

International Relations This Week - Glasgow Summit and Other Issues

EPISODE – 48

International relations is a very important segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#). In this series, we present an analysis of the most important international issues and developments that occurred over the past week relevant for the IAS exam. In this article, you can learn more about the Glasgow Climate Change Summit and other developments.

VIDEO LINK: https://youtu.be/ABG_09quFFE

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1. Glasgow Summit

Context: Recently, the 26th Conference of the UNFCCC was held at Glasgow.

UNFCCC and COP

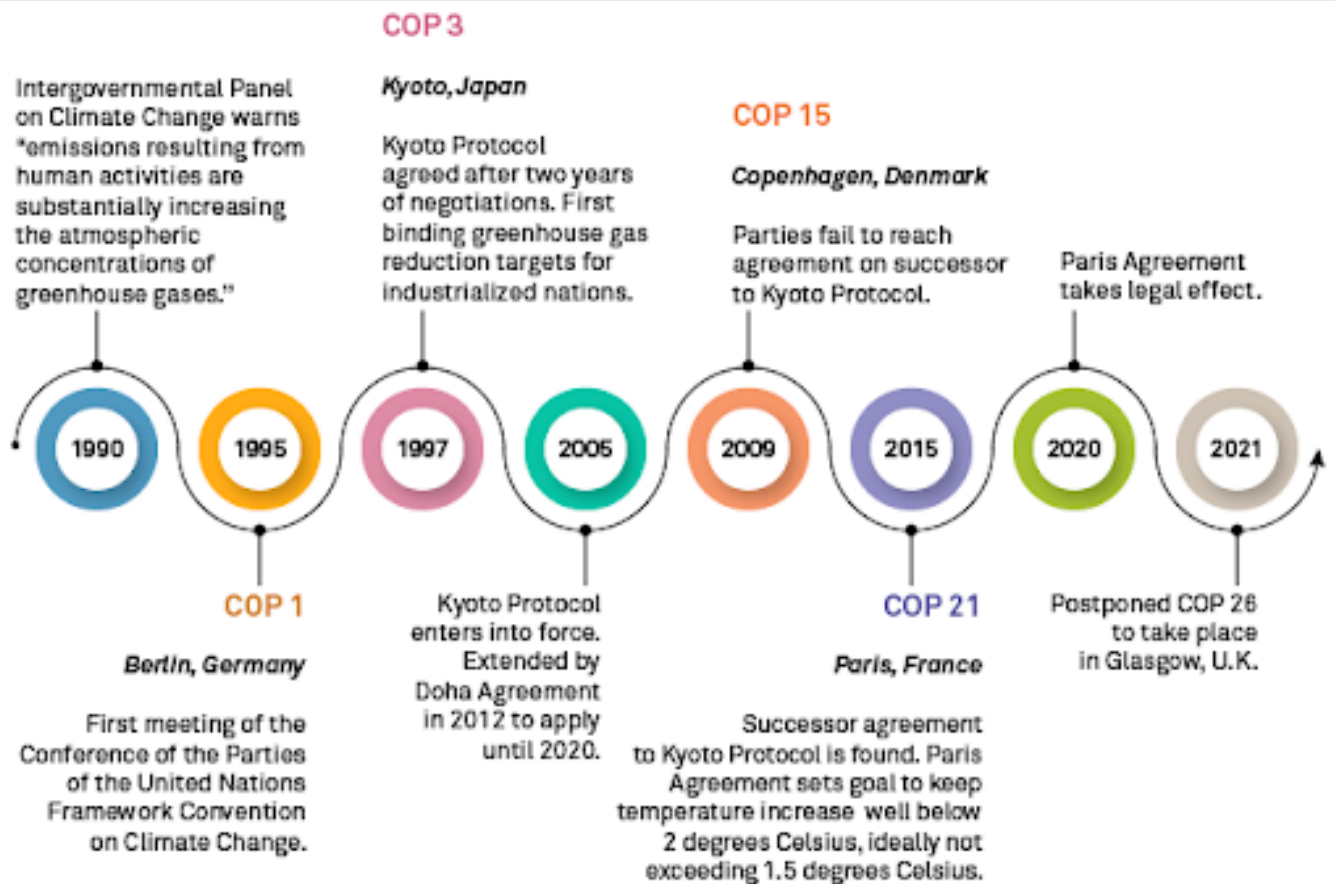
What is UNFCCC?

