

# Alok Sharma ‘deeply frustrated’ by India and China over coal

**Cop26 president says nations will have to ‘explain to climate-vulnerable countries why they did what they did’**



‘An agreement we can build on’: Alok Sharma at a news conference in Downing Street. Photograph: Reuters

## **Fiona Harvey in Glasgow and Rowena Mason**

Sun 14 Nov 2021 19.41 GMT

India and China will “have to explain themselves to poor nations” after watering down the Glasgow climate pact, warned the Cop26 president, **Alok Sharma**, adding that their actions had left him “deeply frustrated”.

He told the Guardian: “We are on the way to consigning coal to history. This is an agreement we can build on. But in the case of **China** and India, they will have to explain to climate-vulnerable countries why they did what they did.”

Boris Johnson, the prime minister, also said the Glasgow deal, even with the weaker wording, “sounded the death knell for coal power”. He **told a press conference** in Downing Street on Sunday: “The conference marked the

beginning of the end for coal. For the first time ever, the conference published a mandate to cut the use of coal power.”

In the closing stages of the Cop26 summit, Sharma told the Guardian he feared that the deal would be lost when China and **India** – both heavily dependent on coal power – attempted to reopen the text of the deal by objecting to a commitment to “phase out” coal.

## India criticised over coal at Cop26 – but real villain was climate injustice

They proposed instead the slightly weaker “phase down”, which implies that they could still carry on using coal in some way. The commitment, contained in the “cover decision” from the **Cop26** summit, does not attach any deadline to the use of coal, but is regarded as significant as it marks the first time such a resolution has been agreed by a UN climate conference.

Sharma accepted the compromise, he said, because “it was my view that otherwise we might end up with no deal at all. We would have lost two years of really hard work, and would have ended up with nothing to show for it for developing countries.”

At the **Cop26 summit**, the UK as host nation set the goal of “keeping 1.5C alive”, meaning setting a roadmap for the world to cut greenhouse gas emissions by the 45% by 2030 that scientists say is needed to cap global temperature rises at 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. That threshold marks the limit of safety, beyond which the impacts of the climate crisis, such as heatwaves, floods, droughts and sea level rises, are likely to become catastrophic and irreversible.

The national plans on emissions set out at the conference would take the world to about 2.4C of heating, according to an analysis presented in Glasgow, but that was expected before the summit began. “People who know Cops say they are not about one big bang solution to climate change, they are a building block,” said Sharma.

After the failure of Cop26, there’s only one last hope for our survival  
*George Monbiot*

At the summit, nations agreed to return next year to revise their national targets in line with the 1.5C goal, which was regarded by most countries as a good outcome.

Johnson acknowledged that his “delight at this progress is tinged with disappointment”. He said some countries were not willing to “go there” to a high level of ambition at the summit, frustrating “those for whom climate change is already a matter of life and death” from vulnerable island nations.

“We can lobby, we can cajole, we can encourage, but we cannot force sovereign nations to do what they do not wish to do,” he said. “It’s ultimately their decision to make and they must stand by it.”

Sharma told the Guardian, speaking from the train as he returned to London, that he was told during the conference that the commitment he wanted on coal was “never going to get in” the final outcome, so having the commitment present even with watered down language was “important”.

“It wasn’t quite the wording I wanted, but I have been saying for quite some time I want us to consign coal to history [at this Cop]; therefore having this wording about coal is incredibly important,” he said.

Other experts agreed that the “Glasgow package” sent a strong message on coal around the world. Nicholas Stern, the peer and climate economist, said: “The last-minute watering down of this statement is unfortunate but is unlikely to slow down a strong momentum past coal, a dirty fuel of an earlier era.”

John Kerry, the UN climate envoy, was also visibly annoyed, telling journalists afterwards: “Did I appreciate we had to adjust one thing tonight in a very unusual way? No. But if we hadn’t done that, **we wouldn’t have a deal**. I’ll take ‘phase it down’ and take the fight into next year.

