

Road to Glasgow: Hopes and expectations for COP-26

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Introduction

While standing less than 30 days away from the 26th COP meeting in Glasgow, there can only be one question: what it has to offer to the world? Our planet is becoming unequivocally warmer by the second, causing some of the most extreme conditions ever witnessed. The United Nations itself has declared a code red for humanity. It is also clear that, much like our climate, the COP26 convention is in a precarious place. The deteriorating status of climate security threatens the success of the Glasgow conference. This year's convention will be of major significance towards deciding the future of our planet. If the Paris Agreement in 2015 delivered the 'what', this conference in Glasgow should deliver the 'how'.

So, what is the COP? The Conference of Parties is the UNFCCC's decision-making body that sits together once a year to negotiate on how to tackle climate change. This supreme body of the Convention has been working towards formulating and undertaking decisions necessary to save our earth since their first COP meeting in Berlin back in 1995. This commentary will attempt to shed light on why this edition of the COP is significant, explain the stakes and major players of the conference and decipher what it all means for Bangladesh.

Why is this year's COP conference different?

The conference is preparing to incorporate the 16th meeting of the Kyoto Protocol (CMP16) and the third meeting of the Paris Agreement (CMA3). This congregation at Glasgow will be the first-time, where countries will be expected to commit to their goals since COP21. They must undergo a process known as the 'ratchet mechanism'² every five years, as planned in the Paris Agreement.



**UN CLIMATE
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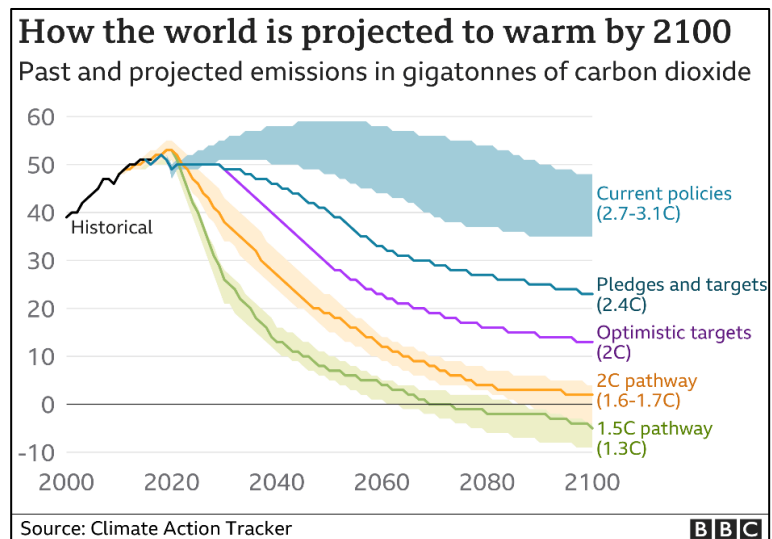
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² To review and further develop the climate agreement every five years also sometimes referred to as the ambition mechanism.

According to the Paris Agreement, countries that ratified the treaty, submitted Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) or Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. NDC or INDC are non-binding plans set by the nations; highlighting climate-related targets, policies and measures the government's aim to implement in response to climate change. This Agreement's long-term plan was to keep the global temperature well below 2°C, hoping that this would substantially reduce the effects of climate change. This year aims to increase the ability of the stakeholders to adapt to climate change impacts and mobilise adequate finances to ensure it. Each country has to plan and regularly report on their parts to the issue. Although, it will not force a country to set specific emission targets, it should go beyond its previous goals. Under that framework, each country was expected to submit enhanced nationally determined contributions every five years. But since they signed the Paris Agreement in 2015, the COP26 was destined to be the first iteration of the ratchet mechanism. In contrast to the Kyoto Protocol, this time, the distinction between developed and developing nations will be blurred, ensuring everyone submitting plans for reduced national emissions.

