

Climate change

Xi Jinping sets out conservative climate goal for China over next decade

President contradicts Donald Trump by calling the green energy transition ‘the trend of our time’



China's President Xi Jinping told the UN climate summit that focus should remain on the green transition even as 'some countries' were acting against it, a day after Donald Trump criticised renewable energy © Yuki Iwamura/AP

Edward White in Shanghai and **Attracta Mooney** in London

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China's President Xi Jinping has set out conservative targets for emissions cuts from the world's second-largest economy while taking a veiled swipe at US inaction on climate change under Donald Trump.

In a video address to a UN climate summit, Xi said China would cut greenhouse gas emissions by up to 10 per cent over the next decade, while doubling its wind and solar installed capacity from today's levels.

A green transition was a "trend of our time", Xi said. "While some countries are acting against it, the international community should stay focused on the right direction," he said in an apparent reference to the US.

[China](#) is the world's biggest producer of greenhouse gases and its goals for cutting emissions are the single most important component of the internationally agreed Paris accord objective of limiting the average global temperature rise to 1.5C above

pre-industrial levels.

Many climate experts wanted Beijing to pledge deeper cuts to emissions of around 15 per cent.

“China’s new climate target is both underwhelming and transformative,” said Andreas Sieber, associate director of policy and campaigns at 350.org, adding that the target “anchors” China to a path “where cleantech defines economic leadership”.

The delivery of China’s plan by Xi himself was regarded as significant and highlighted the country’s dominant position as the world’s leading producer of clean technology.

Xi’s speech came a day after President Trump said climate change was “[the greatest con job](#) ever perpetrated on the world”. The US president also attacked the shift to renewable energy globally as a “joke” that was serving China by helping it to export its technology.

Xi, by contrast, called for greater international co-operation on [green tech](#), a sector China dominates but which is being hit by US tariffs.

The headline target for cutting emissions by 2035 followed months of debate among Xi’s industrial and economic planners as the country also battles deflationary pressures.

China will aim for a 7-10 per cent cut in emissions by 2035 from its peak under the plan, while increasing the share of non-fossil fuels in total energy consumption to more than 30 per cent and boosting solar and wind capacity sixfold from 2020 levels.

The lower-than-hoped-for emissions target over the next 10 years cast doubt on whether China's 2060 carbon neutrality goal previously set out by Xi is achievable.

Li Shuo, director of the China Climate Hub at the Asia Society, said Beijing had favoured pragmatism, and left a gap in global climate action.

"The headline target disappoints environmentalists and falls short of the climate leadership the world urgently needs," Li said.

At the same time, he noted that the country had emerged as a cleantech superpower and this dominant role could enable it to surpass its targets. "Over time, this could push China towards a more proactive role on the international stage," he said.

Activist groups were similarly hopeful about the prospect of China exceeding the set goal, as it had often “under-promised and over-delivered”, said Sieber.

Based on almost three-quarters of emissions data, China's 2025 carbon emissions may be flat or lower than 2024, in part because the pace of manufacturing growth has slowed. This has hastened its ability to meet a "peak emissions" goal previously set by Xi for 2030.

By contrast, the US has withdrawn from the UN-led Paris climate accord with Trump having embraced fossil-fuel industries.

The EU has come under political pressure from nations facing economic constraints and the rise of opposition to green policies.

It failed to agree a binding climate plan to cut greenhouse gases over the next decade in time for the UN general assembly, in a blow to hopes for European leadership. Instead, ministers backed a “[statement of intent](#)” to cut emissions by 66.3-72.5 per cent by 2035.

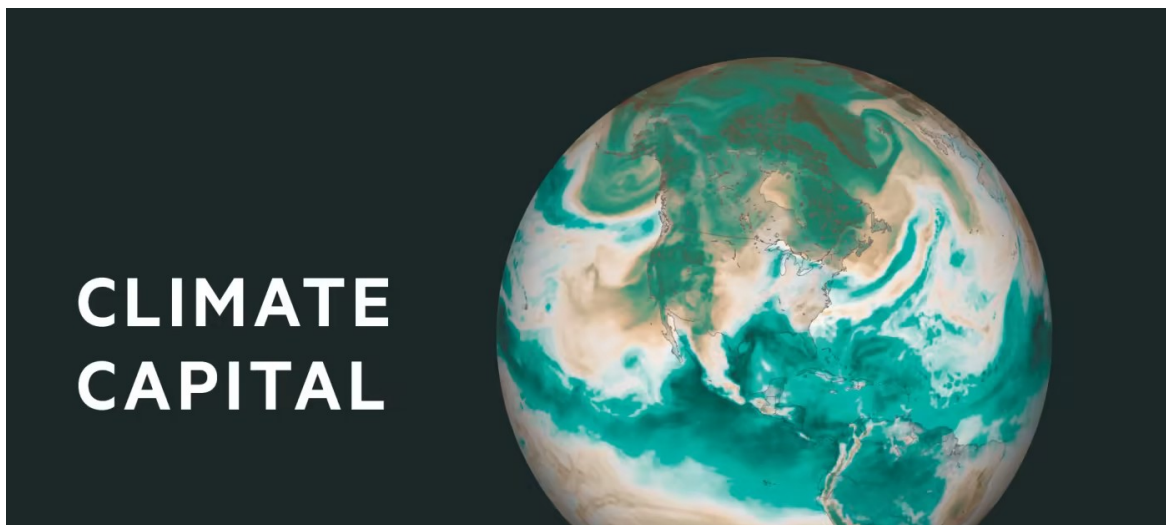
According to Ember, a UK think-tank, China is the biggest investor in clean energy worldwide, spending \$625bn last year. This amounts to nearly one-third of the global total and is driving dramatic cost falls in renewable energy, electric vehicles and batteries.

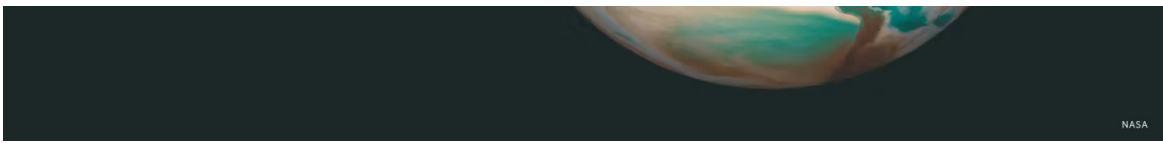
Domestically, China’s rapid deployment was driving “a plateau in direct fossil-fuel use across the Chinese economy”, Ember said.

More than 50 countries launched updated climate plans during the UN event in New York. “The science demands action. The law commands it,” UN secretary-general António Guterres said. “The economics compel it. And people are calling for it.”

**The chart on cumulative emissions per region has been amended since original publication to correct the labelling of US vs EU.*

Climate Capital





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