COP 31 of UNFCCC

Mains: *GS-III – Environment*

Why in news?

The 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) concluded in Antalya, Türkiye, recently, without consensus on its proposed cover decision.

What about COP 31?

- **UNFCCC** – It is an international environmental treaty aimed at stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations to prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.
- **Conference of the Parties (COP)** – The supreme decision-making body, meeting annually to assess progress and negotiate new commitments.
- **Host & Presidency** – Hosted by Türkiye alongside Australia, overseeing the negotiations process.
- **Focus in Antalya** – There will be three meetings in focus
    - COP 31,
    - The 21st session of the COP, serving as the meeting of parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP21), and
    - The 8th session of the COP, serving as the meeting of the parties to the 2015 Paris Agreement (COP21).

What were the Key Priorities and Issues at COP31?

- **Fossil Fuel Phase-out** – Develop a credible roadmap for transitioning away from fossil fuels while addressing energy security and economic dependence.
- Resolving disagreements between fossil-fuel-dependent economies and countries demanding faster decarbonisation.
- **Climate Finance** – Ensure delivery of the $300 billion annual climate finance commitment by 2035.
- Mobilise adequate resources towards the broader $1.3 trillion annual climate finance ambition.
- Address accessibility, affordability and predictability of climate finance for developing countries.
- **Climate Adaptation and Resilience** – Strengthen adaptation financing for vulnerable countries, particularly Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- Improve resilience in agriculture, water resources, coastal infrastructure and disaster management.

- **Just Transition** – Ensure that the shift towards renewable energy does not disproportionately affect workers and communities dependent on fossil fuel industries.
- Promote employment opportunities, skill development and technology transfer.
- **Electrification and Clean Energy** – The presidency's action agenda proposes a global electrification target of 35% by 2035.
- Accelerate renewable energy adoption, grid modernisation, energy storage and clean transport.
- **Pacific Island Nations** – Strengthen the representation and climate concerns of Pacific Island countries facing sea-level rise, extreme weather events and existential threats.

What are the key outcomes at COP31?

- **Antalya Pact failed** – The proposed "Antalya Pact", drafted by the Turkish-Australian presidency, was rejected by the EU, UK, and several climate-vulnerable nations.
- Critics argued that the draft lacked the strong language on phasing down or transitioning away from fossil fuels and adequate commitments on climate finance.
- However, decisions were adopted on several negotiated tracks, including the Climate Finance Work Programme (CFWP) and Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP), while the Mitigation Work Programme ended without an adopted decision.
- **Climate finance remained contentious –** Developing countries expressed disappointment over slow progress on climate finance.
- **Climate Finance Work Programme (CFWP)** – The CFWP became a formal agenda item despite resistance from developed countries, including the European Union.
- Developing countries had sought a two-year programme centred on Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, which addresses developed countries' climate finance obligations.
- COP31 also saw pledges of about $50 million to the Adaptation Fund, against its 2026-2029 target of at least $1.2 billion.
- **Progress on the Adaptation Fund** – The countries agreed that the Adaptation Fund will serve exclusively under the Paris Agreement once revenue begins flowing from the Article 6.4 carbon market mechanism.
- However, the fund continues to face significant financing shortages.
- **Limited progress on formal negotiations** – Despite the failure of the cover decision, some negotiated outcomes were adopted:
- **Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP)** – The JTWP was extended by three years, but negotiations on operationalising the Just Transition Mechanism remained deadlocked over its institutional structure, mandate and financing.
- Countries agreed on procedural steps for a new mechanism supporting a "just transition" toward low-carbon economies.
- **Loss and Damage** – Progress was made in strengthening support mechanisms for countries affected by climate-related disasters.
- **Mitigation** – Mitigation negotiations failed to reach consensus, with Saudi Arabia and Russia objecting to the draft decision, according to CSE.
- **Improving Adaptation Tracking** – There was also consensus on a task force of national experts to refine the 59 indicators adopted at COP 30 for tracking adaptation progress, with guidance due by October 2027.
- **Progress on gender and climate action** – On gender, parties acknowledged the first

year of implementing the ***Belém Gender Action Plan***.

- The plan aims to strengthen gender equality and women's participation in climate policies and decision-making.
- **Launch of the Second Global Stocktake** – The COP31 formally launched the second Global Stocktake; the process assesses the world's collective progress toward achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and identifies areas requiring stronger action.
- **Growing support for fossil-fuel transition plans** – More than 10 countries either published or pledged to develop national fossil-fuel transition roadmaps, bringing the number of such countries to 27.
- The roadmaps are intended to guide a planned shift away from fossil-fuel dependence.
- **Expansion of the Fossil-Fuel Subsidy Phase-Out Coalition** – Tuvalu and Vanuatu joined the Coalition on Phasing Out Fossil Fuel Incentives including Subsidies.
- The coalition advocates ending government incentives and subsidies that support fossil-fuel production and consumption.
- **Global Electrification Push –** One of the most significant achievements outside formal negotiations was a voluntary electrification initiative –
    - The COP31 presidency's ***35x35 electrification pledge***, aimed at increasing electricity's share of global final energy consumption to 35% by 2035, remained part of the voluntary Action Agenda.
- The Paris Agreement's implementation era will need far more solidarity, cooperation, coordination and coherence than what we saw in Antalya.
- **Growing Momentum on Fossil-Fuel Transition –** Although no formal agreement was reached on fossil fuels, coalitions of countries expanded support for national roadmaps to transition away from fossil fuels.
- This indicated continued political momentum despite the absence of a negotiated COP outcome.
- **Calls for Reform of the COP Process –** Following the deadlock, the UNFCCC Executive Secretary expressed "deep disappointment" and called for reforms to modernise and improve the UN climate negotiation process.

