

India to host UN conference on combating desertification

India will host a UN conference on combating desertification in September.

At present, 23 percent of the world's geographical area is affected by degradation while India faces this problem in nearly 30 percent of its land due to multiple reasons including deforestation, The Times of India reported.

"It is like every minute we lose up to 23 hectares of land globally. Every day land degradation is costing humanity up to \$1.3 billion," said Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

The signing ceremony was attended by Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar and environment secretary C K Mishra in New Delhi on Tuesday. The Conference (COP14) will be held at Greater Noida from September 2-13. Nearly 200 countries will participate in the conference which is expected to review the progress made to control and reverse further loss of productive land from desertification, land degradation and drought.

"We will celebrate 25 years of UNCCD, of science and legislation and action on the ground by many countries including India. It is extremely important that in the next 25-30 years we align ourselves to achieve the global climate goals," said Thiaw.



PIXABAY

As part of its actions to check desertification, India had last month launched a pilot project to restore its degraded forests in five states — Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland and Karnataka — in a time-bound manner.

The project, launched in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), will be scaled up to cover remaining states across the country in due course as part of India's voluntary pledge to restore 13 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by 2020 and additional eight million hectares by 2030.

India had in 2015 voluntarily committed to restore 13 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by 2020 as part of its 'Bonn Challenge' pledge.

The 'Bonn Challenge' is a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.

Since land degradation is considered growing threats to peace and security in both developed and developing countries due to widespread loss of livelihoods, the member countries of the UNCCD have already committed to reverse the loss.

Situation is quite serious in India where a little less than one-third of its geographical area (328.7 million hectares) is affected by land degradation including desertification.

Nine deer at famed park in Japan die after eating plastic bags

Nine deer at a famed park in western Japan have died recently after swallowing plastic bags.

Nara Park has more than 1,000 deer, and tourists can feed them special sugar-free crackers sold in shops nearby, AP reported.

The crackers don't come in plastic bags, but people still carry them. A veterinarian said the deer may associate the plastic with food.



AP

The Nara Deer Preservation Foundation said nine of the 14 deer that have died since March had plastic in their stomachs. Masses of tangled plastic litter and packets of snacks were retrieved from their stomachs, with the heaviest amount weighing 4.3 kilograms.

Rie Maruko, a veterinarian who belongs to the animal conservation group, was quoted by Kyodo News as saying the dead deer were so skinny he could feel their bones.

Deer have four-chambered stomachs and eating objects that can't be digested can leave them malnourished and weakened.

Deer are traditionally a messenger of gods in Japan's native Shinto religion and roam freely in the park in the capital city of Nara prefecture.

Volunteers participated in a cleanup campaign in the park on Wednesday.

UK government not acting fast enough on climate change



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The UK government is facing a 'get real' moment over global heating, its advisers said.

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) said ministers were failing to cut emissions fast enough, and failing to adapt to rising temperatures, BBC reported.

The government said it would soon set out plans to tackle emissions from aviation, heat, energy and transport.

The prime minister recently announced that the UK would lead the world by cutting almost all greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 — so-called net zero.

She also aspired to the UK hosting a hugely important global climate summit next year.

But the CCC said that the UK was already stumbling over measures needed to achieve the previous target of an 80 percent emissions cut.

Its report says new policies must be found to help people lead good lives without fueling global warming.

Policies are needed to ensure that people living in care homes, hospitals and flats can stay cool in increasingly hot summers.

And ministers must show how funds will be found to protect critical infrastructure — like ports — from rising sea levels.

The committee said unless it delivered on these issues, the government would not have the credibility to host a global climate change summit of world leaders, likely to be held in the UK next year.

The committee's deputy chairwoman Baroness Brown told BBC News: "There's an increasing sense of frustration that the government knows what it has to do — but it's just not doing it."

The committee said the government's 2040 goal to eliminate emissions from cars and vans was too late.

New ways must be found to nudge some drivers into walking, cycling and taking public transport, it believes.

There's palpable annoyance from the committee that their recommendations are often ignored.

In the list of actions needed to meet emission targets, such as improving insulation of buildings and increasing the market share of electric vehicles, the committee found only seven out of 24 goals were on track.

Outside the power and industry sectors, only two indicators were on track.

Committee chairman Lord Deben, the former agriculture minister John Gummer, said, "The whole thing is really run by the government like a Dad's Army. We can't go on with this ramshackle system."

UK going backwards?

At current rates of global emissions cuts, the world may be heading for a temperature rise of more than 3°C by the end of this century — but the report says England appears unprepared for even a 2°C rise in global temperatures.