- The UNFCCC is the acronym for the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#).
- The UNFCCC entered into force on March 21, 1994.
- Parties to the Convention are the 197 nations that have ratified the Convention.
- The UNFCCC is a "Rio Convention," one of two that were signed during the 1992 "Rio Earth Summit."
- The UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention to Combat Desertification are its sister Rio Conventions.

What is COP?

- COP stands for "Conference of the Parties".
- It is attended by countries that have signed the UNFCCC.
- The numbered COP gatherings are hosted by a different country each year, with the very first – COP1 – held in Berlin in 1995.

COP: A timeline



As of Oct. 11 2021.
COP = Conference of the Parties/United Nations Climate Change Conference
Credit: Arleigh Andes
Sources: UK Parliament Commons Library; S&P Global Market Intelligence

Image Source: UK Parliament Commons Library

Glasgow Summit (COP 26)

What is the COP26?

- COP26 is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 26th annual climate meeting.
- After being postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this summit was held in 2021 in Glasgow, Scotland.

Read more about the [COP26](#) in the link.

The Four Goals of COP26

- To form more ambitious emission reduction targets,
- To increase support for nations struggling to adapt to climate change disruptions,
- To secure finance for developing nations, and
- To work together to make the negotiations in Glasgow a success.

Key Agreements from Glasgow Summit COP26

Emissions:	• It was agreed that countries will meet next year to pledge further cuts to emissions of carbon dioxide (CO ₂) - a greenhouse gas which causes climate change.
Coal:	• For the first time at a COP conference, there was an explicit plan to reduce use of coal - which is responsible for 40% of annual CO ₂ emissions.
US-China Agreement:	• US and China, pledged to cooperate more over the next decade in areas including methane emissions and the switch to clean energy.
Methane:	• A scheme to cut 30% of methane emissions by 2030 was agreed by more than 100 countries.
Trees:	• Leaders from more than 100 countries - with about 85% of the world's forests - promised to stop deforestation by 2030.

Critical Evaluation of the Glasgow Summit

Positive Aspects

1. **Cutting carbon:** Leaders from the United States, China, and the European Union, among others, stated goals to become carbon-neutral or 'net zero'. The Glasgow agreement asks for the elimination of coal exploration and production, as well as fossil fuel subsidies.
2. **Rallying support for renewables:** The summit has formally recognised one of the greatest technology transfer problems in history: helping poor nations to skip fossil fuels and go directly to renewable energy sources.
3. **Multinational efforts:** The major commitments made by large economic powers such as the UK, the European Union, China and the US include a global clean-coal initiative, scores of major businesses to end all investments in new coal power generation domestically and

internationally, and a pledge by more than 100 countries to cut methane emissions by 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030.

4. **Aid to developing countries:** The agreement promised a considerable increase in funding to assist impoverished nations in dealing with the consequences of climate change and making the transition to sustainable energy.
5. **Fossil fuel subsidies:** World leaders agreed to phase-out subsidies that artificially lower the price of coal, oil, or natural gas. However, no firm dates have been set.
6. **Increased disaster aid:** One of the biggest fights at the summit revolved around whether the world's wealthiest nations should compensate poorer nations for the damage caused by rising temperatures.
7. **Focus on clean technology:** Financial organisations controlling \$130tn agreed to back "clean" technology, such as renewable energy, and direct finance away from fossil fuel-burning industries.
8. **ISA and UNFCCC MoU:** The India-led [International Solar Alliance \(ISA\)](#) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) signed a memorandum of understanding at the COP26 climate summit to collaborate and support countries in the implementation of ambitious national climate action in line with global efforts.

What are the Reasons behind the Failures of the Glasgow Summit?

Significant Gap Exists Between Nations' Actions: Pledged reductions and other unfulfilled commitments by nations in an NDC are insignificant and will only reduce emissions by 7.5% by 2030 which is far short of the 55% cut needed to meet the 1.5-degree goal.

Climate Finance: The biggest issue at COP26 is the question of who will provide the promised \$100 billion in annual climate finance. The Glasgow summit failed to find out how much money should be committed. Also, the issue of who should pay has strengthened.

Cutting Coal Usage: The Glasgow Pact was watered down at the last minute by reducing the "phase out" of unabated coal, to "phase down". Despite a series of multilateral agreements, an overall consensus on reducing carbon emissions and ensuring climate finance have hit a dead end.

Ambiguity Over Cuts: How much each nation needs to cut remains unresolved. Rich countries are disproportionately responsible for global warming, but some leaders have insisted that it's the poorer nations who need to accelerate their shift away from fossil fuels.