Developing countries told the Guardian the deal reached in Glasgow was “imperfect” but that it contained many good elements.

Milagros de Camps, the deputy environment minister of the Dominican Republic, a member of the Alliance of Small Island States, said: “Although this is far from a perfect text, we have taken important steps forward in our efforts

to keep 1.5 alive and deliver the much-needed outcomes on adaptation. We acknowledge it was not an easy task.”

But she said a key developing country demand, for finance to address the “loss and damage” that poor countries have suffered from the impacts of the climate crisis, had not been met. “Instead, what we got was a ‘dialogue’. How is this climate justice?”

Tina Stege, the climate envoy for the Marshall Islands, which chairs the High Ambition Coalition of developed and developing countries at the talks, praised the deal for delivering a doubling of the finance available for poor countries to adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis.

“Countries like mine have to fight for every outcome we get. We did that on adaptation financing, and securing that commitment to double adaptation finance took a huge effort. A year ago many developed countries I spoke to really didn’t understand, I think, why this dominated every speech, meeting, interview by many Pacific Island leaders – we just couldn’t let it go. And in the end we didn’t. I hope that aspect of the package gets the attention it deserves, because it really will provide a lifeline for so many people around the world.”

Some developing country observers were less positive. Mohamed Adow, the director of the Power Shift Africa thinktank in Nairobi, said: “Sadly, this wasn’t a good Cop for developing countries. It was a developed country Cop that reflected developed countries’ priorities.”

Saleemul Huq, the director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development in Bangladesh, accused the UK of failing to ensure strong provisions for loss and damage made it into the final text: “This was absolutely unacceptable as a process for arriving at a decision and has made the Cop outcomes a death sentence for the most vulnerable communities in the most vulnerable developing countries.”

# COP26: China and India must explain themselves, says Sharma

By Malu Cursino & Doug Faulkner  
BBC News  
Published  
4 hours ago



Sharma: China and India will have to explain actions to climate-vulnerable countries

**China and India will have to explain themselves to climate-vulnerable nations, COP26 President Alok Sharma has said as the summit ends.**

It comes after the two nations pushed for the language on coal to change from "phase out" to "phase down" in the deal agreed in Glasgow.

But Mr Sharma insisted the "historic" deal "keeps 1.5C within reach".

It is the first ever climate deal that plans explicitly to reduce coal - the worst fossil fuel for greenhouse gases.

The summit, which was initially due to end on Friday, had to go into overtime before a deal was agreed late on Saturday - following the late intervention from India to water down the language on coal.

Later on Sunday, Prime Minister Boris Johnson will join Mr Sharma to give a Downing Street news conference on the outcome of the climate summit.

- **Live: Coal pledge in COP a huge step forward - UN climate boss**
- **New global climate deal struck in Glasgow**
- **What's been agreed at COP26?**
- **Is the UK on track to meet its climate targets?**

Mr Sharma said the deal struck in the Glasgow climate pact was a "fragile win" and urged China and India to "justify" their actions to nations that are more vulnerable to the effects of global warming.

He told BBC One's Andrew Marr Show: "I am going to be calling on everyone to do more.

"But as I said, in relation to what happened yesterday, China and India will have to explain themselves and what they did to the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world."

Mr Sharma, who had to hold back tears as he closed the summit following the late intervention, added: "I wouldn't describe what we did yesterday as a failure - it is a historic achievement."



China teaming up with India to water down the language will have come as something of a blow to those who wanted a much more ambitious outcome at the conference. However - perhaps they should not be too pessimistic about the final agreement.

For example, here in Beijing the Communist Party's media mouthpiece Xinhua wire service is already stressing in its commentaries that coal is "the dominant source of carbon dioxide emissions in the process of electricity generation". It may sound like that is just stating the obvious - but such wording from Xinhua represents a transmission of the party line across the country: coal is the biggest part of the problem! Beijing knows that ultimately the writing is on the wall for coal, but it's the speed of its phase out which matters to the Chinese government.