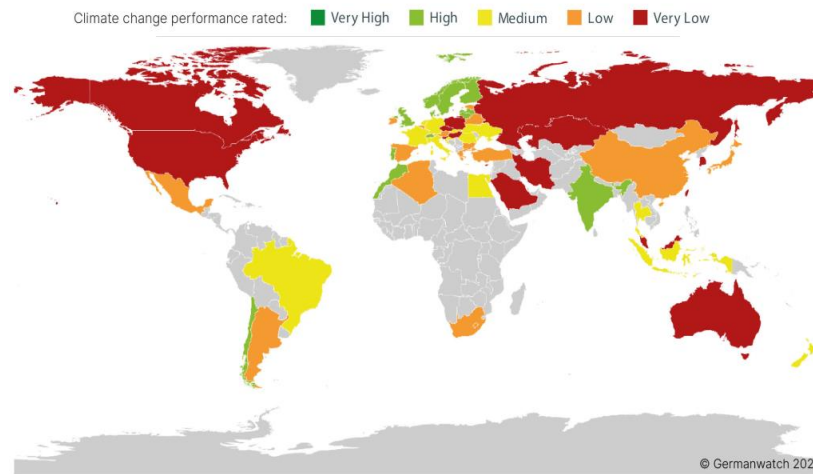
How can this affect climate politics worldwide?

There is a heavily agreed upon notion among the experts in regard to the probable effects of climate change. Assessment Report 6 has predicted that, some of the worst effects are yet to come. So, we must be prepared for the worst that can happen. The Conference this year is of paramount importance, because it is at a point where parties are supposed to make a decisive shift towards a solution by raising the level of their NDCs.



Before the Covid 19 outbreak, COP26 was destined to be the number one priority of the diplomatic network. The disruptive decision of President Trump withdrawing US participation from the Paris Agreement in 2017, coupled with spill overs from the pandemic, disrupted its progress. The downward spiral of the US-China trade war and growing difficulties in the EU-China relationship over trade, human rights issues and pandemic management further exacerbated the issue. The most persistent tension in global environmental politics exists between nations in the northern and southern hemisphere. Simultaneously, there were raised expectations regarding an accord between the EU-China, which could persuade Beijing to raise the level of its NDC. Nonetheless, the EU has internal barriers in establishing its future emission

targets and is also a powerful economic player who previously was a significant internal advocate of climate action³.



Source 1: Germanwatch2020

However, the UK's position was nothing short of a pariah with its then uncertain future with the EU, which eventually saw Brexit happen. Although, they have been a member of the G7 and G20 - which have provided a good example in the past for climate diplomacy - its continuing success in the future is in serious doubt as the UK's relations with the major players have deteriorated. The BASIC bloc is also facing new tensions. India, Brazil, and China continue to highlight their developing status to avoid their part of climate responsibility.

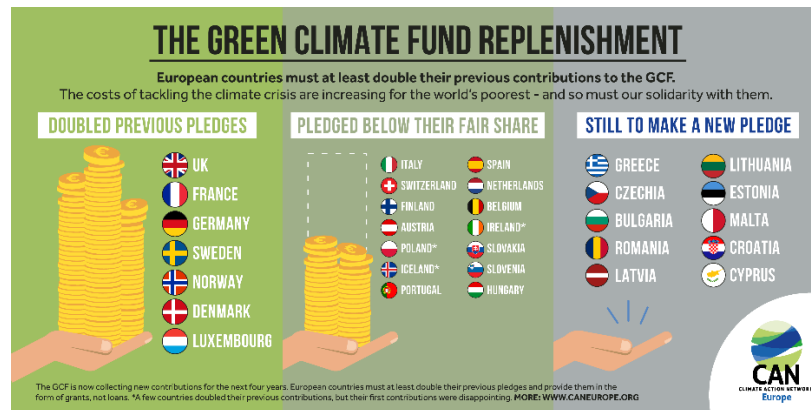
COP 26 will occur in the shadow of an overwhelming Covid 19 pandemic which has already exacerbated international relations – notably between the US and China. The specifics of climate negotiations are a branch of mainstream international politics, but their outcome eventually depends on the interactions of the same old vanguard.

