

China highlights climate change efforts

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In this Wednesday Sept. 1, 2010 photo, a chimney of a coal-fired power plant emit smoke during the night in Changchun in northeast China's Jilin province. As the world's biggest greenhouse gas producer, China was widely seen as an obstacle in the Copenhagen climate summit last year. But while negotiations inched forward, Beijing poured \$34.6 billion into clean energy in 2009, nearly double the U.S. investment. (AP Photo) CHINA OUT

(AP) -- As the world's biggest greenhouse gas producer, China was widely seen as an obstacle in the Copenhagen climate summit last year. But while negotiations inched forward, Beijing poured \$34.6 billion into clean energy in 2009, nearly double the U.S. investment.

Now, with the Asian giant hosting meetings this week ahead of the next major climate conference in Cancun, China has seized the high ground, touting its green credentials publicly and even lecturing rich nations.

Its roaring economy has made China the world's largest energy user and emitter of the greenhouse gases blamed for global warming. But its broad measures to tackle climate change, including pledges to slow its [carbon emissions](#) and huge investments in clean energy, have boosted its standing during [climate talks](#), say environmental groups.

"China has a lot of domestic imperatives to take action on clean energy and energy efficiency. But these actions have put them in an advantageous position in these negotiations," said Ailun Yang, head of climate and energy at Greenpeace China.

This week, an increasingly confident China used a media blitz to promote its energy initiatives, took aim at developed countries for inadequate emission cuts and showcased its model environmental technologies.

The unusual outreach and more public stance seems to be a new strategy in the wake of Copenhagen, when many blamed China for being responsible for the collapse of negotiations, Yang said.

"China is too big - there's simply no way it can hide. You're either the leader or you will be blamed," she said.

By agreeing to host the U.N. negotiations for some 3,000 delegates, China was looking to play a more proactive role on the international stage. The choice of Tianjin allowed China to show off its high-speed rail network, a model eco-city and a pilot carbon exchange project set up last year.

"China is looking to rehabilitate its reputation," said Barbara Finamore, China program director for the U.S.-based Natural Resources Defense Council. "That's one reason for hosting the meeting and leading it. It's an opportunity to not only show they're responsible and proactive, but also

to raise and frame the issues."

The negotiations - the last formal talks before the Mexico conference - have stalled as industrialized and poor nations revisited old divisions. Last year's summit collapsed after countries failed to agree on how to share the burden for emissions cuts and how the cuts could be verified.

Casting a shadow over the talks has been the failure of the United States to enact domestic climate legislation to cap emissions of carbon dioxide, the chief [greenhouse gas](#). With leadership lagging in the U.N. climate process, China is emerging as a key player.

Using its platform as a first-time host, China raised the profile of its efforts to curb emissions. Chinese officials rolled out multiple press conferences to lay out the domestic steps it has taken, highlighting its commitment to [climate change](#).

Taking a more assertive tone during this week's meetings, the country's top climate envoy, Xie Zhenhua, criticized the United States and other developed countries for failing to make more substantial emission cuts, while making unfair demands from developing economies over emissions and transparency. The meetings end Saturday.

Xie criticized the U.S. for refusing to provide financing and technology to poor countries while being unwilling to curb its own emissions, calling it "quite unacceptable."

Meanwhile, he was quick to tout China's own energy measures - much of them fueled in part by a desire to restructure the economy away from coal-intensive industries. Coal-fired power accounts for 70 percent of the country's energy, with China consuming 3 billions tons last year.

China has pledged to slow the growth of its emissions, cutting carbon

intensity - emissions per unit of GDP - by 40 to 45 percent by 2020. Thousands of outdated and heavily polluting power plants have been shuttered in the past five years.

Nationwide efforts have also been made to reach the goal of improving energy efficiency by 20 percent between 2005 to 2010 - with well-publicized blackouts across factories, steel mills and even shopping areas and homes in recent months.

China plowed \$34.6 billion into investment and financing for clean energy in 2009 - nearly double the \$18.6 billion spent by the U.S. and about a quarter of the global total invested, according to a report by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

It surpassed the U.S. last year as the biggest clean power market and is rapidly becoming a world leader in renewable energy sources, including solar, wind and hydropower, setting a national goal of using 15 percent alternative fuels by 2020.

"They think that there's a clean energy industrial revolution happening and they want to be part of that," said Deborah Seligsohn, a senior adviser to the Washington, D.C.-based World Resources Institute.

Swarming with uniformed workers, the \$1 billion "near-zero emissions" GreenGen plant being built on the outskirts of Tianjin symbolizes China's huge ambitions in green technology as it plunges into the [clean energy](#) race worldwide.

When the first phase goes into operation next year, the power plant will become China's first commercial-scale plant to turn coal into gas before burning it, making it easier to capture carbon emissions. Working round the clock in three shifts a day, seven days a week, workers are aiming to finish initial construction by the end of 2011.

With a red hard hat perched on his head, deputy engineer Li Liangshi with the Huaneng Tianjin IGCC, gestured to the nearly built cooling tower behind him, saying, "This will be the future trend."

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