United Nation’s COP 26 climate change summit postponed till 2021

Part of: GS Prelims and GS-III- S&T

NOTE: Please refer PT KUNJI SECTION for REVISE ENVIRONMENT IN 45 MINUTES BOOKLET.

The 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was planned to take place from 9-19 November 2020, in Glasgow, Scotland in the United Kingdom (UK) has been postponed to 2021 due to COVID-19. The date and location for the same is unspecified. Pre-COP and ‘Youth for the Climate’ event were also postponed supposed to be held in Italy.

- This decision has been taken by the COP Bureau of the UNFCCC after discussion with the UK and Italian partners.
- It should be noted that around 30,000 people, including 200 world leaders, had been due to attend the 10-day conference for crucial talks regarding rising global temperatures. Currently, the focus of countries is on saving lives and fighting COVID-19.

About UNFCCC:

Establishment – 1992

Headquarter – Bonn, Germany

Executive Secretary – Patricia Espinosa

About UNFCCC

- The UNFCCC, signed in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development also known as the Earth Summit, the Rio Summit or the Rio Conference
- The UNFCCC entered into force on March 21, 1994, and has been ratified by 197 countries.

The WMO and UNEP established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, to assess the magnitude and timing of changes, estimate their impacts, present strategies for how to respond and to provide an authoritative source of up-to-date interdisciplinary knowledge on climate change.

Objective

- According to Article 2, the Convention’s ultimate objective is “to achieve, stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”.
- This objective is qualified in that it “should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is
not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner”.

Institutional Arrangements

- **The Conference of the Parties (COP)**
  - Article 7.2 defines the COP as the “supreme body” of the Convention, as it is its highest decision-making authority. The climate change process revolves around the annual sessions of the COP.

- **COP President and Bureau**
  - The office of the COP President normally rotates among the five United Nations regional groups. The President is usually the environment minister of his or her home country. S/he is elected by acclamation immediately after the opening of a COP session. Their role is to facilitate the work of the COP and promote agreements among Parties.
  - The work of the COP and each subsidiary body is guided by an elected Bureau. To ensure continuity, it serves not only during sessions, but between sessions as well.

- **Subsidiary Bodies (SBs)**
  - The Convention establishes two permanent subsidiary bodies (SBs), namely the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), by Article 9, and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), by Article 10. These bodies advise the COP.
  - The SBSTA’s task is to provide the COP “with timely advice on scientific and technological matters relating to the Convention”.
  - The SBI’s task is to assist the COP “in the assessment and review of the effective implementation of the Convention”

- **The Secretariat**
  - The secretariat, also known as the Climate Change Secretariat, services the COP, the SBs, the Bureau and other bodies established by the COP.

- **Other Bodies**
  - Other bodies have been set up by the COP to undertake specific tasks. These bodies report back to the COP when they complete their work
  - COP 1 established two ad hoc groups to conduct negotiations on specific issues.
  - COP 11 established the “Dialogue” to exchange experiences and analyse strategic approaches for long-term cooperative action to address climate change.

**Timeline of Important Events**

1979 First World Climate Conference (WCC)

1988 IPCC established

1990 In November IPCC and second WCC call for global treaty on climate change and in December UN General Assembly Negotiations on a Framework Convention Begin.


1994 UNFCCC enters into force
1995 COP 1 (Berlin, Germany)

1996 August: The UNFCCC secretariat relocates from Geneva to its current home in Bonn (Germany), paving the way for the city to become an international sustainability hub and home to 18 UN organizations.

1997 COP 3 (Kyoto, Japan): Kyoto Protocol adopted - The Protocol legally binds developed countries to emission reduction targets.

1998 Buenos Aires Plan of Action

2001 COP 6-2 (second part of 6th COP): The COP 6-2 took place from 16 to 27 July 2001 in Bonn, Germany. A major breakthrough is achieved at the second part of the sixth Conference of the Parties meeting in Bonn, with governments reaching a broad political agreement on the operational rulebook for the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

2001 COP 7 (Marrakesh, Morocco): Resulted in the Marrakesh Accords, setting the stage for ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. This formalized the agreement on operational rules for International Emissions Trading, the Clean Development Mechanism and Joint Implementation along with a compliance regime and accounting procedures.

2002 COP 8 (New Delhi, India) Delhi Declaration: The Delhi Declaration focuses on the development needs of the poorest countries and the need for technology transfer for mitigating climate change.

2005 (February 16): Entry of Kyoto Protocol into force with the Russian Federation ratification to the Kyoto Protocol, sealing its entry into force.

2005 COP11/CMP1 (December): The first Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (MOP 1) takes place in Montreal.

2006 In January the Clean Development Mechanism, a key mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol, opens for business. The CDM is one of the Flexible Mechanisms defined in the Kyoto Protocol that provides for emissions reduction projects which generate Certified Emission Reduction units (CERs) which may be traded in emissions trading schemes.

2007 COP13: Parties agreed on the Bali Road Map and Bali action plan, which charted the way towards a post-2012 outcome. The Plan has five main categories: shared vision, mitigation, adaptation, technology and financing.