Climate Finance steals the light

Climate finance is significantly pivotal to the success of the conference in Glasgow. They cannot just reach the agreement by phasing out coal-based power stations or talking about ending fossil fuel subsidies and making rules for carbon trading schemes. This conference also has to consider the vulnerable and lower-income countries that were previously promised financial aid to adapt to climate change. However, that solely lies in the hands of those negotiators working on the technical details and measuring the political turmoil it can create. The citizens of the developed countries (also known as Annex 1 nations) will certainly not be too happy if a large chunk of their tax money goes to help the least developed or developing countries to help them mitigate

³ Vogler, J. (2020). The international politics of COP26. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 136(1–4), 31–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702541.2020.1863610>

the challenges of climate change. So, these financial decisions will be crucial because the parties in power can lose their votes based on these decisions. Also, large carbon-emitting industrial countries like China or India will still try to find a way to avoid carbon taxes using their developing country status. Countries like Bangladesh, which recently achieved its graduation to the status of a developing nation, will lose some of the benefits they were previously getting. Every country taking part in this will have to consider many pros and cons from their national perspective. They will have to be holistic in their analysis if they are to make the best out of this conference.



Source 2: Climate Action Network

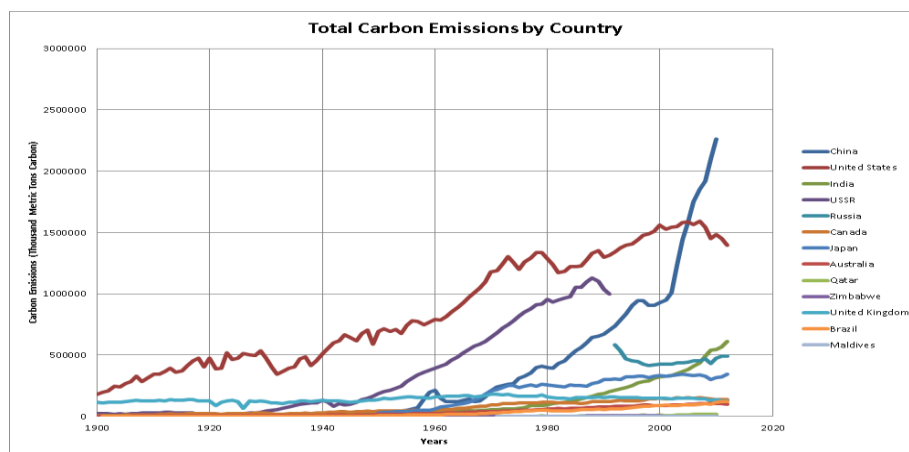
Participants from the Global South (countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania) should emphasise upon climate finance as a key component of COP26 discussions. They need to have access to this climate fund to implement their Nationally Determined Contributions Plans. Multilateral climate finance mechanisms of the UNFCCC, namely the Green Climate Fund (GCF), will channel these funds to the countries in need. As GCF's primary source of finance is from the public sector, transparency and accountability are required where citizens, have a right to be informed about how these funds are getting channelled. To fulfil this requirement, the GCF can work with accredited parties implementing approved projects, such as community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and government institutions; to generate detailed reports on the use of these approved adaptation finance and the outcomes from these investments.

Who might be the disruptors at this conference?

Seemingly, Australia, Russia and Brazil are some of the potential disruptors at COP26 as they contribute to emissions and threaten resilience. Although some countries submitted their new climate-related plans, including Mexico and Russia, those were not more ambitious than their previously set targets. At COP25, China, India and Brazil did push for earlier carbon trading

permits to be allowed in their Paris Agreement targets.⁴ China being the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, has agreed to carbon neutrality by 2060. But they were among many economies - along with Japan, Australia and Brazil - who pushed back to share net-zero plans by a shorter time horizon of 2050.

