

Honest reckoning

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Context:

Major world economies seem unwilling to move away from fossil fuel.

Introduction:

The boundary wall enclosing discussions around global climate is 1.5°C, or the average increase in global temperatures since pre-industrial times. Now that 1°C is crossed, all the wrangling under way at the climate summit in Dubai is to cap the half-degree rise.

Insufficiency of Global pledges:

1. Global pledges to cut emissions are insufficient to achieve this. Current estimates are that to limit warming to 1.5°C, the world requires three times more renewable energy capacity by 2030, or at least 11,000 GW.
2. That there is wide global consensus on the need for this tripling was first formally articulated in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration at the G-20 summit in Delhi in September.

Run up to the Dubai summit:

1. In the run-up to the Dubai summit, it was perceived that this would be widely endorsed by the larger group of about 190 countries signatory to the UN convention on climate. It turns out that, so far, 118 countries have endorsed the pledge and two major countries, i.e., India and China, have so far abstained from signing.
2. The Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge, while still a draft text, says that in their pursuit of tripling renewable energy capacity, signatories should also commit to "...phase down of unabated coal power, in particular ending the continued investment in unabated new coal-fired power plants". This is a major red line for India.

India's stand:

While India has positioned itself as a champion for renewable energy — its 2030 targets as articulated in its formal, nationally determined contributions (NDC) speak of tripling renewable energy capacity to 500 GW from the current 170 GW — it has reiterated several times that it could not be forced to give up certain fuels. Coal-fired plants are responsible for nearly 70% of India's greenhouse gas emissions.

Other Developed countries stand:

1. Developed countries that have made commitments to give up coal often have other large, fossil-fuel resources as back-up. The United States joined 56 other countries at Dubai in a commitment to completely eschew coal for its energy use, by 2035.
2. However, the U.S. only draws about 20% of its energy from coal and at least 55% from oil

and gas, with plans to produce more of it in 2030 than at present.

Conclusion:

The paradox of the world's major economies' commitment to renewable energy is that it is not, as of now, actively geared to replace fossil fuel. Till there is an honest commitment to actually replace existing and future fossil capacity with clean energy, pledges and declarations are worth little more than the paper they are drafted on.



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