COP28: Key announcements by the Japanese government – Transition Asia's view

As COP28 concludes, Transition Asia presents a summary of key announcements from the Japanese government for our stakeholders' quick reference. Amidst the multitude of pledges at COP28, our optimism lies in the potential for expanded renewable energy (RE) capacity to inspire high-emitting industries to embrace a technology pathway centred on emission reduction rather than mere offsetting measures.

Announcements highlights

1. **Japan will end new construction of domestic unabated coal power plants:** Prime Minister Kishida announced that Japan will cease the construction of new unabated coal power plants within the country. While this declaration is groundbreaking, it is crucial to monitor the actualisation of this decision.

   TA's view: The use of the term 'unabated' has faced criticism for the potential of greenwashing, as it implies that power plants with small and incremental improvements emission reductions can be developed even though their use is incompatible with a 1.5°C pathway. Furthermore, it could suggest that countries are permitted to expand fossil fuel production without meaningful or material restriction. We interpret this as potentially laying the groundwork for the advancement of technologies like carbon capture and storage (CCS) and ammonia co-firing; we express the expectation that the government will adhere to the previously committed 1.5°C pathway.

2. **Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge:** Over 116 countries, including Japan, have committed to the Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge, aimed at tripling worldwide installations of RE generation capacity to at least 11,000 gigawatts and doubling the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements from around 2% to over 4% by 2030.

   However, in a subsequent media interview with the country's public broadcaster, NHK, Japan's Minister for Environment clarified that the RE capacity within Japan cannot be

tripled due to land constraints for domestic expansion. In lieu of expanding its own RE installation capacity in line with the pledge, the Japanese government has stated this is a global goal and will contribute by providing technical support to developing countries.

TA's View: While Japan's commitment to providing technical support and expertise is commendable, it is equally crucial for the government to accelerate the implementation and supply of RE within its own borders to facilitate the decarbonization of high-emission industries. The success of the global commitment to triple RE generation capacity depends not only on technological advancements but also on the timely and effective implementation of these technologies at the national level.

3. **Japan will be the first country to include the amount of 'blue carbon' as a reduction to greenhouse gas emissions:** During COP28, Japanese Environment Minister Shintaro Ito disclosed plans to integrate 'blue carbon' into the calculation of Japan's annual greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for reporting to the United Nations, starting from the next fiscal year. 'Blue carbon' refers to the CO_2 absorbed and stored by seaweed and seagrass. The Japanese government has already reported 2,300 tonnes of CO_2 absorption by its mangroves to the UN in the last reporting cycle.

   TA's view: It is crucial to emphasise that incorporating 'blue carbon' into Japan's GHG calculations is a method of offsetting emissions rather than a direct means of reducing them. While safeguarding healthy ecosystems and carbon sinks, including terrestrial forestation, is essential, it is important to recognise that these efforts serve as supplementary measures rather than emission reduction solutions. In fact, the absorption of CO_2 by seaweed and seagrass is not currently admitted under the GHG Gas Inventory.

   Our focus on curbing emissions at the source, particularly in high-emitting industries such as the steel sector, underscores the need for a transparent and honest discussion about emission reduction rather than relying solely on offset measures. The availability of proven technologies supports the feasibility of significant emission reduction, reinforcing the importance of prioritising reduction strategies over offsetting.