

Japanese Prime Minister sets goal of zero emissions, carbon-neutral society by 2050

By Yoko Wakatsuki and Reuters

Updated 1743 GMT (0143 HKT) October 26, 2020



Japan's Prime Minister, Yoshihide Suga, unveils his climate policy in Parliament on Monday.

Japan's Prime Minister, [Yoshihide Suga](#), said the country will aim to become carbon neutral by 2050.

In his first policy speech since taking office last month, Suga told Japan's parliament Monday that his "administration will put the maximum effort to realize the green society by setting a virtuous cycle in the economy and the environment."

In the past, environmental groups such as Greenpeace have criticized Japan for what they considered slow progress on cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

- Japan emitted 1.24 billion metric tonnes (1.36 billion US tons) of greenhouse gas in 2018, down 3.9% from the previous year and 12% down from its peak in 2013, according to the environment ministry.

Greenpeace welcomed Suga's move, saying it is "precisely the kind of action the world needs" -- but cautioned that the commitment must be matched by policy.

Japan had previously said it would be carbon neutral as early as possible in the second half of the century, rather than set an explicit date.

"Responding to climate change is no longer a constraint on economic growth," Suga said.

"We need to change our thinking to the view that taking assertive measures against climate change will lead to changes in industrial structure and the economy that will bring about great growth."

Japan's target of no greenhouse gas emissions on a net basis by 2050 brings it into line with the European Union, which set a target of being carbon neutral by that same date last year.

Chinese President Xi Jinping in September pledged to make his country "carbon neutral" by 2060.

Japan is the world's fifth-biggest emitter of carbon dioxide, and while steps are being taken to increase renewable energy, it also plans to roll out new coal-burning power stations.



Smog in Tokyo, Japan's capital.

Later, Industry Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama told a news conference that plans for attaining key parts of the goal would be drawn up by the end of the year.

"Carbon neutrality itself is a growth strategy, and we must carry it out with all we have," he added.

To achieve its goals, Suga said new solar cells and carbon recycling would be key, and Japan would intensify research and development in those areas, along with digitalizing society -- a policy he has pushed since taking over from Shinzo Abe.

The announcement was cheered by policy makers and investors.

- "Japan joining the EU in targeting carbon neutrality by 2050 is very welcome, and so is PM Suga's focus on green technologies and especially solar, as a growth driver," said Eric Pedersen, Nordea Asset Management's head of responsible investment.

But he also warned that Japan would need to start decommissioning coal power and stop building and financing new coal power abroad.

