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1. India votes in favour of UN resolution demanding Gaza ceasefire

Why in news?

India on December 13 voted in favour of a resolution in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) that demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict and the unconditional release of all hostages. This was the first time India supported such a resolution since the war broke out more than two months ago.

The 193-member UN General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted the resolution at an emergency special session, with 153 nations voting in its favour, 10 voting against and 23 abstentions.



What was the UNGA resolution?

The resolution expressed "grave concern over the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the suffering of the Palestinian civilian population," and it said

Palestinians and Israelis must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law.

It put forward two key demands, including “an immediate humanitarian ceasefire” and “the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access”.

The resolution also reiterated the demand that “all parties comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians”.

Which notable countries opposed the resolution?

The resolution was opposed by 10 countries. These were Austria, The Czech Republic, Guatemala, Israel, Liberia, Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, and the United States.

Can the resolution change the situation on the ground?

Probably not. Unlike Security Council resolutions, General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding. However, the overwhelming support for the resolution serves as an indicator of global opinion.

Moreover, it reflects the growing isolation of the US as it refuses to join demands for a ceasefire.

Why did India abstain from the previous UNGA resolution?

On October 27, India abstained in a UNGA vote on a resolution that called for an immediate humanitarian truce in the Israel-Hamas conflict. The country’s decision was in line with the one that it has maintained in the other ongoing — and deeply polarising conflict — in the world: the Russia-Ukraine war.

While the circumstances, politics, and conditions of the two wars are vastly different and not comparable, the diplomatic toolkit of hedging and balancing between the warring sides has been a consistent feature of New Delhi’s approach.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Indian Express

2. COP28: What were the most important decisions, where they fell short

Introduction

The COP28 climate meeting delivered some important outcomes — a first-time acknowledgement of the need to move away from fossil fuels, a first promise to reduce methane emissions, operationalisation and capitalisation of the loss and damage fund, and an agreement on a framework for the global goal on adaptation.

However, like all previous COPs, it still remained an underachiever, unable to measure up to the expectations, particularly in galvanising more ambitious climate action in the immediate term.

The expectations

COP28 was being seen as possibly the last opportunity to ensure that the world had some hopes of keeping within the 1.5 degree Celsius warming threshold. The main agenda at COP28 was to carry out a Global Stocktake (GST), a comprehensive assessment of where the world was in its fight against climate change and what more needed to be done to meet the climate objectives. The GST is mandated by the Paris Agreement to be a periodic exercise, the first one in 2023 and every five years thereafter.

COP28 was being held at a time when global warming was breaking new records. The year 2023 is already confirmed to emerge as the hottest year ever. Several months this year set new temperature records. More than 80 days this year happened to be at least 1.5 degree Celsius warmer than pre-industrial times.

At the same time, every assessment showed that the world was not doing enough, and that the 1.5 degree target was rapidly slipping out of hand. COP28, therefore, was expected to use the GST to stimulate more ambitious climate actions, particularly between now and 2030.



The outcomes

However, COP28 disappointed on that front. There was little in the final agreement to accelerate climate action in the short term.

Fossil fuel phase-out: This was the most hotly contested issue at COP28, and the reason for a prolonged deadlock. The role of fossil fuels in causing global warming had never been even acknowledged in any earlier COP decision, but this was getting increasingly untenable. After much deliberations, the final agreement called upon countries to contribute towards “transitioning away” from fossil fuels, “so as to achieve net zero by 2050”.

There were no time schedules and no targets. Some countries were extremely disappointed that the term “fossil fuel phase-out” had not been used. But even if it was, it would have a similar effect in the absence of any timeline. Production and consumption of fossil fuels are unlikely to be curbed significantly in the near term, but it is an important, rather unavoidable, measure in the 2050 timeframe.

Tripling of Renewable Energy: This was an expected outcome, and the only one that contributes to additional emission reductions between now and 2030. The COP28 agreement calls upon countries to contribute to tripling of global installed capacity of renewable energy, and doubling of annual improvements in energy efficiency. Together, these two measures have the potential to avoid emissions of about 7 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent between now and 2030, more than all the net result of all the other climate actions being currently taken. Tripling is a global target, and it is not incumbent on every country to individually triple its current installed capacity. It is thus not clear how this tripling would be ensured.

Phase-down of coal: Despite being a fossil fuel, just like oil or natural gas, coal has received a separate mention in the agreement. This is because coal was already singled out for phase-down in the Glasgow conference (COP-26) in 2021. There was a move to stipulate that no new coal fired power plants could be opened without an in-built carbon capture and storage facility, but this was strongly resisted by India, China, South Africa and other countries. It was dropped, and finally the Glasgow language was reiterated. There is nothing about how this phase-down is to be measured, or from what baseline.

Methane emission cuts: The agreement talks about “accelerating and substantially reducing non-carbon-dioxide emissions globally, including in particular methane emissions by 2030”. Methane is the most widespread greenhouse gas apart from CO₂, accounting for nearly 25 per cent of all emissions. It is also about 80 times more potent than CO₂ in causing global warming. Methane emission reductions can therefore bring substantial benefits. But several countries, including India, are extremely opposed to any mandate to cut methane emissions, mainly because one of the major sources happens to be agriculture and livestock.