NDCs proposed by the nations so far turned out to be insufficient to limit global warming. At the same time, several large economies have to consider many of these, including China and India – who have yet to submit new or sufficient plans for the future. These also include the rules for carbon market mechanisms by which countries are allowed to reduce their emissions by purchasing carbon credits from other countries. There also lies a risk of some countries resisting the revised, tighter 1.5C target to avoid curtailing fossil fuel production. They are on their way to surpass the US, the second-largest carbon emitter, by 2040 if they do not undergo a rapid transition in their energy systems. India will also be a crucial player as the world’s third-largest emitter. Although, this time there is no option left for disruption, as it is the very last chance to revive our climate. But there might be some countries that are mentioned above, who will try to disrupt the process knowingly or unknowingly to secure their economical interest. The solution to this issue will only come in sight if the countries associated with it can see beyond the immediate gain.



Source 3: Wordpress.com

But, as these discussions are now delayed, most of these actors will now try to deviate from their target before the covid-19 pandemic. Hence, the next cycle of NDCs is significantly important because the commitments we currently have under the Paris Agreement cannot prevent a 2°C rise in temperature, where only 1.5°C can cause unprecedented changes to the world. So far, only some of the counties have declared their updated or elevated NDCs, most of which are not showing any possible advancement in their targets or so.

⁴ Sharpe, S., & Lenton, T. M. (2021). Upward-scaling tipping cascades to meet climate goals: plausible grounds for hope. *Climate Policy*, 21(4), 421–433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2020.1870097>

What does this mean for Bangladesh?

How Vivid are Our Challenges?

The biggest challenge for Bangladesh will most certainly include evolving into a developed economy while also lowering emissions, pollution, and environmental damage. To forego this challenge, we will need additional financing from development partners, international and national investment, and governments to which COP26 can play a significant role. Bangladesh is the largest riverine delta in the world, with an area of 147,570km². The IPCC assumed that Bangladesh may lose about 18% of its land by 2050 if the sea level keeps rising at the current rate⁵. This loss of landmass will create unforeseeable human displacements (almost 35 million people) across the country. In 2013, about 1.1 million people were displaced by the Cyclone named Mahasen, almost 1 million Bangladeshis are rendered homeless every year due to riverbank erosion alone. Arguably the climate refugees from Bangladesh alone might outnumber all the current refugees worldwide. Rising sea levels will also cause saline intrusion into the rivers and ground waters, significantly affecting the agricultural sector and harming food security. We will see a severe shortage of fresh water and extreme weather conditions, some of which we have already witnessed in recent years. Half of our population (up to 77 million) are exposed to toxic arsenic.

Climate Change: Future Challenges for Bangladesh

The projected more adverse impacts in the coming decades, particularly for low lying coastline and floodplain ecosystems of Bangladesh are -

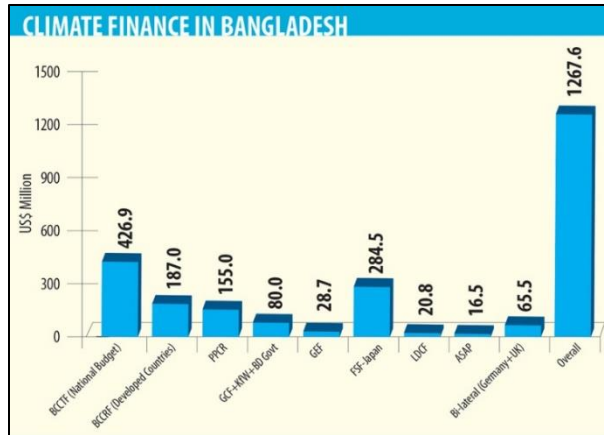
- Sea level raised.
- Increased salinity.
- Significant increase in temperature in both monsoon and dry season.
- More rainfall in monsoon and less rainfall in summer.
- 120 thousand Km² land would be inundated with varying degrees directly or indirectly.
- Frequent and prolonged tidal flood with wide spread coverage.

