementation

Central Theme – Brazil has designated COP 30 as an "Implementation COP." The focus is to shift from negotiating commitments to putting past promises into concrete action.

Logistics – The conference is structured as a 12-day deliberation sprint in Belém.

Key Priorities – Brazil's presidency will champion three core pillars –

1. Strengthening financial mechanisms.
2. Enhancing forest preservation.
3. Refining carbon markets.

Key Agendas on the Table

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Adaptation Finance – Finalizing mechanisms to secure and deliver funding for climate resilience in the most vulnerable nations.

Forest Conservation – Brazil is set to leverage its position as a host to emphasize the Amazon's critical role as a global carbon sink.

Carbon Credit Markets – A major push to refine the rules for carbon markets, focusing on improving transparency and accountability mechanisms to ensure their integrity.

4. Revitalizing Global Climate Governance

Need for Reform – The current climate negotiation process is often criticized as slow and bureaucratic.

UN Multilateral Reforms – A proposal is on the table to enhance the UNFCCC's capacity for decisive, outcome-based action rather than just procedural negotiations.

'Climate Council' Proposal – Brazil has suggested the creation of a new 'Climate Council' to streamline global decision-making, increase accountability, and infuse new energy into the process

5. The Evolving Role of Developing Economies

Shifting Leadership – Major developing economies, specifically India, China, Brazil, and South Africa (BRICS), are expected to demonstrate greater leadership.

Opportunity – These emerging economies are well-positioned to shape the new climate order and fill the leadership vacuum.

Financial Challenge – This new role may require them to recalibrate earlier positions and demonstrate more ambition in their own financial commitments to climate action.

Strategic Imperative for India – It is crucial for India to initiate internal policy dialogue to strategically position itself and define its role in this evolving global climate landscape.

6. Conclusion

COP 30 presents a moment of both profound urgency and significant opportunity. While U.S. policy disruptions and waning cooperation pose serious threats, Brazil's leadership aims to regenerate momentum by focusing on tangible implementation and governance reform. This summit serves as a defining moment for developing nations like India, China, Brazil, and South Africa to assume a greater leadership role, foster innovation, and steer the world towards a more equitable and sustainable climate future.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/new-horizons-on-cop30-in-brazil/article70263039.ece>

2. India-Bhutan ties show how to get it right in a challenging neighbourhood

General Studies 2 – International Relation

Topic – India and Its Neighborhood– Relations.

The India-Bhutan Model – Lessons in Managing Asymmetric Relationships

Introduction

The enduring partnership between India and Bhutan provides a unique and successful case study in international relations, particularly on how a large regional power can effectively manage a relationship marked by significant size and power asymmetry. This analysis examines the historical foundations, key features, and future challenges of this partnership, drawing critical lessons for India's broader "Neighbourhood First" policy as it navigates an evolving and complex regional order.

1. Historical Foundations & Inherent Asymmetry

Post-Independence Bilateralism – The formal relationship was forged immediately after Indian independence, guided initially by the **1949 Treaty of Friendship** (subsequently revised and updated in 2007 to reflect modern realities).

Clear Power Disparity – The relationship is defined by a clear asymmetry –

India – A large, populous, regional power with a major economy and global ambitions.

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Bhutan – A small, landlocked Himalayan kingdom with a small population, limited capacity, and heavy reliance on its neighbour.

Strategic Buffer State – The article emphasizes Bhutan's critical geopolitical role as a **"buffer" state** for India, navigating its sovereignty while being strategically located between India and China.

2. Key Features of the Partnership

Development & Economic Co-operation – India has historically been, and remains, Bhutan's **major development partner**. This cooperation is centered on –

1. Development of hydropower projects.
2. Building critical infrastructure.
3. Providing substantial aid and trade facilitation.

Security & Strategic Depth – Bhutan's geography is vital to India's defence calculus, particularly its location near the sensitive Siliguri Corridor (India's "Chicken's Neck"). This necessitates close collaboration on –

1. Border management and security.
2. Training of personnel.
3. Coordination on foreign policy choices that impact regional security.