It believes that the most developed countries got the world into this problem in the first place - enriching themselves along the way - so now argues that countries like China need to be cut more slack to catch up.

What's also being stressed here from the Chinese delegation has been the perceived shortfall from advanced countries to

deliver on their promises to provide finance and technological support for developing countries to help them move to cleaner energy.

Vice Minister Zhao Yingmin, who headed China's team in Glasgow, said he hoped developed countries could "make further efforts to honour their commitments, enhancing support for developing countries, instead of merely urging other parties to raise their ambitions".

One of the main goals set out by COP26 was to ensure we do not go above 1.5C by 2100 - which scientists have said would limit the worst impacts of climate change.

As part of the agreement struck in Glasgow, countries will meet next year to pledge further major carbon cuts with the aim of reaching the 1.5C goal. Current pledges, if fulfilled, will only limit global warming to about 2.4C.

Scientists have warned if global temperatures rise by more than 1.5C the Earth is likely to experience severe effects such as **millions more people being exposed to extreme heat**. The world is currently 1.2C warmer than it was in the 19th Century.

Under the Glasgow climate pact:

- Countries were asked to republish their climate action plans by the end of next year, with more ambitious emissions reduction targets for 2030
- There is an emphasis on the need for developed countries to increase the money they give to those already suffering the effects of climate change - beyond the current \$100bn annual target
- The language about coal has been included for the first time ever in a global climate deal
- A pledge in a previous draft to "phase out" coal was instead watered down to a commitment to "phase down" coal

The final deal agreed on has been met with some criticism.

Ed Miliband, shadow business and energy secretary, told the Sky News' Trevor Phillips programme that "keeping 1.5 degrees alive is frankly in intensive care".

He said the world's task was to halve global emissions by 2030 and said that despite some progress in Glasgow "the world is only probably about 20% or 25% of the way to that goal".

But Mr Miliband commended Mr Sharma on his efforts.

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The UN's climate change chief, Patricia Espinosa, described the mention of coal and fossil fuels as a "huge step forward". But she added that "we need to also balance out the social consequences for so many people around the world, especially in the poor countries".

Lord Deben, the chairman of the Climate Change Committee, told BBC Radio 4's The World This Weekend that the UK should negotiate future trade deals with "some congruence with the world battle on climate change" - pointing to Australia as an example.

"I hope our government will also recognise that you really cannot sign trade deals on the basis that Australia can do nothing to insist on their farmers meeting the challenge of climate change and then export their goods to Britain," he said. He added that India's push to change the language on coal was a "misuse" of the process.

A report by the Climate Action Tracker group has calculated that at the current rate, the world is heading for 2.4C of warming by 2100.

If no action was taken, scientists believe global warming could exceed 4C in the future. This could lead to devastating heatwaves, droughts, extreme rainfall and floods. As a result, millions of people could lose their homes to rising sea levels. In addition to this, the change in climate could lead to irreversible damage to our ecosystem - with the mass extinction of animal and plant species.

# COP26 climate deal: 'It won't save us from drowning'

By Georgina Rannard  
BBC News  
Published  
18 hours ago



Pacific Island Tonga faces being wiped out by rising sea levels

**The climate deal struck in Glasgow plans to reduce the world's reliance on coal and promises more money to help poorer countries cope with the impacts of a warming planet.**

Campaigners on the frontline of climate change have been speaking to the BBC what that means for them.

Largely pessimistic about the outcome of the summit, they passionately explained their fears that political agreements aren't enough to save their homes and cultures.