2008 COP 14, Poznan (Poland): The launch of the Adaptation Fund under the Kyoto Protocol and The Poznan Strategic Programme on Technology Transfer.


2010 COP 16 (Cancun): Resulted in the Cancun Agreements, a comprehensive package by governments to assist developing nations in dealing with climate change. The Green Climate Fund, the Technology Mechanism and the Cancun Adaptation Framework are established.
2011 COP 17 (Durban): Governments commit to a new universal climate change agreement by 2015 for the period beyond 2020. (Resulted in the Paris Agreement of 2015)

2012 COP18/CMP8 (Doha): The Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol is adopted. COP18 also launched a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

2013 COP19/CMP9 (Warsaw) Key decisions adopted include: Further advancing the Green Climate Fund and Long-Term Finance, the Warsaw Framework for REDD Plus and the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage.

2015 COP 21 (Paris): Paris Agreement adopted. It aims: To keep global temperatures "well below" 2.0C (3.6F) above pre-industrial times and "endeavor to limit" them even more, to 1.5C. Rich countries should help poorer nations by providing "climate finance" to adapt to climate change and switch to renewable energy. The agreement requires rich nations to maintain a $100bn a year funding pledge beyond 2020.

2016 COP22 (Marrakech): A crucial outcome of the Marrakech climate conference was, to move forward on writing the rule book of the Paris Agreement. Launched the Marrakech Partnership for Climate Action.

2017 COP23, Bonn (Germany): Countries continued to negotiate the finer details of how the agreement will work from 2020 onwards. First set of negotiations since the US, under the presidency of Donald Trump, announced its intention earlier this year to withdraw from the Paris deal. It was the first COP to be hosted by a small-island developing state with Fiji taking up the presidency, even though it was being held in Bonn.

2018 COP 24, Katowice (Poland): Poland held the Presidency of the Climate Convention for the third time. COP24 is the informal name for the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Important Outcome of Summit

- **Paris Rulebook:** The COP-24 finalized a “rulebook” to operationalise 2015 Paris Agreement.
  - The rulebook set out how countries will provide information about their **Nationally Determined Contributions** describing their domestic climate actions, mitigation and adaptation measures.
  - The rulebook covers areas such as how countries should report their greenhouse gas emissions, contributions to climate finance, what rules should apply to voluntary market mechanisms, such as carbon trading etc.
  - The rulebook has addressed some concerns about the opaqueness of **climate financing**, such as, developed nations will have to provide hard data on the sources of future financial flows.
    - **Climate finance** refers to local, national or transnational financing—drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing.
    - It seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change.
    - The UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement call for financial assistance from developed countries to developing and less developed countries in
accordance with the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities”.

- Under Paris Agreement, developed countries have committed to provide $100 billion annually from 2020 for dealing with climate change.
  - The rulebook describes which loans, concessions and grants can be classified as Climate finance, how they should be accounted for, and the kind of information about them needed to be submitted.
  - The modalities and procedures for Monitoring and Progress Report System proposal (MPR) to (INDC) were also discussed.

Issues in Conference

- **Disagreement on Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report**: The 1.5°C Report, produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in October 2018, was not acknowledged as an evidence-based cause for alarm by the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Russia.

- **No ambitious action promised**: The absence of any indication towards increasing “ambition” of climate actions, so as to rein in temperature rise at 1.5°C at a faster pace, was one major disappointment of the Katowice conference.

- **Issue of Equity**: Provisions did not reflect the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities. Poorer nations vulnerable to climate change also wanted more clarity on how an already agreed $100 billion a year of climate finance by 2020 will be provided.
  - The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities holds that although all countries are responsible for the development of global society, each has a different set of capabilities that they can contribute to this project.
  - It recognizes the historical correlation between higher levels of development and a greater contribution to the degradation of global environmental resources by developed countries and enables the sharing of responsibility accordingly.

- **Climate Finance**: No roadmap adopted for the mobilisation of funds till 2020, no specific process has been initiated for fixing the long-term goals of finance by 2025, which is a legal mandate of the Paris Agreement.
  - No clear guarantees could be obtained from the developed countries to even report their financial commitments through an international process.
  - The language under the provision related to climate financing is ambiguous allowing countries to report the value of loans (which are to be repaid to lenders) as climate finance, rather than only the grant portion of the total.

- **Market Mechanism**: The conference could not reach a consensus on voluntary market mechanisms. Article 6 of the Paris Agreement talks about setting up a market mechanism for trading of carbon emissions. An emissions trading system already exists under the Kyoto Protocol, though it has become ineffective over the last few years and is meant to end with the end of Kyoto Protocol in 2020.
  - Market-based mechanisms provide flexible instruments reducing the costs of meeting emissions targets. Emissions trading systems, Joint Implementation (JI) mechanism and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) established under the Kyoto Protocol are market-based mechanisms.
  - CDM allows a developed country with an emission-reduction commitment under the Kyoto Protocol to implement an emission-reduction project in any of those developing countries Certified Emission Reduction (CER) credits, each equivalent to one tonne of CO2.
The countries which are unable to reduce their emissions in their business in a cost-effective manner in their country, they can invest in clean projects in developing countries. (Joint Implementation).

