

News • China may grasp climate leadership at UN talks with Trump pulling out

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Morning sky illuminated behind wind turbines near Jacobsdorf, Germany. (AP File Photo used for representation only)

HIGHLIGHTS

- China in ascendant as Washington's influence wanes
- Governments work on "rule book" for Paris agreement November 6-17

BONN, Germany: China has a chance to assert leadership of a global plan to combat warming this week at the first UN climate talks since US President Donald Trump decided to quit the 195-nation Paris Agreement, delegates say.

Government experts are to work on a "rule book" for the 2015 climate pact at the Nov. 6-17 annual meeting in Bonn, Germany. The accord seeks to end the fossil fuel era this century with a shift to wind, solar and other clean energies.

Trump once dismissed climate change as a Chinese hoax to harm the US economy and said in June that he would pull out of the agreement and instead promote US coal and oil. A formal US withdrawal will take until 2020.

No other nation has followed his lead. US influence is likely to wane compared to other big greenhouse emitters led by China, the European Union and India even though Washington will still have a place at the table in Bonn.

"The rest of the world, including all major emerging economies, has made it clear that it is committed to the Paris Agreement," Maldives Environment Minister Thor Abraham, chair of the Alliance of Small Island States (OASIS), told Reuters.

China, on track to beat its goal of a peak in carbon emissions in 2030, seems best placed to step up leadership of an agreement largely designed by Washington under former president Barack Obama, many delegates say.

The meeting "will be a great free advertisement for China," one European environment minister said. And Beijing plans to launch a nationwide carbon market this year, albeit delayed from the first half.

"The results (in Bonn) will prove that this (Paris) process has certainly not stopped," China's top climate official, Xi Zhenhua, told a news conference last week. He expressed hopes that Washington will end up staying in the Paris pact.

Adding urgency, 2017 is set to be the second warmest on record, behind 2016, according to NASA. And 2017 has had weather extremes of hurricanes, floods and drought-fuelled wildfires.

Fiji will preside at the Bonn talks, the first small island nation to do so in more than two decades of UN climate negotiations. That may give OASIS, at risk from rising seas, unprecedented influence.

The Paris rule book, including details of how to measure and report emissions, is due to be in place by the end of 2018.

Alden Meyer, of the Union of Concerned Scientists, said governments will face a tougher test in coming years when they have to ratchet up national ambitions to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

The United Nations says average temperatures will rise about three degrees Celsius (5.4 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial times by 2100 with existing policies, against a Paris goal of keeping them "well below" two degrees (3.6F), ideally 1.5 (2.7F).

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Mahesh Kuthuru

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And on Friday, US scientists released a report saying it was "extremely likely" that human activities are the main source of warming, contradicting Trump's views.

"The US has painted itself into a corner," isolated both from other nations and from mainstream science, Christiana Figures, who was the UN climate chief in Paris, told Reuters.

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