It warns that the UK is failing to insulate itself from the knock-on effects of climate change overseas such as colonization by new species, changes in the suitability of land for agriculture or forestry and risks to health from changes in air quality driven by rising temperatures.

The report says, "Last June, we advised that 25 headline policy actions were needed for the year ahead. Twelve months later, only one has been delivered by the government in full."

It complains that in some ways the UK is going backwards.

Green space in parks and gardens cools cities and helps reduce flood risks. But as more homes are crammed into cities, green spaces have shrunk from 63

percent of urban area in 2001 to 55 percent in 2018.

Heat magnifies the production of pollutants, so more people are expected to suffer breathing problems.

Meanwhile, the proportion of hard surfaces in towns has risen by 22 percent since 2001, even though they make floods worse.

The report says the government's planning should consider the risks that the world may warm by as much as 4°C by 2100.

It warns that the new net zero target requires an annual rate of emissions reduction that is 50 percent higher than under the UK's previous target.

It is 30 percent higher than what's been achieved on average since 1990 — a period when the UK has benefited from a relatively simple switch from coal to gas for electricity.

The report says, "The need for action has rarely been clearer. Our message to government is simple: 'Now, do it.'"

A government spokesman said the UK had cut emissions faster than any other G7 country and set a strong example for other countries to follow.

"We know there is more to do — and legislating for net zero will help to drive further action, as well as further measures to protect the environment from extreme weather including flood protection, tree planting and peat-land management," the spokesman added.

Friends of the Earth's Mike Childs said, "Theresa May keeps talking about the need for climate action, while giving the green light to fracking and more roads and runways."

"Reining in the rogue Department for Transport is crucial. Billions of pounds are being squandered on gas-guzzling developments, while trams, trains, buses and cycling are starved of investment."

S. African residents take steel company to SAHRC for 'polluting our air'



network24.com

Residents of Kuils River in Western Cape, who insist that nearby steel company has been polluting their air, have taken their complaints to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC).

"Our plight has reached a point where this has become a human rights issue and the company is polluting our air," said Earl Polman, a community leader, iol.co.za reported.

Homeowners have drawn up a petition and initially dragged the steel company, Cisco, to court for violating noise pollution regulations.

Polman said they did everything in their power to get the city council to act over Cisco, with no results.

"We have heard nothing from the City and there has been no commitment from the City on this issue."

"We are very frustrated," he said.

Cisco was established in the 1960s and operated until 2010. During the company's shutdown period, housing developments began in Kuils River in areas such as Vredelust, Jagtershof, St. Dumas, Highbury and Silver Oaks.

According to residents, when they purchased their homes they were under the impression the factory would no longer be operating.

However, in October 2012, the industrial plant was purchased by DHT Holdings, which continued trading as Cisco.

DHT Holding invested R550 million

to upgrade the plant with the hope of creating more than 300 jobs in the coming years. The Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa through the Department of Trade and Industry invested an additional R230 million.

In January last year, the council told residents that after measuring the noise limits, a legal notice was served on Cisco to reduce the noise and a docket for prosecution was lodged for contravening the Western Cape Noise Control Regulations.

The matter was heard in the Blue Downs Magistrate's Court on March 6 and April 3 (last year). Both cases were appealed by Cisco.

Residents are calling for the company to be deemed as a noxious trader — a company that is irreparable because it caused a great deal of pollution. SAHRC provincial commissioner Chris Nissen confirmed a complaint was received.

"The complaint is being handled by our legal advisers. We have also raised this

issue with the City and have written to them about this," he said.

Mayoral Committee member for community services and health Zahid Badroodien said, "The city's Air Quality Management Unit has en-

gaged with the National Department of Environmental Affairs' Compliance and Enforcement Unit and jointly conducted an unannounced compliance inspection of Cisco on June 12 this year. The City is awaiting the independent findings of their investigation," said Badroodien.

The City, he said, would liaise with the ministries of trade and investment; and environmental affairs to seek a meeting to discuss the Cisco matter, with a view to finding sustainable solutions.

Cisco said, "Cisco is in possession of a Provisional Atmospheric Emission Licence to minimize the impact of emissions from the operations, the plant has employed various preventative and corrective actions which are communicated to and approved by the authorities and audited (by) licensing officials."

"The plant has four permitted stacks, one for the combustion unit and three for Meltshop operation.

Due to the combustion of high/low sulphur oil, smoke is occasionally generated during plant startup as well as during equipment installation and/or repairs."