Climate consensus appears near; India objects to coal plans

By SETH BORENSTEIN and FRANK JORDANS

GLASGOW, Scotland (AP) — Almost 200 nations were poised Saturday to adopt a compromise on how to curb climate change and to keep a key global warming target alive after 15 days of contentious climate talks.

During nearly three hours of discussions, nation after nation said the proposed agreement did not go far enough, but only India and Iran...
appeared inclined to object. Negotiators have started the traditional posing for photos signifying some kind of success.

The deal calls for an eventual end of some coal power and of fossil fuel subsidies. It also includes enough financial incentives to almost satisfy poorer nations that anticipate harms from climate change out of proportion with their roles in causing it.

Most importantly, negotiators said, it preserves, albeit barely, the overarching goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times. The world has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit).

Ahead of the talks in Glasgow, Scotland, the United Nations had set three criteria for success, and none of them were achieved. The U.N.’s criteria included pledges to cut carbon dioxide emissions in half by 2030, $100 billion in financial aid from rich nations to poor, and ensuring that half of that money went to helping the developing world adapt to the worst effects of climate change.

The draft agreement says big carbon polluting nations have to come back and submit stronger emission cutting pledges by the end of 2022.

A rich-poor divide widened at the U.N. summit in recent days, with developing nations complaining about not being heard. But when the representative from Guinea, speaking for 77 poorer nations and China, said his group could live with the general results, negotiators applauded.

The Chinese delegation also said it was fine with the positions that would come out of a Glasgow in a final conference agreement. But Indian Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav potentially threw a wrench when he argued against a provision on phasing out coal, saying that developing countries were “entitled to the responsible use of fossil fuels.”

Yadav blamed “unsustainable lifestyles and wasteful consumption patterns” in rich countries for causing global warming. It was unclear whether India would try to stop a potential deal. “Consensus remains elusive,” the minister said.
Iran said it supported India on not being so tough on fossil fuels.

A frustrated European Union Vice President Frans Timmermans, the 27-nation EU’s climate envoy, begged negotiators to be united for future generations.

“For heaven’s sake, don’t kill this moment,” Timmermans pleaded. “Please embrace this text so that we bring hope to the hearts of our children and grandchildren.”

U.S. climate envoy John Kerry expressed support for the most recent provisions, calling the draft a “powerful statement.” Kerry and several other negotiators noted that good compromises leave everyone slightly unsatisfied.

“Not everyone in public life ... gets to make choices about life and death. Not everyone gets to make choices that actually affect an entire planet. We here are privileged today to do exactly that,” he said.

Gabon’s delegation indicated it couldn’t leave Glasgow without “scaled up” and predictable assurances for more money to help poorer nations adapt to the worst effects of global warming. Kerry tried to assure Gabon’s representatives that the United States would redouble its efforts on adaptation finance.

Small island nations that are vulnerable to catastrophic effects of climate change and had pushed for bolder actions in Glasfow said they were satisfied with the spirit of compromise, if not outcome of the talks.

“Maldives accepts the incremental progress made in Glasgow,” Aminath Shauna, the island nation’s minister for environment, climate change and technology said. “I’d like to note that this progress is not in line with the urgency and scale with the problem at hand.”

Shauna noted that the latest provisions are not vigorous enough to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times by the end of the century, which was the goal nations agreed to six years ago.
“The difference between 1.5 and 2 degrees is a death sentence for us,” Shauna said, noting that to stay within that range the world must cut carbon dioxide emissions essentially in half in 98 months.

Earlier Saturday, the negotiators in Glasgow pored over fresh proposals for sealing a deal that they hoped could be credibly said to advance worldwide efforts to tackle global warming.

The last-minute huddles focused on a potential loss-and-damage fund for poor nations hurt by climate change and forest credits in a carbon-trading market.

“I hope we can have some resolutions before formally starting this plenary,” conference president Alok Sharma, an official from host nation Britain, told negotiators. “Collectively this is a package that really moves things forward for everyone.”

Until late Saturday afternoon, divisions remained on the issue of financial support sought by poor countries for the disastrous impacts of climate change they will increasingly suffer in the future. The United States and the European Union, two of the world’s biggest historic emitters of greenhouse gases, continued to have deep reservations about the so-called “loss and damage” provisions.

Mohammed Quamrul Chowdhury of Bangladesh, a lead negotiator for less-developed countries, ticked off the ways that vague wording in a Saturday morning draft fell short of committing wealthier countries to putting new money on the table for countries struggling with climate damage.