Logistics Failure: Logistical difficulties, the exclusion of people with disabilities and a lack of attendees from the Global South are just some of the criticisms levelled at the event organizers. Companies that pumped up millions of pounds to sponsor the Cop26 climate summit have condemned it as "mismanaged". The sponsors have raised formal complaints blaming "very inexperienced" civil servants for delayed decisions, poor communication.

Failures of Major Countries:

- China's President was widely criticized for failing to attend the summit given that China is responsible for nearly 30% of the world's carbon emissions.
- China, Australia and Russia have either failed to set new targets for cutting carbon emissions this decade or announced ones that scientists consider weak.
- India pledged to significantly increase renewable energy, but coal would remain a large part of its energy mix in the coming decade.
- Brazil announced it would cut emissions by 50 percent by 2030, but many observers remain sceptical that Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, will keep that pledge.

Gender and Generation Gap: There was a clear gender and generation gap. Those with the power to make decisions about how much the world warms were mostly old and male. Those who were most fiercely protesting the pace of action were mostly young and female.

Resentments and Protests against the Summit: Climate activists marched across Glasgow, the venue of the COP26 summit, urging world leaders to do more to tackle the climate crisis. The most recognisable climate activist, Greta Thunberg, said that the COP26 climate summit had been a "failure".

Way Forward

1. Developing nations should push rich nations to ramp up climate change funding through the end of the decade and to help with the losses and damages that are already occurring.
2. The financial commitments should be enhanced to shift away from fossil fuels. This will enable countries to meaningfully commit to the global environmental movement known as a **Green New Deal**.
3. A complete societal transformation is needed that decarbonises the economy with a focus on green jobs and global climate justice.
4. G-20 nations should take the responsibility to translate announcements into actual and lasting policies as [G-20](#) contributes nearly 80% of global emissions.
5. National governments should adopt radical language, such as talk of a **Green Industrial Revolution**, to check the policies.
6. The climate change action plan which focuses on mitigation, adaptation, and addressing irreversible losses needs to be integrated into national policies.
7. One of the biggest factors driving global warming and climate change is unchecked emissions. Countries should prioritise cutting [greenhouse gas](#) emissions to limit global warming.
8. Fighting climate change will have to be a collective effort of all countries, however, it will be a financial burden for middle and low-income countries. To tackle this, developed countries should agree to raise more funds.

Additional Information:

What is the 1.5 Degrees Celsius Target?

There is a need to limit global temperature rise to under 1.5 degrees Celsius, or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit, compared with levels before the Industrial Revolution. That's the threshold beyond which scientists say the dangers of global warming grow immensely. This threshold was decided at the [Paris Agreement](#) in 2015.

What is Net Zero?

Net zero refers to a state in which the greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere are balanced by removal out of the atmosphere. The Paris Agreement underlines the need for net zero, requiring states to 'achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century'.

2. CBD; Kunming Summit: COP-15

Context:

Recently, the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD COP-15) was held at Kunming, China.

Significance of COP-15 Kunming Summit

- COP-15 Kunming Summit developed a new framework for biodiversity for the post-2020 period.
- The new global framework for biodiversity will define the most important guidelines for human interaction with nature.
- A particular point of focus for this support is the drafting and implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs).
- The draft of the new agreement proposes 21 targets for 2030 including:
 - At least 30% of the land and seas should be conserved through effective, equitably managed measures;
 - There should be a 50% or greater reduction in the rate of introduction of invasive alien species, with controls to eliminate or reduce their impacts;
 - Nutrients lost to the environment should be cut by at least half;
 - Reduce pesticide use by at least two thirds;
 - Eliminate the discharge of plastic waste;
 - Nature's contribution to global efforts to cut greenhouse gases should be increased;
 - Redirect or eliminate incentives harmful to biodiversity by at least \$50b a year;

- An increase in the funding for the conservation of nature to at least \$200b a year.

Drawbacks:

- The nations of the world failed to fully meet any of the 20 targets which included protecting coral reefs and tackling pollution.
- Another key question that will need resolving in the negotiations is termed the digital sequence of information on genetic resources.
- This is a highly contentious issue and refers to digital biological data and the sharing of benefits between countries that might arise from the use of these resources.
- The digital sequence of information and access and benefit-sharing is one of those terms that's quite complicated.

3. ASEAN Summit

- Recently, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)) conducted its 38th and 39th summits under the chairmanship of Brunei via virtual conference.
 - Myanmar skipped the summit in protest after the ASEAN shut out its top general from its meetings.
 - The ASEAN summits, with the theme "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper," discussed a number of issues, including further strengthening the resilience of the ASEAN Community towards regional recovery.
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