Respecting Bhutan's Agency – Despite the clear asymmetry, the partnership has been marked by India's increasing recognition of Bhutan's independent standing. This includes respecting Bhutan's sovereign decisions, its internal evolution to a democracy, and its right to conduct its own foreign policy.

3. Lessons for India in Managing Asymmetric Relationships

Prioritise Respect and Equity – India must treat smaller neighbours with dignity and acknowledge their sovereign choices. The success of the India-Bhutan model is attributed to India's strategic restraint and its willingness to act as a partner rather than a regional hegemon.

Maintain Strategic Sensitivity – India's policy must be empathetic and account for the security, economic, and social concerns of its smaller neighbours, not just its own strategic interests. The Himalayan geography and the Bhutan-China border dynamics are prime examples of this.

Welcome Diversification & Autonomy – Bhutan has gradually diversified its diplomatic and economic partners (e.g., Japan, South Korea, European nations). India must welcome and even support this autonomy, as it builds trust and reduces the smaller state's feeling of over-dependence.

Embrace Adaptability – The India-Bhutan relationship was forced to recalibrate due to the end of the Cold War, Bhutan's internal democratic shift, and China's growing assertiveness. This teaches India to avoid rigid, one-size-fits-all models for its neighbourhood.

Build on Mutual Benefit, Not Dependency – The most successful aspects of the relationship (e.g., hydropower) work because the benefits are mutual. Bhutan produces clean electricity and receives investment, while India procures clean power and secures a friendly, stable neighbour.

4. Challenges & Future Risks to the Partnership

Chinese Influence & Border Realities – The primary challenge is China. Ongoing Bhutan-China negotiations, potential territorial settlements, and Chinese economic overtures may test Bhutan's steadfast alignment with India.

Public Perception of Dominance – Even in a healthy relationship, the local Bhutanese sentiment of being overshadowed by a "big brother" can erode goodwill. India must continuously manage these perceptions to avoid resentment.

Economic Imbalances – Bhutan's heavy economic reliance on the Indian market and its hydropower sector gives India significant leverage. However, this same dependency may push Bhutan to actively seek greater autonomy and rebalance towards other powers.

Changing Neighbourhood Architecture – The regional landscape is evolving with new groupings (BBIN, BIMSTEC, Indo-Pacific frameworks) and increased activity from external players (China, US). India must update its engagement strategies to remain relevant and the partner of choice.

5. Implications for India's Broader Neighbourhood Policy

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A Template for South Asia – The India-Bhutan relationship should be viewed as a template for India's broader regional approach, one that combines development, connectivity, strategic collaboration, and profound respect for sovereignty.

Invest in Value-Based Ties – India must invest beyond hard infrastructure, focusing on digital cooperation, educational exchanges, and value-based ties (e.g., cultural links, shared Buddhist heritage), acknowledging Bhutan's unique emphasis on Gross National Happiness (GNH).

Act as an Enabler, Not a Dictator – In matters of external defence and diplomacy, India should position itself as an enabler, supporting its smaller neighbours' hedging efforts rather than dictating their alignments.

Prioritise Trust Over Obedience – The ultimate goal must be to secure the trust of its neighbours. India's security calculus is better served by Bhutan's trust than by Bhutan's "obedience," making open and honest communication channels vital.

6. Conclusion

The India-Bhutan story successfully demonstrates that asymmetric relationships, often defined by disparities in size, power, and resources, do not have to be exploitative or one-sided. It proves that trust, mutual respect, pragmatic cooperation, and sensitivity to the smaller state's agency can forge a durable and productive partnership. For India, applying these core principles to its broader neighbourhood policy is essential for enhancing regional stability and reaffirming its role as a responsible leading power in South Asia.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raj-mohan-writes-india-bhutan-ties-show-how-to-get-it-right-in-a-challenging-neighbourhood-10357777/>

