

India skips key meet on climate change

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India failed to attend a two-day meeting of 51 countries where key issues regarding the Paris climate deal were discussed over the weekend and through Monday, according to officials who cited technical difficulties.

The meeting was closed-door ministerial conference which was meant to take stock of global efforts to fight the climate crisis and the efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C (as part of the Paris climate accord) ahead of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow this November.

The meeting was called by COP26 president-designate, Alok Sharma and India was invited following the G20 joint ministerial on energy and climate last week.

“We attended the G20 ministerial and made our stand clear. The UK Climate ministerial was right after that. It was being held in the middle of the Parliament session so it was decided that this time we cannot be present. On an official level we wanted to participate virtually but we couldn’t because of various technical issues” said Gaurav Khare, spokesperson, ministry of environment, forest and climate change.

On the outcome of the ministerial meeting, Sharma’s office said: “Climate ministers have taken a step forward towards a successful COP26, as a constructive meeting in London concluded with countries coming closer together on key issues such as actions to keep the 1.5C goal alive, adaptation finance and concluding the Paris rulebook.” The Paris rulebook is basically the implementation guidelines to execute the Paris Agreement.

According to a note issued by the UK government on Monday, Sharma was quoted saying: “We made progress over these two days. And there was a clear spirit of cooperation. However, the issues we have discussed are complex. There are still significant differences that persist. We have moved closer together. But still, on these vital issues we are not yet close enough.”

The statement also said that over the past two days, countries had reached a common understanding that COP26 needs to keep 1.5°C within reach. Ministers participating at the meeting called for all countries to deliver long-term strategies towards net zero before COP26.

The meeting will take place in a year when multiple freak weather events have brought back focus on climate change, especially in the western world. These incidents include unprecedented flooding and deaths in parts of Germany, flooding in parts of US and an unusual heatwave across parts of north America and Canada.

One of the key agreements at the meeting was on finance. Sharma has called for a plan from developed countries on how they are going to deliver the \$100 billion a year in international climate finance, which has been promised since 2009 but has been delivered. Now, the amount will have to be delivered between 2020 and 2025.

India said in its official statement at the G20 energy and climate joint ministerial meeting on Saturday that the target of reducing emissions to net zero by mid-century, proposed by some countries, will not be adequate in view of the fast-depleting global carbon space. It urged the G20 nations with per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions above the world average to reduce the levels by 2030.

According to data provided by the Climate Watch by World Resources Institute, India emits 7.1% of global emissions and has per capita emissions of about 2.47 Tco2e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent), as compared to the global average of 6.45 tco2/per capita.

Union environment minister, Bhupender Yadav said on Friday at the G20 Climate ministerial that the world should not be shifting goalposts, possibly referring to diplomatic pressure on every country to raise ambition to meet a 1.5 degree C goal.

“At COP26, India should be the voice of the vulnerable, and the conscience-keeper for the rich countries. By proffering even stronger climate action, India can reap health and economic co-benefits. But we clearly need clean technology partnerships for industrial processes,” said Ulka Kelkar, director of the Climate Program at World Resources Institute.

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