Another issue that caused problems Saturday had confounded negotiators for six years: setting up carbon-trading markets. The idea is to trade credits for reducing carbon like other commodities, unleashing the power of markets, with poorer nations getting money, often from private companies, for measures that reduce carbon in the air.

Rich countries wanted to make sure that poor nations that sell their carbon-reduction credits don’t claim those actions in their national tallies of emission cuts, a process called double counting.
Saturday’s draft provided “strong” provisions to prevent double counting of offsets, but new issues involving forests reemerged later in the day, according to Environmental Defense Fund Vice President Kelly Kizzier, a former European Union negotiator and expert on carbon market negotiations.

Before the areas of disagreement between rich and poor nations demanded urgent attention, coal had garnered more consideration.

A proposal for the overarching decision retains contentious language calling on countries to accelerate “efforts towards the phase-out of unabated coal power and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.”

But in a new addition, the text says nations will recognize “the need for support towards a just transition” — a reference to calls from those working in the fossil fuel industry for financial support as they wind down jobs and businesses.

Some advocacy groups said early Saturday proposals were not strong enough.

“Here in Glasgow, the world’s poorest countries are in danger of being lost from view, but the next few hours can and must change the course we are on,” Oxfam senior policy adviser Tracy Carty said. “What’s on the table is still not good enough.”

But the possibility of having fossil fuels explicitly mentioned for the first time in a decision coming out of the U.N.’s annual Conference of the Parties meeting, or COP, was well-received by some environmentalists.

In another proposal, countries are “encouraged” to submit new targets for emissions reduction for 2035 by 2025, and for 2040 by 2030, establishing a five-year cycle. Previously, developing countries were expected to do so only every 10 years. Developed countries are also being asked to submit a short-term update next year.

The proposed agreement states that to achieve the 2015 Paris accord’s ambitious goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit), countries will need to make “rapid, deep and sustained
reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, including reducing global carbon dioxide emissions by 45% by 2030 relative to the 2010 level and to net zero around mid-century, as well as deep reductions in other greenhouse gases.”

Scientists say the world is not on track to meet that goal yet, but various pledges made before and during the two-week talks, which are now in overtime, have brought them closer.

The latest draft agreement expresses “alarm and utmost concern that human activities have caused around 1.1C (2F) of global warming to date and that impacts are already being felt in every region.”

Next year’s talks are scheduled to take place in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh. Dubai will host the meeting in 2023.
Switzerland has registered its profound disappointment about the decision to “water down” the language around fossil fuels and coal. “We don’t want to phase down coal, we want to phase out coal”. But they will still accept the text.

Frans Timmermans says that it is disappointing to water down the language but this should not stop the text. The EU will work within the EU and with all partners to phase out coal. The partnership with South Africa should be a model.

India has just asked to change the final text of the agreement to say, ‘phase down’ rather than ‘phase out’ unabated coal power.

And then to ‘phase out’ inefficient fossil fuel subsidies while providing targeted support to the poorest and most vulnerable in line with national contributions and recognising the need for support for a just transition.

Alok Sharma thanks the conference for agreeing “something meaningful for our people and our planet’ and that keeps 1.5C alive.
Alok Sharma has just started the final session of Cop26 talks in Glasgow.

Extinction Rebellion protesters are seen during a die in protest outside the entrance to the Cop26 site on November 13, 2021 in Glasgow. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

Friends of the Earth climate campaigner Rachel Kennerley, has said:

*The road to 1.5C just got harder when these talks should have cleared the way to making it a whole lot easier. The Glasgow get-out clause means that leaders failed to phase out fossil fuels and the richest countries won’t pay historic climate debt. With the Cop moment over, countries should break away from the pack in their race for meaningful climate action and let history judge the laggards.*

*The UK, as a country with huge historical responsibility for emissions, can end support for a mega-gas project in Mozambique, pull the plug on the Cambo oil field, stop the new coal mine in Cumbria and drilling for oil in Surrey. After all the Prime Minister talked a big game at the beginning of the fortnight.*

Alok Sharma has just asked delegates to take their seats and says the final session will start shortly. As a final agreement appears near, there is praise...
from some commentators:

But the lack of ‘loss and damage facility’ in the final agreement has been criticised. “Loss and damage” is the phrase for the destruction already being wreaked by the climate crisis on lives, livelihoods and infrastructure.

And this from Oxfam International executive director Gabriela Bucher:

Clearly some world leaders think they aren’t living on the same planet as the rest of us. It seems no amount of fires, rising sea levels or droughts will bring them to their senses to stop increasing emissions at the expense of humanity.

