India highlights role of big cat conservation in climate change mitigation

ANTALYA, Nov 17 (ANI)

UNION Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav has underscored the critical role of big cat conservation in advancing climate change mitigation and reinforcing ecosystem resilience during a high-level ministerial side event titled 'Big Cats: Drivers of Climate Change Mitigation'.

The event was co-organised by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) on the sidelines of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya, Turkiye.

The gathering brought together Ministers and national delegates from big cat range countries, including Nepal, Venezuela, Cambodia and Sri Lanka, alongside representatives from international bodies and conventions such as the Ramsar Convention and the UNCCD.

Participants and conservation experts deliberated on how safeguarding big cats and their natural habitats contributes directly to climate mitigation, ecosystem resilience and sustainable development. Discussions emphasised that protecting the world's seven major big cat species helps preserve carbon-rich ecosystems, boost climate resilience and achieve global climate goals.

COP31

Nepal pushes for billions to help disaster survivors

NUWAKOT, Nov 17 (AP)

AS in Nepal deadly floods in August washed away entire villages and left thousands dead or missing, life has ground to a halt, thousands of miles away at the UN climate summit in Turkiye, known as COP31, leaders from mountain countries are warning the world there is no time to wait, as they sound the alarm about future disasters from global temperature rise, including the collapse of Himalayan glaciers.

They and other climate activists are calling for discussions on the heightened peril that people face from a warming planet, caused mainly by the burning of gas, coal and oil.

India, Japan to hold 2+2 dialogue in Tokyo

NEW DELHI, Nov 17 (PTI)

INDIA and Japan will hold the fourth edition of their Foreign and Defence Ministers' Dialogue (2+2) in Tokyo this week, where the two sides will review the full spectrum of bilateral strategic and defence cooperation and reaffirm their commitment to a free and rule-based Indo-Pacific, officials said on Tuesday.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will co-chair the 2+2 ministerial dialogue, alongside Japan's Minister of Defence Shinjiro Koizumi and Minister for Foreign Affairs Toshimitsu Motegi.

From Manila, Quad signal to China: 'Peace by strength'

First Maritime Military Drill To Be Held In 2027

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Amid doubts not about Quad's survival but the level at which it will function, the leaders of member countries Australia, India, Japan and the US — PM Anthony Albanese, PM Narendra Modi, PM Sanae Takaichi and President Donald Trump — met in Manila on Tuesday for the first summit of the grouping in two years.

They looked to turn up the heat on China as they expressed grave concern over economic coercion, including through arbitrary export curbs, and committed to working together to ensure open, safe and resilient maritime transit corridors in the Indo-Pacific.

Trump described Quad as very important and special — and Modi as a friend and a great leader — in his opening remarks, as he announced Quad will conduct its first military exercise featuring maritime patrol aircraft in March 2027, working to protect "peace through strength".



The leaders agreed to launch the first-ever Quad business leaders' forum; PM Modi proposed to host the next summit early next year

Calling the meeting an important milestone, Modi said for India, Quad is a trusted partnership. "From maritime security to trusted supply chains, new technologies to disaster response, it has been our endeavour that the Quad provides trusted solutions for the entire Indo-Pacific," he said.

The short joint press release – unlike the expansive 2024 Wilmington Declaration – cut Beijing some slack though by not explicitly mentioning South or East China Sea.

With India unable to host the Quad summit for the past two years, Modi pitched a meeting in early 2027. There was no acknowledgement of the next summit in the joint release.

▶China message, P 12

PM announces int'l initiative to secure seafarers

PM Narendra Modi addressed the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Manila where he announced a Seafarers' Safety Initiative and, highlighting the threat from terrorism, proposed an EAS Cyber Crime conference at the National Forensic Science University to address new-age threats from cross-border crimes.

EAS is an annual Asean-led dialogue forum of 19 Indo-Pacific countries, including US and China. "Our seas are the lifelines of our shared prosperity. Ensuring their security and freedom of navigation is the responsibility of us all... We are launching a Seafarers' Safety Initiative, under which we will enhance cooperation in joint training and emergency response," Modi said.