- **[New global climate deal struck in Glasgow](#)**
- **[How the final day unfolded](#)**

## Pacific Islands: 'It won't save us from drowning'

Elizabeth Kité is a youth leader in Nuku'alofa, Tonga. The deal doesn't do enough to save her home in the Pacific islands from drowning, she says. The survival of their island is at stake. She calls the summit a stage for big countries to "flex how much they can pay small nations". She wanted to hear rich countries acknowledge responsibility for historic greenhouse gas emissions. "But they talk like promising money is a favour for us - it is not," she says.

She became emotional when she was describing how proud she was to watch Pacific Island negotiators fight hard at the summit. Last week Foreign Minister Simon Kofe of Tuvalu gave a press conference standing in the sea, to highlight rising sea levels.



Elizabeth Kité doesn't think the deal goes far enough to help countries like hers

"We are friendly people and usually very peaceful. It's unnatural for us to come out so strong - and I'm sad the deal doesn't reflect how hard we tried," she explains.

She is frustrated by what she feels is a lack of urgency and immediate actions: "It's like rich countries are saying, 'Yes we'll let the islands die off and we'll try to figure something out along the way.'"

- [How might decisions at COP26 change our lives?](#)
- [Seven ways to curb climate change](#)
- [Simple guide to climate change](#)

But she sees signs of progress. It's the first time fossil fuel and coal have been included in the texts. And she says the agreement to discuss separate funding for loss and damage - money to help countries pay for the damage caused by climate change they can't adapt to - is another positive step.

## Bangladesh: 'Youth finally got a voice'

Sohanur Rahman, 25, is a founding member of Bangladesh's Friday for Future movement. He leads young people as they grow up in a low-lying country that is extremely vulnerable to climate change and feeling the dire effects now.

As the agreement was gavelled, he said he felt that youth were recognised for the first time at COP. But he concluded "the end result is nothing".



SOHANUR RAHMAN

He was in Glasgow for two weeks and hoped to take back good news to the most affected communities. But he's leaving with feelings of helplessness and betrayal.

"These empty pledges will not protect our people from crisis," he explains.

He welcomes the news on loss and damage, but he says the voices of the most affected people were silenced. He blames **the fossil fuel industry representatives at the summit.**

- **What climate summit means for one woman in Bangladesh**

Children in Bangladesh will still be forced out of education and communities will be displaced by rising sea levels, he fears.

## Uganda: 'No change for my community'

Edwin Mumbere in Uganda lives in the shadow of the Rwenzori mountains where glacial melt and flooding is putting rural communities at huge risk. Now 29, he became an activist when he saw the snow disappearing from the high ground.

He works with communities to bring solar power to the area and educates them about their rights as a pipeline is built nearby.

- **The people under threat from a melting glacier**

He calls the Glasgow deal disappointing for Uganda and thinks it makes no real difference to the 100,000 people in his communities.



EDWIN MUMBERE

"Real solutions have not been put in place despite us proving to them that climate change is real," he says.

His main concern is the lack of urgency in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. He sees new oil and gas exploration being established in Uganda and other parts of Africa and says that the Glasgow agreement won't stop that.

"Pledges to give money are being made and the same countries are also investing in projects that are seriously increasing the carbon emissions - it's truly a double standard," he says.

## Philippines: 'We will keep fighting'

Jon Bonifacio, 23, studied biology before he became an activist in Metro Manila, Philippines. "It's a lot of 'one step forward, two steps backwards'", he said about the deal.

With 197 parties to the UN summit, compromise between countries with vastly different priorities is the route to agreement. But he says this compromise is "completely unjust" for countries on the climate frontline. "We will continue to

experience the climate crisis acutely and in the long term," he says.



JON BONIFACIO

He is distrustful of the language used in the text about coal and fossil fuels because he thinks it provides get-out clauses to the biggest polluters.

Like many activists who have long campaigned for better support for developing nations, he says the promise to increase the money given to poorer countries represents good progress. He'll go back to Manila and keep fighting for change: "Even if it was a perfect agreement, it's still up to citizens and activists to pressure their governments into action," he says.