The request to strengthen 2030 reduction targets by next year is an important step. The work starts now. Big emitters, especially rich countries, must heed the call and align their targets to give us the best possible chance of keeping 1.5 degrees within reach. Despite years of talks, emissions continue to rise, and we are dangerously close to losing this race against time.

Developing countries, representing over 6 billion people, put forward a loss and damage finance facility to build back in the aftermath of extreme weather events linked to climate change. Not only did rich countries block this, all they would agree to is limited funding for technical assistance and a ‘dialogue’. This derisory outcome is tone deaf to the suffering of millions of people both now and in the future.

For the first time, a goal for adaptation finance was agreed. The commitment to double is below what developing countries asked for and need, but if realised it will increase support to developing countries by billions.

It’s painful that diplomatic efforts have once more failed to meet the scale of this crisis. But we should draw strength from the growing movement of people around the world challenging and holding our governments to account for everything we hold dear. A better world is possible. With creativity, with bravery, we can and must hold onto that belief.

Reaction to what appears to be the final text now coming in.

Greenpeace International executive director Jennifer Morgan said:
It’s meek, it’s weak and the 1.5°C goal is only just alive, but a signal has been sent that the era of coal is ending. And that matters. While the deal recognises the need for deep emissions cuts this decade, those commitments have been punt to next year.

Glasgow was meant to deliver on firmly closing the gap to 1.5C and that didn’t happen, but in 2022 nations will now have to come back with stronger targets.

Cop26 saw progress on adaptation, with the developed countries finally beginning to respond to the calls of developing countries for funding and resources to cope with rising temperatures. There was a recognition that vulnerable countries are suffering real loss and damage from the climate crisis now, but what was promised was nothing close to what’s needed on the ground. This issue must be at the top of the agenda for developed countries as the Cop goes to Egypt next year.

The line on phasing out unabated coal and fossil fuel subsidies is weak and compromised but its very existence is nevertheless a breakthrough, and the focus on a just transition is essential. The call for emissions reductions of 45% by the end of this decade is in line with what we need to do to stay under 1.5C and brings the science firmly into this deal. But it needs to be implemented.

The offsets scam got a boost in Glasgow with the creation of new loopholes that are too big to tolerate, endangering nature, Indigenous Peoples and the 1.5C goal itself. The UN Secretary General announced that a group of experts will bring vital scrutiny to offset markets, but much work still needs to be done to stop the greenwashing, cheating and loopholes giving big emitters and corporations a pass.

Updated at 6.26pm GMT

Meanwhile, on the topic of fossil fuels, in London today police have been arresting Extinction Rebellion protesters blocking the lord mayor’s show.
Demonstrators say Cop26 talks have failed and called on City banks to stop funding fossil fuel projects.

Footage shared on social media showed officers dragging demonstrators out of the road after they disrupted the procession.

Miranda Duncombe, a mother and member of the XR Families group, told PA Media:

Cop has failed to deliver the transformative changes needed to keep us at 1.5C of warming, a complete betrayal of our children. If the City of London was a country, it would be the ninth largest emitter in the world. The City’s banks and asset managers provide loans and investments for the projects and companies that are killing us.

Arrests as XR activists block lord mayor's show in London

Updated at 6.17pm GMT

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2h ago
18:07

It seems the final agreement will be known as the ‘Glasgow Climate Pact’... It’s 10 pages in total if you fancy reading it.

The wording on fossil fuels (I’ve added the bold formatting) is as follows:

‘Calls upon Parties to accelerate the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies, and the adoption of policies, to transition towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, including accelerating efforts towards the phase-out of unabated coal power and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, recognizing the need for support towards a just transition.’

Updated at 6.09pm GMT

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1 of 8

Newest
Newer
Greenpeace International’s executive director, Jennifer Morgan, has commented on the draft, saying the retention of the line about fossil fuels is a “breakthrough” but warned some countries could try to get it removed in talks today.

“The key line about fossil fuels is still in the text. It’s weak and compromised, but it’s a breakthrough, it’s a bridgehead and we have to fight like hell to keep it in there and have it strengthened. Today’s plenary could witness a defining moment with a clutch of countries seeking to strike that line from the deal and dilute plans to force nations to come back next year with better emissions plans.

“The coal and subsidies language now includes a reference to a just transition and that is very welcome. Fossil fuel interests should be put on notice, the deal on the table is weak but if they gut it they’ll have to answer to the young, to people on the frontline of climate impacts and ultimately to history. Today the eyes of the world are on Glasgow and the loudest voices in the room need to be the nations now fighting for their lives.