- **Carbon Credits**: Developing countries like China, India, and Brazil argued that their accumulated unused carbon credits should be considered valid in the new market mechanism.
  - In the recent years, as several countries quit Kyoto Protocol, and no country was feeling compelled to meet its 2020 emission reduction targets, there has been virtually no demand for carbon credits. As a result, developing countries like China, India and Brazil have accumulated huge amounts of unused carbon credits.
  - The developed countries questioned the authenticity of the unused carbon credits, pointing to weak verification mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol. The discussion over carbon markets is deferred to the next year.

**Note**: **Carbon Credit** - A carbon credit is a permit or certificate allowing the holder to emit carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases. Carbon trading involves trading of carbon one of the market-based mechanisms set up under Kyoto Protocol.

**COP25**: The prime objective of the conference is to complete the rule-book to the 2015 Paris Agreement that will become effective in 2020 to replace the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (comes to an end in 2020).

The issues like the creation of new carbon markets, emission reduction targets, country’s individual targets, etc. remained unresolved during COP24 at Katowice (Poland) 2019. Thus the rulebook under the Paris Agreement could not be finalized.

- The summit will also discuss the functioning of international emissions trading systems, compensation for poor countries to deal with rising sea levels and other consequences of climate change.
- It will consider the Annual Emissions Gap Report, produced by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and a series of reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
  - Both the reports summarise that the goal of keeping average temperatures within 1.5°C from pre-industrial times is “on the brink of becoming impossible.” As the overall emissions are still increasing worldwide.
- The processes and methods of reporting information about climate change would be fixed during the summit. Specifically, the developing countries will try to ensure that there are greater appreciation and recognition of the issue of loss and damage due to climate change.
  - There is a demand to institute a mechanism to compensate countries that suffer major losses due to climate change-induced events like cyclones or floods.
- It puts into efforts for committing to a long-term action plan to fight climate change.
  - So far only 71 countries, most of them small emitters, have committed themselves to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

**India’s Agenda**

- India is unlikely to announce any enhanced targets during the summit.
- India’s current efforts are already much more compared to even rich and developed countries. Thus, India will reiterate its stand for "Common but Differentiated
Responsibilities”.

- Developed countries are major contributors to climate change and they are doing proportionately less, especially when it comes to providing finance and technology to the less developed world.

Shortcomings

- **Non-inclusive**: Most scientists agree the most dangerous environmental air pollutants today are microscopic particulates that come from car engines and combustion-based power plants, but these pollutants are largely ignored by the Kyoto Protocol.
- **Slow progress**: It took a long time for COP to bring Russia to agree into participating in the Kyoto Protocol. (until 2005)
- **UNFCCC failed to persuade USA to ratify the Kyoto protocol thereby keeping one of the largest emitter of greenhouse gases away from commitments.**
- **Unsustainable targets**: The world reached at almost 1 degree Celsius warming post industrialization and the Paris contributions are not enough to maintain 2 degree Celsius levels.
- **Unsatisfactory Response**: Many countries argued for a tougher target of 1.5C - including leaders of low-lying countries that face unsustainable sea levels rises in a warming world.
- **Financial Constraints**: The agreement requires rich nations to maintain a $100bn a year funding pledge beyond 2020, which is not enough as highlighted by several pacific island countries.
- **Non-binding agreement**: The US withdrawal from the 2015 Paris climate agreement, citing, that the deal punished" the US and would cost millions of American jobs”, has created new barriers and more pressure on rest of the nations in achieving the targets of Paris agreement.
  - As part of the US withdrawal, USA has stopped the payment of the extra $2bn that had been promised in to the Green Climate Fund.
- **No enforcement mechanism**: Under the Paris agreement, each country determines, plans, and reports its own efforts to mitigate global warming. The only penalty for non-compliance is a so-called “name and shame” — or “name and encourage” — system whereby countries that fall out of compliance are called out and encouraged to improve.

Achievements

- Kyoto protocol only required wealthy nations to cut emissions, which was a bone of contention; however this anomaly was corrected with the signing of Paris agreement in 2015.
- **UNFCCC initiatives helped create Public awareness regarding climate change, which is much higher today than in the late 90s.**
- Although climate science in the late 90s was certainly strong enough—to negotiate an international treaty, it is hard to deny that the scientific understanding of the climate crisis has improved considerably over the past two decades in which UNFCCC played a significant role.
- **UNFCCC has enabled planning and implementation of concrete adaptation activities under the National Adaptations Programme of Action (NAPAs) and the Nairobi work programme.**
- **UNFCCC helped create innovative ideas in mitigating climate change like the Clean Development mechanism (CDM) under which developing country’s projects that reduce**
emissions earn credits that can be sold to countries or companies with a commitment to reduce emissions.

- Since the establishment of UNFCCC national governments have encouraged and increased cooperation on the development and transfer of technology.
- UNFCCC efforts support the developing countries in combating climate change by providing a platform for finance, technology transfers, discussions, global partnerships, etc.

👍 Jai Hind Jai Bharat