What led to the deadlock?

- **COP31 ended without a final agreement** – COP31 collapsed over disagreements on the "cover text", the final political document that summarises and guides the outcomes of the climate conference.
- Like every outcome, it needs the agreement of all parties. No country or bloc holds a veto, but every clause must be accepted by all 190-plus delegations; opposition from a large group of countries prevented its adoption.
- **Objections to the Cover Text** – The European Union led the objections, reportedly backed by about 130 countries, mainly because the text carried no explicit language on moving away from fossil fuels.
- **Dispute over fossil fuels and electrification** – The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), a research body, reported that earlier drafts reportedly included a target to achieve 35% electrification by 2035 and a commitment to speed up the transition away from fossil fuels, but these couldn’t be finalised.
- **Controversy over Carbon Capture Technology** – A proposal for a target on carbon

capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS), a technology that traps carbon dioxide before or after it is released, added to the dispute.
- IISD has called the technology “expensive” and “unproven at scale.”
- **Countries that rejected the final text –** The EU, Panama, the Marshall Islands, Vanuatu and Belize formally rejected the final text.
- **Key reasons for rejection** – Panama’s chief negotiator gave three reasons:
    - Repeated old commitments without increasing ambition.
    - Relied too heavily on carbon-capture technologies.
    - Diluted language agreed upon in earlier COP decisions.
- **Continued deadlock on climate finance** – The countries remained divided over climate finance on
    - Who should provide climate finance.
    - How funding commitments should be fulfilled and monitored.
    - Developing countries continued to demand greater financial support from developed nations.
- **Setback for global emissions reduction efforts** – Russia and Saudi Arabia opposed renewing the Mitigation Work Programme, a forum for discussing and sharing emission-reduction strategies.
- As a result, there is currently no dedicated UN process focused specifically on global mitigation efforts.
- **Concerns over the Loss and Damage Fund** – The final text welcomed the Loss and Damage Fund, which supports countries affected by climate disasters.
- However, critics pointed out a major funding gap: developing countries requested $2.8 billion in support, but only $342 million was available for allocation.

What was India’s position?

- **India supported the draft cover text** – India was among the countries not opposed to the proposed cover text.
- Along with Saudi Arabia and China, it opposes explicit language on fossil fuels, particularly prescriptive targets on their phase-out.
- All three belong to the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC) group, which insists on continued fossil fuel use for economic growth while having deployed renewable energy significantly.
- **India's position on energy transition** – India’s voice has shaped the draft, particularly on food security, livelihoods and cultural practices in action on methane.
- The climate ambition must go hand in hand with means of implementation, and that energy transitions must be nationally determined, just and equitable, and backed by finance, technology and capacity-building.
- **Criticism of developed countries on climate finance** – The climate-policy experts argued that COP31 delivered little progress on climate finance.
- Developed countries were criticised for failing to strengthen their commitments on adaptation funding.
- In particular, there was no agreement to triple adaptation finance, or increase annual adaptation finance to $120 billion.
- **Limited progress on other finance goals** – The negotiators also failed to make meaningful advances on

    - Mitigation finance,
    - Just-transition funding, and
    - Financial support for climate-vulnerable countries.
- Critics accused developed nations of trying to avoid their financial responsibilities under the climate regime.
- **Launch of the Second Global Stocktake (GST)** – One of the few notable outcomes of COP31 was the launch of the Second Global Stocktake (GST).
- The GST is a five-yearly assessment under the Paris Agreement that evaluates the
    - Collective progress toward climate goals,
    - Gaps in implementation, and
    - Areas requiring stronger action.
- The findings are intended to guide countries in enhancing their future climate commitments.
- The first GST ended at COP 28 in 2023 and highlighted that the world is not on track to meet the Paris Agreement goals.

What is the road ahead to Addis?

- Attention now turns to the June talks in Bonn, where, IISD said, countries must rebuild trust and lay the groundwork for ***COP 32 in Addis Ababa*** in 2027.
- Several matters are pending, such as decisions on the Just Transition Mechanism's functions and operations, which were postponed to COP 32.
- Countries could also renew the mitigation work programme there.
- Discussions on national adaptation plans, which advanced only incrementally, resume in June.
- Developing countries are still seeking a clear baseline and a way to track the pledge to triple adaptation finance by 2035.

References

1. The Hindu | Why is COP31 perceived to be a failure?
2. Down to Earth | Fractured outcome at COP31 as rich nations block progress on key issues: CSE