“Developed countries, especially the United States, still need to step up on finance, throwing their weight behind the vulnerable nations pushing for increased public adaptation funding and recognition of the loss and damage they’re suffering from climate impacts. Even at this late hour president Biden should send a signal to his team in Glasgow that they shouldn’t block public adaptation funding and finance
It’s a beautiful sunny day in Glasgow. At the entrance to the SEC, many people are taking pictures on their way in - hoping, presumably, that there will be a deal today and that this will be the last time they have to see this view from this direction.

An unexpectedly sunny day in Glasgow. But let’s not read too much into that... Photograph: Bibi van der Zee

For two weeks this place has been humming with energy, people rushing up and down the halls purposefully, or talking into phones with urgent expressions. There are far fewer here now, and the energy is much quieter.

At the coffee stands, the barista says everyone she’s been serving is absolutely knackered. She started her shift at 8, but the person she took over from told her there were people here from 5am. They’re waiting for the final deal, and then they’ll start to strike the stand.

Some more analysis of the new draft text

The new draft text has relatively few changes, showing that the 196 countries at Cop26 are narrowing down on the most contested issues that will make or break a strong agreement.

The call for the phaseout of coal and fossil fuel subsidies remains, which is positive as many observers thought fossil fuel-rich nations would get it deleted. It has been slightly softened again, with “accelerating efforts towards” inserted before “coal phase out”, rather than a straight call for a phase out. That may be the price of keeping the clause in - remember no Cop document has ever named fossil fuels.

Also added to this section is “recognising the need for support towards a just transition”, highlighting that funds may be needed to retrain fossil fuel industry workers.

The all-important “ratchet” remains - this requests nations to return to the next Cop in 2022 with more ambitious pledges to cut emissions. The current ones to 2030 are forecast to lead to a catastrophic 2.4°C of global heating.
The most substantial changes are on “loss and damage” - the compensation vulnerable and poor countries want for the destruction already being cause by the climate crisis they did little to cause. It is perhaps the most bitterly fought section of all, with low income nations believing they have a moral right to this money and rich nations like the US and EU fearing exposure to unlimited financial liabilities.

The new text introduces a specific mention of “funds”:

Decides that the Santiago network will be provided with funds to support technical assistance for the implementation of relevant approaches to avert, minimize, and address loss and damage

The previous text said “will be supported by a technical assistance facility to provide financial assistance”. It’s a small change, but a group of 130 nations, called the G77 + China and representing 85% of the world’s population, have been demanding the inclusion of text to establish a “loss and damage facility”, a specific delivery mechanism for funding, rather than more vague words about assistance in setting something up.

The text also says:

73 - Decides to establish the [NAME] dialogue between parties, relevant organizations, and stakeholders to discuss the arrangements for the funding of activities to avert, minimise and address loss and damage associated with the adverse impacts of climate change to take place at the first sessional period of the SBI, concluding at its 60th session

This gives a specific timetable for dedicated work on loss and damage. These are concessions from rich nations, but it may not be enough. The G77 + China have been clear loss and damage is a critical issue for them.

Saleemul Huq, a veteran from Bangladesh of every Cop, said:

While Mohamed Adow of thinktank Power Shift Africa said:

There has also been a little movement on funding for adaptation - preparing for climate impacts like floods and droughts. The new text specifies the date - 2019 - from which the money must be doubled by 2025. That implies about $40bn a year.
Saleemul Huq, of the International Center for Climate Change and Development, is also not happy with the current draft:

Climate analyst Ed King is monitoring how far the conference is overrunning:

At the time I’m sending this [9.59am on Saturday], Cop26 is in 12th position in the league table of Cop closing times, about to overtake Cop10 in Buenos Aires (which wrapped up at 10.58 on a Saturday morning). Will Glasgow beat Paris and Copenhagen, or break Madrid’s shameful record, by closing later than 13.55 on Sunday?

Oxfam have responded to the new draft text. Tracy Carty, head of the charity’s Cop26 delegation, said:

“Here in Glasgow, the world’s poorest countries are in danger of being lost from view, but the next few hours can and must change the course we are on. What’s on the table is still not good enough.

“We need the strongest possible outcome to ensure governments come back next year with strengthened emission reduction targets that will keep 1.5C alive. And decisive progress on finance to help countries adapt and for the loss and damage endured.

“Negotiators should come back to the table armed with cans of Irn-Bru and stop at nothing to get an ambitious deal over the line.”

