China's foreign coal push risks global climate goals

Carbon-belching power stations to have lifespan of decades

BEIJING: China's plan to fund dozens of foreign coal plants from Zimbabwe to Indonesia is set to produce more emissions than major developed nations, threatening global efforts to fight climate change, environmentalists have warned. Under the Paris climate deal signed in 2015, China positioned itself as a leader on climate change, and in September President Xi Jinping pledged the country would become carbon neutral by 2060.

But Chinese state-owned firms are investing billions in coal power abroad, which are not counted in the domestic carbon neutral calculations, and which environmentalists say put at risk the Paris accord's goal of keeping global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. "New plants that would potentially be operating for many years beyond 2030 are fundamentally incompatible with global efforts to contain climate change," said Christine Shearer, head of coal research at the Global Energy Monitor.

The new carbon-belching power stations already under construction will produce 19 gigawatts of power and emit 115 million tons each year, data from Boston University's Global Development Policy Center showed. China has nearly three-times more in the pipeline abroad, meaning its overseas plants would emit more than the current emissions of major economies such as Britain, Turkey and Italy, according to figures in British Petroleum's annual review of global energy.

Each of the dozens of plants are expected to have a lifespan of decades. If completed and operated for 30 years, these plants would emit the equivalent of almost three years of emissions from all coal-fired power plants in China, according to Lauri Myllyvirta, lead Asia analyst with Helsinki-based Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

China is making the overseas coal play as part of its trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, a plan to fund infrastructure projects and increase its sway overseas. Xi has promised to "pursue open, green and clean co-operation" under the Belt and Road plan, yet Chinese banks have continued their financing of coal projects regardless. Between 2000 and 2018, 23.1 percent of the $251 billion invested by China's two biggest policy banks on overseas energy projects was spent on coal projects, according to Boston University's database on China's global energy financing.

The foreign plants the Chinese firms are currently building include the $3 billion Sengwa power plant in Zimbabwe - one of the largest in Africa. There are also at least eight projects in Pakistan, including a $2 billion plant in the restive region of Balochistan. The new projects are all in countries that have signed up to the Belt and Road plan, locking them into a coal-consuming energy future. The flood of coal cash is "hampering efforts by developing nations to switch to cleaner alternatives," said Li Shuo from Greenpeace China, and that risks "derailing the Paris accord".

At home, China has about 96 billion tons of untapped coal reserves - the fourth largest in the world. The surplus has pushed Chinese power companies into energy hungry nations in South and Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America. "It is a way to provide markets for companies and services that the country itself increasingly does not need," said Lauri Myllyvirta, China analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA). — AFP

SINGARAJA, Indonesia: This picture taken on Oct 29, 2020 shows the Celukan Bawang 2 power plant on the resort island of Bali. — AFP

UK inks Singapore trade deal as EU talks falter

SINGAPORE: Britain yesterday signed a free-trade deal with Singapore, giving it a key foothold in Asia as it seeks to forge its own path after leaving the European Union, while talks on a post-Brexit deal stumble. The agreement largely replicates an existing EU-Singapore pact, with the city-state saying it will cover more than £17 billion (US$22 billion) in trade.

It removes tariffs, gives both countries access to each other's markets in services and cuts non-tariff barriers in electronics, cars and vehicle parts, pharmaceutical products, medical devices and renewable energy generation, the ministry said. Duties will be eliminated by Nov 2024, the same timeline as the agreement between the EU and Singapore, a former British colony that maintains close links with London.

As the deal was signed in the city-state, Britain's International Trade Secretary Liz Truss praised Singapore for its leadership on free trade. "Now the United Kingdom is back as an independent trading nation, we are free to join this campaign," she said. "Singapore is already the UK's largest trade and investment partner in ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), while the UK is Singapore's top investment destination in Europe."

Her Singapore counterpart, Chan Chun Sing, said the deal "provides British businesses a platform to access opportunities in the region through Singapore". Truss said the agreement will take Britain a step closer to joining a massive free-trade zone, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, of which Singapore is a member.

The pact groups 11 Pacific Rim nations, among them Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Mexico and Vietnam. A previous version of the deal was once championed by the US, but President Donald Trump abandoned it. Britain signed its first major post-Brexit trade deal with Japan in October, but Thursday's agreement is its first with a member of ASEAN. The 10-country bloc is home to 650 million people and - prior to the pandemic-induced downturn - had enjoyed rapid economic growth in recent years.

Yesterday's signing came after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gave themselves until Sunday to decide on the future of post-Brexit negotiations, following a three-hour dinner that left the two sides "far apart". Britain and the EU are running out of time to reach an agreement on a future trading relationship before a post-Brexit transition period finishes at the end of the year. — AFP


SINGAPORE: Britain's International Trade Secretary Liz Truss and her Singaporean counterpart Chan Chun Sing sign a free-trade deal yesterday. — AFP

France imposes €135m in fines on Google, Amazon

PARIS: France's CNIL data privacy watchdog said yesterday it had fined two Google units a total of €100 million and an Amazon subsidiary €35 million over advertising cookies. The regulator said the fines were "for having placed advertising cookies on the computers of users ... without obtaining prior consent and without providing adequate information". A cookie is a small piece of data stored on a user's computer browser that allows websites to identify users and remember their previous activity.

The CNIL said when a user visited the website google.fr, several cookies used for advertising purposes were automatically placed on his or her computer, without any action required on the user's part. It said a similar thing happened when visiting one page on the amazon.fr website. CNIL said this type of cookie "can only be placed after the user has expressed his or her consent" and thus violated regulations on receiving prior consent.

It faulted Google for providing insufficient privacy information for users as it did not let them know about the cookies which had been placed and that the procedure to block them still left one operational. CNIL also said Amazon had not provided clear or complete information about the cookies it placed on computers of users until a redesign in Sept 2020. —AFP