CLIMATE TALKS NATIONAL

India can do more, hints climate official

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New Delhi is on track to overachieve its Nationally Determined Contribution, says head of COP 26.

Alok Sharma, president-designate, United Nations Conference of Parties (COP), said he hoped India would consider more ambitious emissions targets. Mr. Sharma is visiting India as part of a larger international tour building consensus among nations for concrete outcomes ahead of the 26th round of climate talks.

“I have been encouraged by the discussions I’ve had. India is on track to overachieve its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). I would request if India would consider any NDC that takes into account this overachieving,” Mr. Sharma told reporters on Wednesday. Among those he met in this three-day India tour were Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Carbon neutrality

A major theme building ahead of the climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland, this November is the question of how many nations can commit to a net zero target and by when. Net zero or carbon neutrality is when more carbon is sucked out from the atmosphere or prevented from being emitted than what a country emits and is critical to ensuring that the planet doesn’t heat up an additional half a degree by 2100.

A little over 120 countries have committed, with varying degrees of firmness, to reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. Five countries have net zero pledges set for after 2050, including Australia and Singapore, which haven't set a firm target yet.

China, the world's biggest emitter, has committed to peaking its emissions before 2030 and achieving net zero by 2060.

The United States has said it would achieve net zero by 2050 and nearly halve emissions by 2030. India is among the major countries that haven't committed to a 2050 plan but has said it is one of the countries that has delivered on one of the 2015 Paris Agreements main goals that is taking steps to ensure that its emissions don't put the globe on a road to heating one degree more than present by the turn of the century. Further, India's position is that it has among the lowest per capita emissions, is not responsible for the climate crisis, which the science establishes is due to historical emissions by developed countries and cannot compromise on ensuring economic growth of its vast citizenry.

India's NDC includes reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 33%–35% by 2030 below 2005 levels; increase the share of non-fossil-based energy resources to 40% of installed electric power capacity by 2030, with help of transfer of technology and low-cost international finance including from Green Climate Fund (GCF) and to create an additional (cumulative) carbon sink of 2.5–3 GtCO2e through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. It has committed to installing 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030 of which 100 GW is reportedly installed.

Thorn of contention

A thorn of contention is the over-$100 billion that was to have come to developing countries from developed ones for clean energy investments and mitigation that continues to be outstanding. Mr. Sharma said Canada and Germany were working with his team to set out a "delivery plan".

"Delivering the $100 billion a year is a matter of trust. Germany and Canada will be setting out a delivery plan until 2025 and have it in place before COP 26. For the years beyond 2025, that will certainly require trillions of dollars, much is expected to come from the private sector," he said.

On Wednesday, the Union Cabinet approved ratification of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol that envisages phasing out of hydrofluorocarbons (HFC) by 80-85% of present levels by 2040 in a phased manner by all signatory countries. The HFC are used in refrigeration and contribute to global warming. India in 2016 committed to phasing down HFC in four steps from 2032 with a 10% reduction in 2032, 20% in 2037, 30% in 2042 and 80% in 2047.