# UN climate boss: ‘Good compromise’ beats no deal on warming

By SETH BORENSTEIN  
today



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A woman walks past piles of coal burning after scavenging from an open-cast mine near Dhanbad, an eastern Indian city in Jharkhand state, Thursday, Sept. 23, 2021. On Saturday, India asked for a crucial last minute-change to the final agreement at crucial climate talks in Glasgow, calling for the "phase-down" not the "phase-out" of coal power. (AP Photo/Altaf Qadri) GLASGOW, Scotland (AP) — It was no deal or a lump of coal at Glasgow climate talks and for Patricia Espinosa, the United Nations' climate secretary, there was no choice.

“No deal was the worst possible result there. Nobody wins,” Espinosa said in an interview with The Associated Press Sunday, about 15 hours after

nearly 200 nations agreed on what is now being called the Glasgow Climate Pact.

The world got a climate deal that outside experts said showed progress, but not success. It didn't achieve any of the three U.N. goals: Pledges that would cut world carbon dioxide emissions by about half, \$100 billion in yearly climate aid from rich countries to poor ones and half that money going to help the developing world adapt to the harms of a warming world.

Even more disappointing, a big world economy — India — which is already seeing droughts and extreme heat from global warming was the nation that watered down the final Glasgow deal.

“I am satisfied,” Espinosa said. “I think this is a very positive result in the sense that it gives us a very clear guidance on what we need to do in the coming years.”

One climate deal itself won't do the trick to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times, the U.N.'s overarching goal, Espinosa said. But she said it sets the stage, creating a carbon market, allowing more money to flow from rich to poor nations, even if poor nations were unsatisfied and said it isn't enough.

“It doesn't fully satisfy everyone,” she said. “But it brings us forward. It's a good compromise.”

Compromise was essential when a last minute proposal almost killed her possible deal.

India, the third-largest carbon-polluting country whose development is coal-centric said it couldn't live with historic language calling for a phase out of coal and an end to fossil fuel subsidies. For many of the countries, especially small island nations facing threats from rising seas, ending coal was key in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and trying to keep warming to a level that would allow their nations to live. Many countries were telling Espinosa and conference president Alok Sharma that the coal phase-out language “has to be in there.”

But no deal or a deal without India was unacceptable.

A series of small negotiations erupted. Many on camera, which Espinosa said was important for the world. Small island nations got consulted. They didn't like it, but they like Espinosa, and U.S. climate envoy John Kerry said had no choice. India would have preferred no coal language at all, Espinosa said. Instead India proposed "phased out" become "phase down" and country after country said they hated the idea, but accepted it.

"I think it's a clear example of a compromise," Espinosa said.

Is it blackmail?

"Some people see it like this, but I would say this is really the essence of multilateral negotiation," the veteran Mexican diplomat said. "Everybody comes to the table with some specific concerns, puts it on the table and is participating in good faith."

The way Espinosa sees it, the fact that India had to make the change was because the negotiations pushed and pushed India to do more. If talks hadn't been pushing for more change, there wouldn't have been the drama, she said.

Still, it's not what Espinosa wanted.

"We would have preferred a very clear statement about a phasing out of coal and (the) elimination of fossil fuel subsidies," Espinosa said, but she understands India's needs.

And even the phrase "phase down" may mean more than what it seems Espinosa said: "When you say phase down you're not saying what is the limit and therefore zero can be the limit."

But somehow it wasn't the most tense moment of the two-week climate negotiations for Espinosa. That came Friday, the ostensible last day.

"I was worried," Espinosa said. "I was looking at the at the clock and I was thinking, 'OK, how can we make this still work if the text does not receive broad support?'"

In the end, a day later, a hold-your-nose deal to many nations because of the coal controversy was struck.

Espinosa then asked her staff to run out and get some celebratory sushi and wine.

“We had this very short toast and then we had to leave, because the premises were going to shut down,” she laughed.