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FROM COAL TO CLEAN: INDIA'S LEGAL ENERGY TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT

Since independence, India's electricity generation profile has been dominated by coal. However, since last two-decades, India energy landscape is demonstrating a broad shift reflected by growing contribution of non-renewable energy sources in India's energy portfolio. Instead of putting a complete ban on coal, this shift is attributed to a layered accumulation of policies, regulatory frameworks and statutes. The legal architecture and gradual policy norms paved way for India's clean energy path. This article traces India's energy law transition from coal to clean. It examines the legal and regulatory architecture which governs India's initiative of coal to clean energy to determine the adequacy and efficiency of existing law to deliver a transition that is rapid but is required to be equitable. As coal still remains the backbone of India's power system, the changing energy landscape with adoption of decentralized energy sources the transition requires enhanced judicial and legislative measures.

THE COAL REALITY AND INDIA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY PUSH

India's legal and institutional frameworks including nationalized policy frameworks such as The Coking Coal Mines (Nationalization) Act, 1972 [1]and the Coal Mines Nationalization Act, 1973[2] consolidated the monopoly of coal in India's power generation. As far as India's legal energy position is concerned, coal has served as bridge to India's clean energy transition not a

[1] Coking Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act 1972 (No 64 of 1972) (India Code) https://bcclweb.in/RTI/COKING%20&%20NONCOKING%20COAL%20MINES%20NATIONALIZATIONACT1973.pdf accessed 3 October 2026.

[2] Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act 1973 (No 26 of 1973) (India Code) https://www.bcclweb.in/RTI/COAL%20MINES(NATIONALIZATION%20ACT)1973.pdf accessed 3 October 2026.

destination. According to Pankaj Agarwal, Secretary of Power Ministry, there are no present plans to add coal power generation capacity beyond 2035 as it aims to generate 307 gigawatts by 2035. On the other hand, as per reports published by Ministry of New and Renewable Energy on August 31, 2026, India has installed 168.040.05 megawatts of solar energy, 58520.32 MW of wind energy and 304334.37 MW of total non-fossil fuel sources in its cumulative installed capacity.[3] India has achieved targets to reduce greenhouse emissions and clean energy push ahead of its prescribed timelines, achieving 52.57% of installed power generation capacity in February this year which is five years ahead of its goal.[4]

The most notable foundation of legislative framework including The electricity Act, 2003[5] and The Draft Electricity Amendment Bill, 2025[6] specified the obligations regarding enforcement laws aligning with legal reforms in India's renewable energy sector. Instead of passing legislation of renewable targets through parliament, the frameworks of policy instruments and regulation laws has been a distinctive characteristic of India's structural shift from hydrocarbons to renewable energy transition.

At its top sits the Union Cabinet approval of Nationally Determined Contribution (2031-2035), in March 2026 with India's commitment to reduce 47% of emissions intensity of GDP by 2035. It also plans to achieve 60 percent total installed capacity of electric power generation capacity from non-fossil fuel sources.[7] These goals and commitments form a crucial part of India's Net Zero commitment by 2070.

[3] 'India Has No Immediate Plans to Add Coal Power Capacity' (Reuters, 7 December 2025) https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/india-has-no-immediate-plans-add-coal-power-capacity-beyond-2035-official-says-2025-12-07/ accessed 3 October 2026.

[4] Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India, 'Physical Progress' https://mnre.gov.in/en/physical-progress/ accessed 4 October 2026.

[5] 'Cabinet Approves India's Nationally Determined Contribution (2031-2035) to be Communicated to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change' (Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 25 March 2026) https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2245209&reg=3&lang=1 accessed 4 October 2026.

[6] Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (Renewable Purchase Obligation and Renewable Energy Certificate Framework Implementation) Regulations 2025, No F.17(332)/DERC/Engg./2024-25/8107 (10 October 2025) https://www.derc.gov.in/sites/default/files/DERC_RPO_REC_Regulation_2025.pdf accessed 4 October 2026.

[7] Ministry of Power, Government of India, 'Electricity Amendment Bill' (Press Release, 29 January 2026) https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2220083&reg=6&lang=1 accessed 4 October 2026.

Along with legal frameworks, market based turn in India's legal development through Amendments in 2022 to Energy Conservation Act, 2001[8] translated into establishment of carbon pricing mechanism and Carbon Credit Trading Scheme. These legal schemes and regulatory amendments aiming at India's energy conservation and efficiency provided the energy law of economic instruments. Moreover, India's market based legal mechanism ensures the creation of parallel markets consisting of both hydrocarbons and renewable energy sources, while keeping climate commitments and commercial values remain intact. Climate action is not just a policy preference but a constitutional interest that weighs heavily in the eyes of Indian judiciary reflecting in adoption of legal frameworks aimed at energy conservation.

CHALLENGES AND WAY AHEAD

The energy transition is legislated as a result of India's climate commitments. From National Action Plan on Climate Change, 2008 served as the foundation of India's domestic policy to more recent and revised targets at COP26 and Nationally Determined Contribution in 2026, there are several challenges and structural tension that will define the next decade. The coal expansion is evident in contribution of fossil fuels in India's energy portfolio. The country stills relies on hydrocarbons leading to signing of long term contracts the meet demand and energy requirements. There is a need for just transition in India's energy sector with transparency in funds and financing. The grid integration and battery storage pose major challenges in India's transition towards clean energy.

CONCLUSION

India's legal transition from coal to clean is a multi-faceted transformation relying on statutory laws and policy frameworks along with goals aimed at energy conservation and efficiency in power generation. The government has set ambitious targets with the help of legal and policy framework to ensure a long term legal structure for India's energy transition. A layered approach ensures market based efficiency instruments, policy driven missions and legal mechanisms to match with international norms and regulations. As India's climate commitments are revised and grow bigger as per current installation capacity and future energy requirements, the next legal challenge may not be focussed on building new policy goals and

[8] PRS Legislative Research, 'The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2022' (Legislative Brief) https://prsindia.org/billtrack/prs-products/prs-legislative-brief-4002 accessed 5 October 2026.

regulations in renewable energy sector but consolidating the patchwork that already exists into a framework to carry out the transition through to the year 2070.