

India's new climate targets could mean emissions peaking by 2030

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GLASGOW: India through its new climate action commitments has not only demonstrated its seriousness in responding to the climate crisis but also put the ball back in the court of affluent nations by shouldering more than its fair share of burdens and securing a diplomatic edge by pitching itself as a voice of developing countries seeking accountability from rich nations on their finance promises.

Though more clarity on how India would achieve its goals may come through the country's formal submission of nationally determined contributions (NDCs), the fine-print of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech looks bolder than what appeared initially as it has clearly hinted that the country may try to peak its carbon emission around 2030 backed by a huge renewables push.

Even as the announcement on 'net zero' by 2070 has become a centrepiece of commentary, the real objectives are the pledge to reduce carbon emission in absolute terms – with mitigation currently measured in reduction of carbon intensity (emission per unit of GDP) — and asking the global forum to track the progress on climate finance the way it is being done on climate mitigation (emission reduction).

Modi on Monday announced India will reduce its total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes from now onwards till 2030. It means the country would reduce 22% of greenhouse gases (GHG) in carbon equivalent from its total inventory in 2030. The country's entire GHG inventory is currently less than 3 billion tonnes and it will be 4.5 billion tonnes in 2030 in a business-as-usual scenario.

"It also sets the stage for carbon markets. In a way this means absolute emission reductions and this also means that India has set itself to commit to a peak in emissions without saying so explicitly," said R R Rashmi, distinguished fellow, TERI and India's former climate negotiator.

As far as announcing the 'net zero' goal is concerned, India has successfully resisted the pressure from the developed countries to join the 2050 league and instead put it on 2070 timeline which in a way signals foreign and domestic investors who want to invest in manufacturing (Make in India) and development of green technologies in the country. It also indicates that nations with historic responsibilities must pay up.

"In fact, by announcing these targets, India is not only walking its talk, it is literally running the talk — and recognising the urgent need to reduce GHG emissions and combat climate change. Going by our comparatively low contribution to global emissions, coupled with the fact that our economy needs to grow and meet the energy needs of millions of poor citizens, we did not need to make such an ambitious pledge. But these are a challenge to the already rich world to step up," said Sunita Narain, environmentalist and director general of the New Delhi-based policy group, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

Referring to the CSE analysis on the issue, she said, "As far as the net-zero 2070 is concerned, India's target matches the commitment of the already industrialised. The fact is that the world must reach net-zero by 2050, which means that the OECD countries should get there by 2030 and China by 2040 (not in 2060 as announced by the country)".