[**Climate crossroads**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1653645/climate-crossroads)

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The writer is the British high commissioner to Pakistan.

ON a visit to Sindh a month ago, I saw the breath-taking beauty of Pakistan’s coastline. I was also, sadly, told climate change threatens its very existence.

In 2015, the National Institute of Oceanography warned that Karachi could be completely submerged by 2060 if the current trajectory of rising sea levels continues. The thought that this global metropolis could be under water in a few decades should make everyone sit up, take notice and take action.

But amid gloomy warnings, I’ve also seen plenty of reasons for optimism on climate change here in Pakistan. I toured the state-of-the-art 50-megawatt Zephyr Wind Farm in Gharo, part-funded with UK capital, including 25 turbines located at the edge of the Indus delta. To protect the site from increased flooding in the near future, Zephyr is restoring the magnificent mangrove swamp around the windfarm. Natural flood protection like mangrove swamps can be up to 50 times more effective than concrete flood protection, and Pakistan’s mangroves have the potential to store around 21 million tonnes of organic carbon. They are also a potential income source if a carbon credit system becomes more widespread.

Tackling climate change is not just an issue for governments. We all need to do our part, including individuals but also, crucially, the private sector. That’s why the British High Commission in Pakistan has been running a ‘26for26 campaign’ — to encourage 26 private companies in Pakistan to commit to halving their emissions by 2030 and get to net zero emissions by 2050. We clearly underestimated the determination of Pakistani companies to get involved. I’m delighted that we’ve reached our target nine days early from the Oct 31 COP26 start date. These leading Pakistani companies including Sapphire, Soorty, Gul Ahmed and others are seeing not just brand advantage but competitive advantage in decarbonising their business. As global capital shifts away from fossil fuels, they know it makes sense for their balance sheets to be a part of the green revolution.

There are reasons for optimism on climate change in Pakistan.

Our world is heating up at an alarming rate. Pakistan is on the front line, consistently assessed as among the top 10 most vulnerable countries to climate change. As temperatures rise, by 2100, 36 per cent of the glaciers along the Hindu Kush and Himalaya range will be gone. This will devastate local communities and reduce water supplies across the whole country. According to the International Monetary Fund, Pakistan is the third most water-stressed country in the world. It also has the world’s fourth highest water use. Experts say that by 2040, it will be the most water-stressed country in the region. In Karachi, temperatures this year are already the highest in 74 years and by 2030, property damage due to coastal storm surges and rising sea levels is set to increase tenfold. It’s clear we’re on the cusp of a climate calamity if we do nothing.

That’s why the annual climate negotiations, COP26, will be the biggest event of its type the UK has ever hosted. Between Oct 31, and Nov 12, we’ll bring together world leaders, government representatives, negotiators, business and civil society in Glasgow to accelerate global action to tackle climate change.

As hosts of COP26, the UK will put the needs of the most vulnerable front and centre. We are working hard to get international leaders to enhance national commitments, accelerate progress on phasing out coal and increase zero-emissions vehicles.

Pakistan is leading the way on climate change, working closely with the UK. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, while addressing the United Nations General Assembly last month, singled out Prime Minister Imran Khan for a special mention for his leadership on reforestation. He urged the world to follow Pakistan’s example in pledging to plant 10 billion trees by the end of his term in 2023. Pakistan has also set itself ambitious energy targets with the aim of having 60pc of its energy from renewable sources by 2030.

The UK is supporting Pakistan. As well as our existing commitments, we will invest a further £53m in Pakistan from this year on, helping communities adapt to climate change and improve resilience through emergency disaster planning and supporting the efficient use of water resources. It also includes testing nature-based approaches to water management.

COP26 could be a turning point in protecting the planet. If we all act together now, we can avert a catastrophe. I urge all government leaders and private firms to come together to ensure that the summit is a success.

Pakistan and the UK are showing the world we are ek saath (together) against climate change!

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