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Historic deal reached to limit powerful greenhouse gases

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In a landmark step to combat climate change, about 200 nations, including India, today struck a legally-binding deal after intense negotiations to phase down climate-damaging HFCs that have global warming potential thousand times more than carbon dioxide.

Negotiators and policymakers held meetings since yesterday morning and through the night, having intense deliberations to iron out differences concerning the amendment to the Montreal Protocol to reach the Kigali Amendment to phase down the use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

The agreement reached by 197 parties on the amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is expected to prevent a global temperature rise of up to 0.5 C by the end of the century, while continuing to protect the ozone layer.

According to the amendment adopted by nations, developed countries will reduce HFCs use first, followed by China along with a large number of countries.

India and nine other countries of South and West Asia will follow suit. Overall, the agreement is expected to reduce HFCs use by 85 per cent by 2045.

The amendment will enter into force on January 1, 2019, provided that at least 20 instruments of ratification, acceptance or approval of the Amendment have been deposited by states or regional economic integration organisations that are parties to the Montreal Protocol on substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

"We cared for our development, industrial interest and at the same time the interest of the country," Environment Minister Anil Madhav Dave, who attended the high-level segment of the conference here, said.

Under the amendment, three different schedules have been set for countries to freeze and then reduce their production and use of HFCs.

The developed countries, led by the US and Europe, will reduce HFC use by 85 per cent by 2036 over a 2011-13 baseline.

China, which is the largest producer of HFCs in the world, will reduce HFC use by 80 per cent by 2045 over the 2020-22 baseline.

India will reduce the use of HFCs by 85 per cent over the 2024-26 baseline.

Developed countries have also agreed to provide enhanced funding support to developing countries.

Unlike the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Montreal Protocol amendment is legally binding.

Hailing the role played by India reaching the deal, Indian climate experts said India went with a clear strategy and a proactive agenda to enhance the overall environmental ambition of the deal and to protect the nation's economic interests.

"The amendment finally agreed to not only protect India's economic interests, but also doubles the climate benefit compared to the previous Indian proposal. It will avoid HFC emissions equivalent to 70 billion tonne of CO₂," Chandra Bhushan, deputy director general of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), said.

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