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- ❖ **Situation in Afghanistan**
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COP26: Success or Failure?

With the two-week long 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) coming to a close on November 12, there have been mixed reactions to the outcomes of this climate summit, and these outcomes are characterized by both successes and failures. While welcoming the Glasgow Climate Pact, reached at by consensus of all delegates from around the globe, some experts raise the question as to whether did the Glasgow Pact text along with many agreements forged on the sidelines of the summit, mean the world is now closer to averting climate catastrophe or not.

Major positive outcome of COP26 can be construed in terms of reference to fossil fuels, with the emphasis on phasing down coal and phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, a reference that had never been named directly in the past COPs. Undoubtedly, 2015 Paris Agreement envisages 1.50 C as the target for the reduction of emissions, and interestingly this target came at a time when the narrative was hovering around 20 C; nonetheless, currently, we are at about 2.70 C of warming. Pointing to the commitments for 2030, some critics opine that it can be brought down to 2.40 C, and it may seem closer but still far off from the Paris Agreement target. Admittedly, COP takes place very year tending to exist on a cycle where one gets a big COP after a gap of five years, as it happened in – Copenhagen and then in Paris and now in Glasgow – and in terms of the Paris Agreement, countries are coming back after every five years with new and improved commitments that will improve a nation’s standing on reduction of emissions. At the time of convening of the Glasgow summit, nations were actually behind the target and one can hope that nations can keep up the momentum to make that happen at ensuing COP27.

Another positive outcome of COP26 veers around ‘loss and damage’ that takes care of the concerns of the vulnerable countries and opens the door to liability. The question of providing financial help to developing countries is still hanging in the balance. Developed countries’ commitment in 2009 COP to providing \$100 billion a year beginning in 2020 until 2025 in climate finance for developing countries has not been met thus far. Nevertheless, the developing countries are looking for means to really gear that up and Glasgow Climate Pact contains language around creating post-2025 adaptation finance, and this is, as one critic opines, really more robust than what has been seen thus far.

Another salutary outcome of COP26 is the conclusion of bilateral agreements. The US-China agreement to slow down climate change says: “We’re going to work together on this issue. We’re going to put aside our differences for the good of addressing climate change.” Besides, the agreement on deforestation brings together more than 100 countries, and an agreement on reducing methane emissions globally by 30% between 2020 and 2030 has brought together over 100 countries to sign this agreement. Moreover, the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net-Zero (GFANZ) is committed to finding ways to get to net-zero. Similarly, the First Movers Coalition, coming out of a partnership between the World Economic Forum and the US State Department, is set to galvanize clean energy technology by getting companies to commit to buying it and thereby creating that demand signal.

Admittedly, COP is held every year and countries make commitments; however, there is need to devise a mechanism that accounts for fulfillment of those commitments. It is also incumbent upon media and activists to ensure that the follow-through happens. According to a media report, Achim Steiner, the head of the UNDP, has said: ‘When we’re in such a dire situation, COPs can never really be a success.’ While referring to COP26 having made important progress in a number of areas, one critic laments that not enough is done and the world still remains off track to beat back the climate crisis.

COP26 moved the ball forward but it didn’t move it far enough forward. In order to make major emitters ramp up their 2030 emissions reduction targets to align with 1.50 C, more robust approaches are required to hold all actors accountable for the many commitments made at COP26.

— BK