

Obama to launch clean energy initiative in India

November 5 2010, by Shaun Tandon



The illuminated billboard welcoming US President Barack Obama is seen in Mumbai on November 4. Obama and India are expected to launch a joint initiative on clean energy, eyeing economic opportunities in an area that has long divided the two countries.

US President Barack Obama and India are expected to launch a joint initiative on clean energy, eyeing economic opportunities in an area that has long divided the two countries.

Obama arrives Saturday on his first presidential visit to India, where many analysts say that relations with the United States have lost momentum after warming rapidly over the past decade.

The United States and India will announce during Obama's trip the creation of a center for joint cooperation on developing [clean energy](#), including solar power and biofuels, according to two people familiar

with the plan.

Both nations and the private sector will fund the center, they said. The United States is also expected to announce help for India to map out shale reserves, the deep-underground gas source that has triggered a boom in North America.

The United States and India, whose relations were strained during the Cold War, have increasingly identified common interests on global issues. But points of friction remain.

India has quietly voiced unease about the Obama administration's support for US war partner Pakistan, particularly military assistance.

In slow-moving negotiations on a [climate treaty](#) to succeed the [Kyoto Protocol](#), the United States and India have found themselves on opposite sides with emerging economies pressing for greater commitments by wealthy nations.

Despite Obama's appeals, the US Congress has resisted imposing nationwide restrictions on carbon blamed for global warming. The new Congress elected Tuesday will be even more skeptical, with many in the triumphant Republican Party questioning the economic cost and the science behind climate action.

Rajendra Pachauri, the Indian scientist who heads the UN-backed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, acknowledged the political obstacles but pointed to climate action at the local level, particularly California.



Indian pedestrians walk on a promenade near the Arabian Sea front in Mumbai, as a huge billboard welcoming US President Barack Obama is seen in the background. Obama and India are expected to launch a joint initiative on clean energy, eyeing economic opportunities in an area that has long divided the two countries.

The United States and India can find practical ways to cooperate on the climate that would help both nations increase energy independence and create jobs, Pachauri said.

"I believe, for a variety of reasons, there is much that we can do together and I don't think one needs to wait for legislation to start acting in the right direction," Pachauri said.

The Obama administration has also sought cooperation on climate change with China, which has surpassed the United States as the top carbon emitter and is a much larger polluter than India.

During his maiden visit to China last year, Obama agreed with President

Hu Jintao to set up a joint 150-million-dollar research center to develop cleaner forms of energy -- particularly in the politically sensitive area of coal.

Ron Somers, president of the US-India Business Council, said that India enjoyed a 300-year supply of coal but largely of a highly pollutant quality.

"So the imperative is to develop clean coal technologies, to make the energy of that coal in the cleanest manner possible to reduce India's carbon footprint," Somers said.

Somers is organizing what he described as the largest-ever US business mission overseas, with some 240 US companies taking part in a commercial summit in Mumbai alongside Obama.

Obama, slapped with the election defeat, is expected to stress jobs while visiting India, which is both a growing investor in the [United States](#) and consumer of US goods.

"High-end US manufactured goods are still very popular around the world and markets like India present an important opportunity," Somers said.

A study by the World Resources Institute recently estimated a market of more than two billion dollars a year for providing renewable energy to Indians who now lack reliable access to power grids.

In another sector, US companies are seeking billions of dollars worth in military sales. India has relaxed rules on foreign investment in defense and is hoping Obama will ease restrictions on high-technology exports.

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