▶PM on regional peace, P 12

Nepal PM Shah to cut short 1st India visit from 3 days to 25 hrs

New Delhi: Nepal PM **Balendra Shah** has cut his first bilateral visit to India from three days to 25 hours on Nov 22–23, with Kathmandu seeking $2 billion (Rs 18,000 crore) in grants and concessional loans for flood reconstruction and infra projects, besides improved access through Indian airspace for its international airports.



The visit, at PM Modi's invitation, will focus on economic cooperation, connectivity and pending bilateral projects, although differences over Pancheshwar hydro project and the recruitment of Nepalese Gorkhas into the Indian Army under the Agnipath scheme are unlikely to be resolved.

Shah is expected to arrive in Delhi Sunday afternoon and return to Kathmandu Monday evening. He will hold a 30-minute one-on-one meeting with Modi on Nov 23, followed by delegation-level talks, and meet President Droupadi Murmu and EAM S Jaishankar. The former Kathmandu mayor, who became PM in March, has declined an offer to visit Bengaluru or Ahmedabad. A visit to Uttarakhand has also been dropped, restricting his trip only to New Delhi.

Officials did not explain why Shah curtailed his visit. The shortened itinerary marks a departure from previous visits by Nepalese PMs, which typically lasted three to four days and included engagements outside the capital.

"The PM wants the visit to deliver tangible results, particularly on flood reconstruction, hydropower and projects that have remained stalled for years," a source in the Rastriya Swatantra Party told **TOI**.

Nepal's proposed $2 billion package includes $1 billion in loans, $500 million in grants and $500 million for reconstruction following the Aug 26 floods. —**Vishant Agarwala**

Quad sends China message hours before Trump meet with Xi & Putin

Opposes Unilateral Actions Seeking To Change Status Quo

▶Continued from P1

The joint release, however, strongly opposed any "destabilising or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo, including by force or coercion, which escalate tensions and undermine regional peace and stability". The meeting took place hours before Trump's departure for China, where he is set to attend a potentially landmark trilateral summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. Trump said Quad nations had reached several new critical mineral deals to secure their supply chains and ensure that none of them remained vulnerable to coercion by any single foreign supplier.

The joint statement said that P-8 and P-3C patrol aircraft are scheduled to fly in a maritime exercise for the first time in a Quad context, "making our seas safer". The exercise will take place in Guam next year under the Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration, an initiative launched in May this year to enhance information sharing and maritime domain awareness.

The joint statement unequivocally condemned terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism, and committed to strengthening the Quad's ongoing cooperation on counterterrorism.

The statement also said that Quad is working to secure critical supply chains, protecting freedom of navigation and overflight, driving growth through technologies of the future, including investments and deployment of trusted AI, and responding to disasters with life-saving assistance.

AI was a major area of focus, with the leaders backing AI Accelerator, which was announced by the foreign ministers on the margins of the G20 meeting in Atlanta and is intended to coordinate and fund efforts to support trusted AI access and technical assistance across the Indo-Pacific.

Foreign secretary Vikram Misri said the Quad leaders agreed to launch a business forum, bringing together businesses, academics and industries to foster greater business ties across private sectors, including the promotion of commercial deals and partnerships critical to the prosperity of the Indo-Pacific.

The statement recalled that this year marks nearly a decade since the Quad was revived and the 10th anniversary of the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific, first articulated by the late Japanese PM Shinzo Abe in 2016. "Together, we have shown the Quad is a force for good and a partnership of action, committed to peace, stability and prosperity," it said.

A FORCE FOR GOOD

- First maritime patrol aircraft exercise in a Quad context in March next year
- First Quad Business Leaders' Forum to promote commercial deals important for Indo-Pacific prosperity
- Focus on AI Accelerator to support trusted AI access, deployment, and technical assistance across the Indo-Pacific
- Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience to secure and trusted communications infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific
- Quad Cybersecurity Cooperation for an open and secure cyberspace

PM picks up flag from floor

PM Modi Tuesday picked up a marker bearing the Indian flag from the floor as he took his place alongside other Quad leaders at a ceremony in Manila. Though such markers are commonly used to guide delegates at events, this was not the first time Modi picked one up and put it in his pocket, a nod to the Indian tradition in which leaving national symbols lying on the floor is considered disrespectful. TNN

PM discusses trade with leaders of 3 SE Asian nations

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the Philippines President, Ferdinand Marcos, on the margins of the Asean and East Asia Summit, welcoming the increased momentum in bilateral cooperation in areas such as defence and security, space, railway infrastructure, fintech, and trade and investment under the Strategic Partnership established between the two countries last year.