Cutting methane emissions could involve tweaking agricultural patterns which could be extremely sensitive in a country like India. Possibly in deference to the concerns of

such countries, the agreement does not mention any targets for methane emission cuts for the year 2030, although a group of about 100 countries had made a voluntary commitment, in Glasgow in 2021, to reduce their methane emissions by 30% by 2030.

Loss and Damage Fund: For the poor and vulnerable countries, this was the most important outcome. A decision to set up a Loss and Damage Fund had been taken last year in Sharm el-Shaikh but it had not been created, and no money had been promised. COP28 operationalised this fund on the opening day of the conference, and several countries, including hosts UAE, made funding commitments. By the end of the conference, commitments worth about US\$ 800 million had been made. The money is meant to provide financial help to countries trying to recover from climate-induced disasters.

Global Goal on Adaptation: This was another important step developing countries had been waiting for. Historically, adaptation hasn't received enough attention, or resources, as compared with mitigation activities, mainly because adaptation is largely a local endeavour. Its benefits also are mostly local.

But developing countries had been arguing that a global framework for adaptation was necessary to bring more attention to it. Accordingly, the Glasgow conference had decided to set up a two-year work programme to define the contours of this framework. The work programme resulted in the identification of some common adaptation goals, important for the entire world. These included reduction in climate-induced water scarcity, attaining climate-resilience in food and agricultural production, supplies and distribution, and resilience against climate-induced health impacts.

COP28 adopted the framework, but much more needs to be done on this front, particularly in identifying the indicators to measure progress on each of the global goals. The adaptation agreement currently lacks financial provisions, and countries would need to continue working on it to strengthen it in the coming years.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Indian Express

3. Allahabad HC allows survey of Mathura Idgah: What is this plea in the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi case

Introduction

Putting the focus back on the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid dispute, the Allahabad High Court allowed an application seeking the appointment of a commission to inspect the mosque complex.

The Hindu petitioners believe the mosque, built on the orders of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1670, was constructed atop the birthplace of Lord Krishna in Mathura. Today, it lies adjacent to the Krishna Janmasthan Temple, visited by millions of Hindu devotees each year.

Here is what you need to know about the latest plea, and the long-standing dispute.



Figure 1 The Shahi Idgah Mosque with the Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple in front of it.

The latest plea

The latest application seeks a survey of the Shahi Idgah mosque — which was allowed by the HC.

The petition filed by the Hindu side says that “it is matter of fact and history that Aurangzeb ruled over the country... (and) had issued orders for demolition of large number of Hindu religious places and temples including the temple standing at the birth place of Lord Shree Krishna at Katra Keshav Dev, Mathura in the year 1669-70 (Sixteen Sixty Nine- Seventy) AD”.

The petition also says that “the order (for demolition) passed by Aurangzeb finds place in the Official Court Bulletin (Akhbaraat) of January – February 1670 (Sixteen Seventy)”.

The Muslim side’s counterclaims

The lawyers, representing the UP Sunni Central Waqf Board and the Shahi Idgah mosque committee, contended that “the Shahi Idgah Mosque does not fall within the ambit of 13.37 acres land at Katra Keshav Dev”.

“Place of birth of Lord Krishna does not lie beneath the Mosque. The claim of plaintiffs is based on guess work and is not substantiated by any documentary evidence,” the lawyers submitted.

An age old dispute

The mosque was built by Aurangzeb in 1670 on the site of an earlier temple. The area was regarded as nazul land — non-agricultural state land owned by the Marathas, and then the British. Before the mosque was built, Raja Veer Singh Bundela of Orchha had also built a temple on the same premises in 1618.

In 1815, Raja Patni Mal of Benaras bought the 13.77 acres in an auction from the East India Company. The Raja's descendants — Rai Kishan Das and Rai Anand Das — sold the land to Jugal Kishore Birla for Rs 13,400, and it was registered in the names of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Goswami Ganesh Dutt, and Bhiken Lalji Aattrey.

The Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Trust was set up by Birla, and it acquired the ownership rights over the Katra Keshav Dev temple. In 1951, the 13.77 acres were placed in the trust, with the condition that the "trust property will never be sold or pledged."

In 1956, the Shri Krishna Janmasthan Sewa Sangh was set up to manage the affairs of the temple. In 1977, the word 'Sangh' in the registered society's name was replaced with 'Sansthan.'

The case so far and Gyanvapi order

At least a dozen cases were filed in courts in Mathura by different petitioners. A common thread in all the petitions is a prayer for the removal of the mosque from the 13.77-acre complex. In May this year, the Allahabad High Court had transferred to itself all the suits on the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah Masjid dispute.

The latest Mathura order is similar to the one in Varanasi's Gyanvapi Mosque, also built adjacent to a venerated Hindu temple.

On May 16 last year, a videographic survey of the Kashi Vishwanath temple-Gyanvapi mosque was completed by a Commission appointed by the local court. During the survey proceedings, a structure which the Hindu side claimed was a "shivling", and the Muslim side claimed was a "fountain", was found to be inside the mosque premises.

Subsequently, a scientific survey of the Gyanvapi mosque complex was ordered by the Varanasi district court on July 21 this year. The survey was halted after the mosque committee approached the Allahabad High Court, and then the Supreme Court, seeking a stay on the survey. Both the courts cleared the decks for the survey which was resumed on August 4 amid tight security arrangements. The ASI teams have been surveying the campus since.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Indian Express & The Hindu