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CAN INDONESIA MOVE TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE: WHAT HAPPENED AT COP 26?

[COP 26](#) was the 2021 UN conference on climate change, the world's biggest summit to tackle the world's biggest problem. The 26th summit took place from October 31 to November 12 2021, Glasgow, with the United Kingdom as the President. Under the [Paris Agreement \(COP 21\)](#), the world leaders promised to work together to limit global warming below 2 degrees and aim for 1.5 degrees. They committed to frame Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for doing the same and pledged that every 5 years they would come back with an updated plan to tackle the situation at hand. It was at COP 26 that the countries were to work on this upgradation. While many issues were addressed during the conference, one country that remained spotlight was Indonesia.

INCREASING DEFORESTATION

Indonesia is suffering from numerous problems, including unemployment, pollution, and diseases. Over the last 30 years, the nation has lost 25 million hectares of forest due to palm oil concessions, plantations, and logging. Indonesia's peatlands act like a "giant sponge" that absorbs the greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide (CO2). As these peatlands are destroyed, they release CO2 into the atmosphere causing mass damage. For Indonesia, the palm oil business contributes a sizeable percentage to its much-needed economy, a [4.5 percentage of the GDP and employment for over 3 million citizens](#). Every year, from June to October, the nation sets massive fires to its forest to establish areas for its agriculture. Palm oil production requires dry land and thus the slash and burn technique is used for cultivating them especially as they are twenty times cheaper than other forms of forest clearance. The pollution caused by the same is visible as it creates a blanket of white smoke, commonly known as haze, covering not only the entire country but also affecting neighbours such as Malaysia and Singapore. However, it is important to note that the deforestation rate hit a historic low in 2020. While the Government proudly [endorsed the role](#) of their policies such as issuing licenses to new palm oil industries, et cetera, others point out factors such as an unusually wet year, declining prices for the same and urged the Government to continue its efforts. Nevertheless, the country still [lost 115,549 hectares forest](#). Even though it is a 75% drop since 2019, it is not enough to tackle the issue.

USE OF LANDFILLS

Indonesia is not only one of the largest nations practising slash and burn but it is also the largest dump for wastes, i.e., [about 7000 tons of waste](#) arrives at Banter Gebang every day and [only 10 percent of the dump is recycled](#). As per villagers, the rice fields of Indonesia are [becoming trash mountains](#) and these mountains are growing bigger and bigger every day. Since the waste is simply stored rather than being broken down, it releases methane, which does not only affect the climate but also the health of the people. The improper waste management in Indonesia remains an underestimated contributor to global warming.

HUGE COAL FACTORIES

Adding to its deforestation and landfills are Indonesia's coal factories. Just like India and China, Indonesia relies for much of its revenue and energy production on coal. For them, "Coal is king". The large smokestacks emit a constant plume of thick smog every day. The [Suralaya coal](#) plant on the island of Java is the largest emitter of smoke in the country. Many of the residents surrounding the plant have developed extensive breathing problems and tuberculosis over the years. While many countries witnessed an improvement in the air quality due to the lockdown, Indonesia's air [remained toxic](#) with the coal plants working every day to sustain the economy. Despite such high pollution levels, the energy ministry of Indonesia seems to expand their coal production. Currently, the coal plant at [Cilegon](#) is undergoing a massive expansion. Thus, one can expect a much greater increase in Sulphur dioxide, Particulate matter 10, Nitric oxide emissions- in other words, global warming and climate change.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

Indonesia already appears to suffer the costs of its actions and it has already [become vulnerable to climate change impacts](#). The country has witnessed extreme floods, droughts, an increase in the sea level and changes in rainfall patterns. The weather has become unpredictable. The [landslides](#) have increased manifold and the death toll to thousands. People are losing their livelihoods and homes as they are forced to evacuate the affected areas. In 2020, extreme weather, triggered by the continuation of the dry season had affected crop growths and caused immense drought in several areas of the country. However, Jakarta, the country's capital is sinking due to horrific rains and a rise in sea level. [Such different](#) conditions in the same country! By 2050 it is predicted that the sea level surrounding the country will increase by 50 cm. and at this rate, by 2100 scientists predict, Indonesia might no longer exist.

