

Thimphu energy transition

If the Rubesa project is a success, the department plans to install 24 more wind farms to make up for power shortages during the dry season, when hydro output drops to less than a fifth of capacity and electricity has to be imported from India.

The renewable energy department is also looking at installing solar panels that would generate 1 megawatt (MW) of electricity, and plans to supply 13,500 solar cook stoves and 2,800 home biogas digesters in 20 districts by the end of 2016.

After the U.N. climate change summit in December, where some 195 governments agreed a new deal to tackle global warming based on national pledges, the tiny Himalayan nation has begun to put its own commitments into practice.

Transforming Thimphu into a bicycle-friendly city is one of Bhutan's objectives to curb planet-warming emissions from transport. The municipal corporation is planning to build dedicated cycle lanes and tracks around the city.

"The government should encourage people to ride bicycles, walk or use public transport, and switch to electric cars to cut down carbon emissions," said ardent cyclist Lungtok Tshewang Chedup, 23, as he climbed the road to Kuenselphodrang on his Trek 500 mountain bike.

The number of cyclists has increased since the launch of popular races several years ago, such as the international "Tour of the Dragon" organised by the Bhutan Olympic Committee, according to cycle shop owner Ngawang Dorji.

Motor vehicles are going greener too. Electric cars were introduced two years ago, and four new charging stations were installed this month, funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, bringing the total to 10.

"Global warming is a global problem that requires a global solution, and shouldn't be between the rich world versus the poor," Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay said in a written response to questions from the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Prime Minister Tobgay said the country is also committed to maintaining forest cover on 60 percent of its land - a goal it is exceeding with cover of more than 70 percent, thanks to regular tree planting.

This and other policies, such as lowering the level of glacial lakes, could help protect vulnerable mountain communities in the landlocked country from climate change impacts, including a higher risk of landslides and



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flash floods.

Bhutan's 11th Five-Year Plan, a national economic strategy running from 2013 to 2018, has embraced carbon-neutral development. The government also aims to integrate into its 12th Plan the climate action commitments it submitted for the U.N. climate deal, which will come into effect in 2020.

The agriculture ministry, meanwhile, is encouraging farmers, who make up 70 percent of the population, to adopt sustainable land use and improved livestock management, and is promoting organic agriculture.

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