Veteran climate activist Bill McKibben has written in today’s Guardian about how any progress that has been made is as a result of protest and citizens holding governments to account.
Copenhagen failed because there was too little movement building in the years preceding it, allowing a leader like Barack Obama to go home empty-handed and pay no political price. The global climate movement remedied that deficiency before Paris: many governments had no choice but to reach some kind of credible deal and hence a workable framework emerged, albeit without the actual pledges to make it capable of the task. **Glasgow** was supposed to be the place where countries lived up to the resolutions they’d proudly announced in France, and the decidedly mixed results reflect, at least in part, the difficulties activists have faced over the last few years.

Read the full piece here:

It’s a fairytale that world governments will fix our climate crisis. It’s up to us

*Bill McKibben*

Read more

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Bob Ward, policy and communications director at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, has weighed in on the new draft:

“This text is still pretty good and one I hope that all countries can embrace. It continues to request countries to deliver more ambitious pledges next year.

“Countries will leave **Glasgow** painfully aware that collectively current pledges for emissions cuts by 2030 are not ambitious enough. They are not aligned with the goal of the Paris Agreement of holding the rise in warming to well below 2°C degrees, and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C. The draft text also still calls on all countries to accelerate efforts towards the phase-out of unabated coal power and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.

“Importantly the UK presidency has now published draft text that outlines a good process for agreeing a significant increase in investment in developing countries to help them make their economies zero-carbon and climate-resilient. It is time for countries to stop arguing over the text and to start taking the action that has been promised, particularly to increase the flows of financial support to developing countries.”

Australia have been accused of “hiding behind others” and opposing progress in the climate talks. Bill Hare of Climate Analytics said:

“The overall view of Australia is it’s the worst I have seen it in my career. It’s not exposing its position publicly but it’s clear that it doesn’t want a process next year for all countries to come back and close the emissions gap for 2030.”
My colleague Adam Morton in Australia has the full story:

Cop26: Australia accused of 'hiding' while opposing deal needed to limit catastrophic climate breakdown
Read more

Last night Australia was also awarded the “colossal fossil” award by activist group Climate Action Network for its obstructive approach to the talks. “The only good thing about Australia being at Cop is they have the best coffee at their pavilion,” said the activists as they presented the award.

Panama’s chief negotiator, Juan Carlos Monterrey, is not at all happy with the latest draft:

It has been announced that the stocktaking session in which delegates express their opinions on the current state of play has been moved to noon - it was expected to begin at 11am.

Sébastien Duyck of the Center for International Environmental Law has a very useful tool that tracks changes between draft versions:

Hopefully the negotiators didn’t spend too long debating whether “policymaking” is one word or two:

One key area is paragraph 36, which refers to fossil fuels. Here’s the old version:

36. Calls upon Parties to accelerate the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies and the adoption of policies for the transition
towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up clean power generation and accelerating the phaseout of unabated coal power and of inefficient subsidies for fossil fuels;

and here’s the new version:

36. Calls upon Parties to accelerate the development, deployment and dissemination of technologies, and the adoption of policies, to transition towards low emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, including accelerating efforts towards the phase-out of unabated coal power and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, recognizing the need for support towards a just transition;

The first draft was the first UN document since the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 to mention fossil fuels, which was seen as a major step, so environmentalists will be pleased to see the language made it through the night.

However, the qualifier “inefficient”, which was added for the second draft, remains. In yesterday’s stocktaking plenary many poor countries objected to this language as they said it could be used as a loophole to continue fossil fuel subsidies. However, others defended the language saying it was essential for governments to be able to alleviate high fuel prices for citizens, such as with winter fuel allowances.

The mention of support for a just transition is also a positive step.

The key areas people will be examining the language of will be to do with climate finance for poor countries, the “ratchet” mechanism by which countries return with improved pledges, and money for loss and damage - the impacts of climate breakdown that can’t be avoided.

Yesterday’s text is here and today’s is here, for those of you who want to examine them.

New draft text published

The text has just appeared on the UN website. Analysts will immediately start poring through it to see what has changed overnight - we’ll bring you the reaction here as it happens.
Welcome to the Guardian’s coverage of day 13 of the Cop26 climate summit.

Negotiations were supposed to end at 6pm local time last night, but to nobody’s surprise they have overrun into Saturday. You can read our latest news story on the state of play here:

Pressure mounts on countries to strike Cop26 deal as talks pass deadline

Yesterday evening, the Cop26 president, Alok Sharma, put a pause on negotiations overnight so delegates could get some rest, before a new draft text is expected to be revealed this morning. Previous Cops have often been marked by delegates negotiating late into the night; it remains to be seen whether Sharma’s decision to let people rest signals a confidence things can be wrapped up today or a recognition that the talks are not close to agreement.

We’ll bring you all the latest news and analysis as it happens. You can email me at alan.evans@theguardian.com or find me on Twitter at @itsalanevans