

India, France to sign two agreements during French minister's 5-day visit

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France's ecological transition minister Barbara Pompili, whose post is considered number two in the government, will begin her visit to India on Thursday. (TWITTER/@barbarapompili)

India and France will sign two agreements on renewable energy and urban mobility during a five-day visit to India by a key member of President Emmanuel Macron's government to bolster bilateral cooperation on sustainable development.

France's ecological transition minister Barbara Pompili, whose post is considered number two in the government, will begin her visit on Thursday. Besides meeting her Indian counterpart Prakash Javadekar, power and renewable energy minister RK Singh and minister of state for urban affairs Hardeep Singh Puri, she will travel to Assam and Gujarat to strengthen cooperation on specific projects.

Singh and Pompili will preside over the signing of a letter of intent between the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) and the French Development Agency (AFD) for developing a floating solar plant of up to 150 MW.

AFD will also sign a credit facility agreement with the finance ministry to provide 250M euros as funding for the Surat metro rail project in line with France's commitment to supporting green urban mobility in India, the French embassy said in a statement.

Pompili's discussions with Javadekar are expected to focus on climate challenges, global efforts to protect biodiversity, air pollution and a joint initiative on single-use plastic.

The two ministers will also launch the India-France Year of the Environment, which aims to amplify cooperation between the two countries on environmental issues and jointly foster global momentum throughout the year.

In her meeting with Singh, Pompili will hold talks on joint efforts to promote renewable energy and smart grids. They will discuss the strengthening of the International Solar Alliance, which was

initiated by India and France, bilateral technical cooperation on high-efficiency solar panels, and new investments by French companies in solar power projects and smart grids.

Puri and Pompili are expected to discuss collaboration on smart cities, mobility, and water and waste management. They will also touch on civil aviation and conditions for smooth resumption of activities after the pandemic.

Pompili will travel to Assam's Kaziranga national park, one of the sites of the Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation (APFBC). AFD has been working with Assam since 2012, providing financial and technical assistance to APFBC to support biodiversity conservation efforts, sustainable management of forests and creation of alternate livelihoods for forest-dependent communities.

She will meet local communities that have benefited from skill development programmes to develop alternative livelihoods.

At the Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati, Pompili will interact with researchers of the Centre of Excellence-Sustainable Polymers, credited with developing India's first biodegradable plastic.

Pompili will also travel to Surat for discussions with Indian and French players involved in smart mobility and sustainable urban development projects. She will reiterate France's commitment to the Smart Cities Mission, including expertise from French companies and financing from AFD and the European Union.

She will also meet leading think tanks and companies working on climate change and clean energy and visit Indian NGOs working on sustainability, particularly waste management.

Pompili is the second senior French minister to visit India amid the pandemic. Defence minister Florence Parly travelled to India last September to attend a ceremony marking the induction of the first batch of French-made Rafale combat jets into the Indian Air Force.

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