Source 4: *slideplayer.com*

Also, being a lower riparian country, we remain vulnerable to the dams built in the upper riparian areas inside India to control the natural flow of the rivers⁶. Apart from that, Bangladesh has yet to transition from the coal-based power plants and put a leash on deforestation, establishing eco-friendly tourism, stopping water pollution from industrial waste, among others, which we should address on a top priority basis. Therefore, at the COP26 conference, Bangladesh should demand funding for protecting human rights like ensuring food security, health security, energy security, human displacement and tackling climate related challenges.

⁵ Energy Security and Climate Change in South Asia: A Threat Analysis for Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (2017). *Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies*. Published. https://www.cosatt.org/uploads/news/file/Energy%20and%20Climate%20Change%20Study_20171221115243.pdf

⁶ Baten, M. A., & Titumir, R. A. M. (2015). Environmental challenges of trans-boundary water resources management: the case of Bangladesh. *Sustainable Water Resources Management*, 2(1), 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40899-015-0037-0>



Source 5: Dhaka Tribune

To be very honest, this conference in Glasgow is going to be our last resort towards a change. The situation might go out of hand if we fail to utilize this opportunity to its fullest. Our climate should get one last chance to be saved. It's in the hands of the leaders who have the authority to take the decisions. The effort towards carbon neutrality and the journey to net-zero energy by 2050, while keeping the energy supplies stable and affordable should be our primary focus.

Silver Linings

Although Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, we have done a great job establishing resilience to tackle the adverse impacts. Bangladesh has been leading in this area by acting as the chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), through providing early warning and creating attainable evacuation systems to save lives while protecting the food sources. We have also made some significant progress in both community-based disaster management and adaptation to mitigate the severe aftermaths of climate disasters. Our floating seedbeds, salt-tolerant rice varieties are being admired by all. On the contrary, while we still have a lot to receive from the Green Climate Fund, we only received 100 million USD in grants and 250 million in loans, which should be one of our primary targets this year.

To make things easier to us, our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently placed a six-point proposal to address this climate emergency to some of the leaders of COP-26. These included a strict follow-up on the Paris Agreement, getting a hundred billion USD annually from the climate fund, about 50% of which will be used for formulating adaptation and resilience. The proposals also included forging of new financial mechanisms, addressing the loss and damage that will be faced by the developing countries, all the while having to fight the double jeopardy from the Covid-19 pandemic. But we have persevered in terms of adoption and resilience, despite being a climate vulnerable country. We have also sent an ambitious NDC to fight the climate change to the UNFCCC. Bangladesh has adopted the **'Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan'** where we focused on resilient infrastructure, green growth and renewable energy. We have our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as the Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) and V20, where our key focus is on the climate vulnerable countries; we're also sharing the adaptation knowledge with other climate vulnerable countries all over the South Asian region office in Dhaka.

Conclusion

This year's Conference of Parties is going to be pivotal for Bangladesh. Dhaka will need a consistent and concerted effort by all parties. At the same time, we will have to transition from coal to clean and renewable energy, without hampering our economic growth. We need to take a strong stand in the conference, highlighting our probable loss and damage to materialise the plans. The propositions from our prime minister and the notable positive indicators that we are showing in terms of tackling climate change challenges, can actually show us a right path towards a secured future. We're on our journey from climate vulnerability to climate resilience to climate prosperity and that can only come into visibility if our NDCs find a way to success. Although there are possible disruptors who can refuse to play by the rules, which is going to be the biggest challenge for this year's conference as well. So, our destined goal will be to make the best out of this conference to a more resilient future for climate change.