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Bonn climate meet takeaways

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Why in News:

The two-week mid-year UN climate talks held in Germany's Bonn ended on Thursday without finding a resolution to the dispute between developed and developing countries over finance.

A Brief about the meeting

These mid-year talks set the stage for political discussions at the annual Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change later in the year.

Due to a stalemate on the issues of finance and mitigation, the governments could agree on the meeting's agenda only on the second-to-last day of the conference.

Limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees

At the Paris climate talks in 2015, countries agreed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius as compared to the pre-industrial levels to avoid extreme, destructive and likely irreversible effects of climate change.

The Earth's global surface temperature has risen by around 1.15 degrees Celsius and the CO₂ spewed into the atmosphere since the start of the industrial revolution is closely tied to it. In the business-as-usual scenario, the world is heading for a temperature rise of around 3 degrees Celsius by the end of the century.

Climate science says the world must halve emissions by 2030 from the 2009 levels to keep the chances of achieving the 1.5-degrees target alive.

Developing countries argue that wealthier nations should take greater responsibility for emission reductions, given their historical emissions, and provide the necessary means of implementation, finance and technology to assist developing and vulnerable nations in transitioning to clean energy and adapting to climate change.

Key Takeaways

1 Global Stocktake

Mandated by the 2015 Paris Agreement, GST is an exercise aimed at assessing the progress in the fight against climate change, and deciding ways and means to enhance global action to bridge the adequacy gap (see box). The Paris Agreement says GST must be conducted every five years, starting in 2023.

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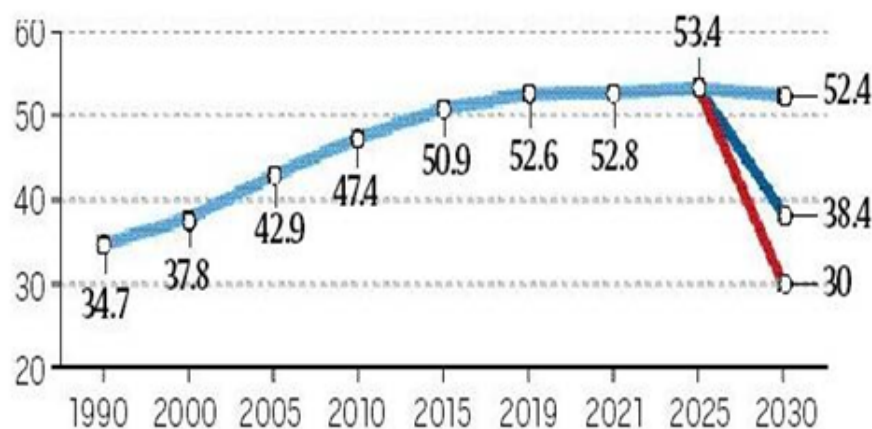
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EMISSIONS STILL GROWING

Emissions in billion tonnes of CO₂ eq

■ Current Projections ■ 1.5 degree Pathway ■ 2 degree Pathway



Projected Emissions in 2030

52.4 billion tonnes CO₂eq

2030 Emissions for 2-degree pathway

38.4 billion tonnes
Gap: 14 billion tonnes

2030 Emissions for 1.5-degree pathway

30 billion tonnes
Gap: 22.4 billion tonnes

Projected rise in global temperatures with current level of climate action by 2030: 2.1 to 2.9 degree Celsius

The actual meat in GST would come in at COP28, the year-ending climate conference, this time being held in Dubai.

The technical discussions just produced a short 'framework' on the elements to be included in the stocktake exercise.

Even this saw repeated squabbling between the developed and developing countries, mainly over provisions related to finance and 'historical responsibility' of the rich countries.

But what riled the developing countries the most was a statement from Australia seeking to downplay the 'historical responsibility' of the developed countries in causing global warming.

A bulk of the accumulated greenhouse gas emissions, the reason for global warming, have come from a group of about 40 rich and industrialised countries, usually referred to as Annex I countries because they were mentioned in Annexure I of the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, or UNFCCC.

This historical responsibility has been the basis for the differentiated burden-sharing on developed and developing countries in the climate change framework.

Australia argued that the historical emissions happened at a time "when there was no alternative to fossil fuel based energy sources", and when there was little understanding or consensus on the harm caused by greenhouse gases.

It pointed out that since 1992, about 57% of the carbon dioxide emissions had come from non-Annex I countries. It said that 70% of the incremental warming since 1992 due to emissions from carbon dioxide, methane and sulphur dioxide had come from non-Annex I countries.

While maintaining that developed countries would take the lead in climate action, Australia said it did not believe there was "an unambiguous debt" owed by the developed countries for past actions.

The stand was similar to the one taken by the US at the start of the Bonn meeting, which said bridging the adequacy gap was not the sole responsibility of the developed nations and that it would not agree to references to pre-2020 commitments in the GST.

Erasure of historical responsibility is the most sensitive red line for developing countries. This issue would likely come back at COP28 and has the potential to result in major fireworks.

2 Issue over Climate Finance

Apart from GST, another mechanism was set up at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021 for climate action. Called Mitigation Work Programme (MWP), this is a temporary emergency exercise focused only on increasing emission cuts.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says global emissions have to come down by 43% from 2019 levels by 2030 to keep alive hopes of meeting the 1.5 degree target. As of now, emissions are still growing and, in 2021, were higher than 2019 levels (see box).

Discussions at the MWP ran into trouble after developing countries complained that while they were being asked to strengthen their climate actions, developed countries were yet to offer the enabling finance and technology transfers.

Most developing countries, including India, have said they would be able to act more if international support in the form of money and technology transfer was made available.

Developed countries are under an obligation to support the implementation of climate action plans of developing countries through money and tech transfers. But money has been in perennial short supply.

According to one assessment, developing countries need as much as US\$ 6 trillion between now and 2030 just to implement their climate action plans.

The loss and damage needs of developing countries are assessed to be about US\$ 400 billion every year. More funds are needed for all kinds of other purposes, the total estimated to be running in several trillions of dollars every year.

Against this, even a minuscule-looking US\$ 100 billion per year that the developed countries had committed to raise from 2020 is not fully available.

Conclusion

A fresh effort at raising financial resources for climate change is being made in Paris recently that several heads of states are slated to attend. The Summit for a New Global Financial Pact is an attempt at redirecting global financial flows and raising new money to fight climate change, and dealing with associated problems like biodiversity loss and poverty.