The two leaders also exchanged views on key regional and global issues of mutual interest, according to a ministry of external affairs (MEA) readout.

"The Prime Minister congratulated the Philippines on its successful chairship of ASEAN this year. He appreciated the role of the Philippines as country coordinator for India in the ASEAN since 2024 and its continued support in strengthening ASEAN-India relations," said the ministry.

Modi also met his counterparts from Singapore and Thailand, Lawrence Wong and Anutin Charnvirakul, respectively.

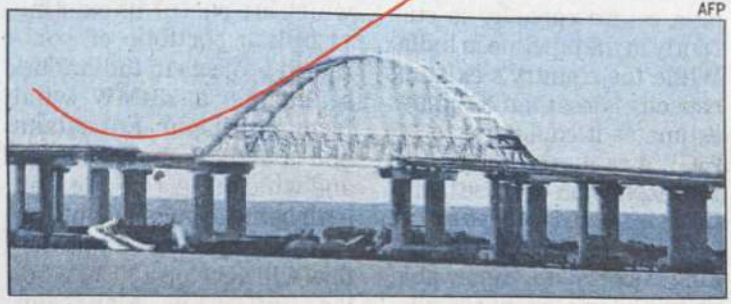
In the meeting with Wong, the leaders discussed the way forward across the eight priority areas: economic cooperation, skills development, digitalisation, sustainability, connectivity, healthcare and medicine, defence and security cooperation, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges. As Singapore prepares to assume Asean chairship, Modi assured Wong of full support from India.

With the Thai PM, Modi discussed trade and investment, defence and security, connectivity, digital technologies and fintech, culture, tourism and people-to-people ties.

"The leaders also underscored the importance of working closely together in regional forums such as BIMSTEC, IORA, Mekong Ganga Cooperation and the ASEAN-led architecture. Both leaders also exchanged views on various regional and global issues of mutual importance and reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening their partnership," said the ministry. TNN

Ukrainian drones and missile hit bridge linking Russia with Crimea

Kyiv: Symbol Of Occupation Cracks



AFP

A videograb shows the damaged Kerch bridge. Ukraine said an arch and a span of the bridge's road section collapsed, severing the road link

Kyiv: Ukrainian drones and missiles struck a vital bridge linking Russia to the occupied Crimean Peninsula, President Zelensky said Tuesday, calling it an "unprecedented" operation as Russia reported that its forces downed a record number of Ukrainian drones for the second straight day.

Zelensky portrayed the operation on the Kerch Bridge as a masterstroke. The attack was the culmination of weeks of preparatory strikes over seven stages of the operation, Zelensky said on social media. Ukrainian forces knocked out defence systems, radars, electronic warfare equipment and other designated targets before launching Monday night's final attack, he said. Domestically developed long-range drones struck the bridge's road section during the night while Ukraine's Neptune missiles and other drones aimed at the rail section, he said. Flamingo precision-guided missiles delivered the final blow, he said. Zelensky didn't detail the damage, but the Ukrainian General Staff said that an arch and a span of the bridge's road section collapsed, severing the road link, while the railway line was still standing but its arch was damaged.

Russia's Investigative Committee said that the bridge was attacked but didn't elaborate. The Kerch Bridge is a crucial link in moving military and civilian supplies from Russia to Crimea and to support troops on the front line. The construction of the bridge, a symbol of Russia's annexation of the peninsula in 2014, was inflammatory to Ukrainians. "The symbol of the occupation has cracked," the Ukrainian General Staff said.

The Russian-installed governor of Crimea, Sergei Aksyonov, said traffic across the bridge was halted but rail traffic was restored by Tuesday afternoon. He didn't mention any damage. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that "there is no doubt that the bridge will be restored and will be even better than it was before."

Moscow's forces, meanwhile, fired missiles and drones at Kyiv, hitting two of Ukrainian capital's main bridges and killing at least two people. AP