AT COP 26

Thus, COP 26 was an important summit to check and regulate Indonesia's actions towards climate change. Even though the country took reasonable efforts to mitigate the issue since the Paris Agreement, it has proven to be insufficient. The country, at the conference, had [pledged](#) to reach zero deforestation by 2030. It invited all nations to fulfil their pledges and work towards a better future. Nevertheless, the government has backed out of the same. Siti Nurbaya Bakar, the environment minister of Indonesia, held that the deal was unfair and that the development of [the country will be the](#) topmost priority. [The country's foreign minister too held](#) that the deal was false and misleading. It remains unclear as to how the bureaucrats will "develop" a nation that might not even exist in the future. The battle is between the environment and economic development. Both are significantly important, but the Indonesian government appears to worry very little about the future.

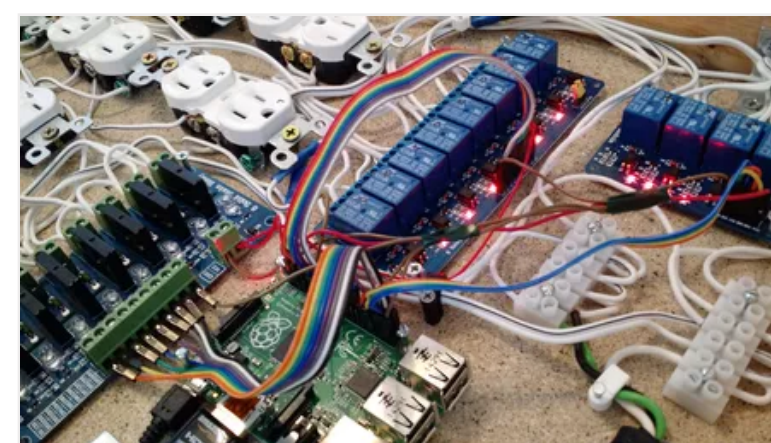
Even with regard to coal production, with the support of countries such as India and China, Indonesia has pushed for a [revision](#) to change the promise to "phase out" coal into "phase down". Thus, despite the goal to stop generating new coal-fired power plants by 2056, Indonesia will use and produce coal to sustain its economy. [Indonesia's President "Jokowi"](#) at the summit conveyed that the country has witnessed a heavy reduction in forest fires and deforestation. He also said that Indonesia has begun efforts to rehabilitate 600,000 hectares of mangrove forest and pledged that the forests which originally contributed 60 percent of Indonesia's emissions, will reach a carbon net sink by 2030. One policy of the Government that reduced deforestation is the [moratorium on clearing primary forests](#). At COP 26, the same was extended by Jokowi. However, as mentioned before, Indonesia has already backed out of one of the significant pledges of COP 26. The future of Indonesia lies at the spirit of one question, development or environment? One already knows what the government has chosen. Will they realize what development takes and thus follow the steps of their fellow countries?

The post has been authored by Prof. Harsh Mahaseth, Assistant Professor & Assistant Dean (Academic Affairs) JGLS; Senior Research Analyst Nehginpao Kipgen, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies






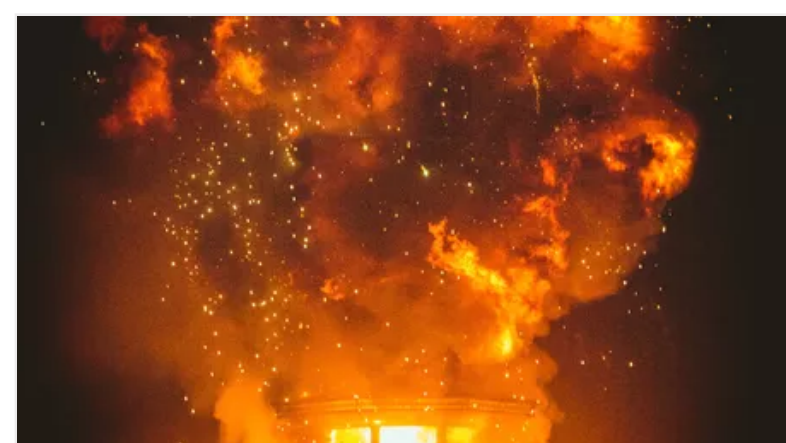
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