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Why not building up a green society?

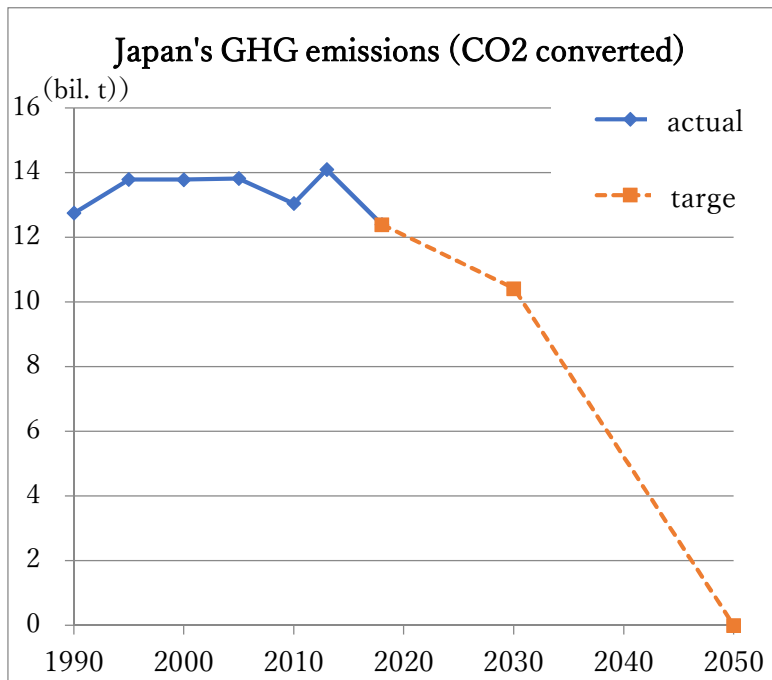
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Last August, Mr. Shinzo ABE stepped down from the Prime Minister of Japan/LDP President because his chronic disease got worse. It was just after celebrating the long-time rule of his government of 7 years and 8 months, which was a surprise to all. As the successor to Mr. Abe, LDP elected Mr. Yoshihide SUGA, the Chief Cabinet Secretary of the Abe administration, and he came into office on 16 September 2020. During the all-LDP election, Mr. Suga appealed that he will inherit the policies of the Abe administration. However, as regards the climate/energy policy, he seems to take the opposite stance. In his first speech on 26 October, he declared that his administration assumes the policy to realize Green Society, which is almost contrary to the Abe administration.

I think his declaration includes the following critical points for building a Green Society: i) the positive growth cycle of the economy and environment as piler of his government's development strategy; ii) zero GHGs emission by 2050; iii) combat against global warming will bring about another economic development, facilitating changes of industrial structure and economy; iv) become a leader of "green industries" mobilizing all possible measures including technology innovation, promotion of R&D, regulatory reforms, green investment, etc.; v) efficient and effective greening of society through digitalization; vi) enhanced energy-saving and extensive introduction of renewable energy while promoting safer nuclear energy generation; vii) convert from the long-time energy policy based on coal-fired power generation.

It is a drastic or almost evolutionary change from the previous Abe administration's energy policy. I have no idea what is the real goal of Mr. Suga, but this is a positive change, and I highly welcome this new policy.

However, things may not be so easy to achieve CO2 zero-emission by 2050. As the following graph indicates, CO2 zero-emission will require a drastic transformation of society.



Created by Kanbun based on the confirmed 2018 MOEJ data

Japan's total GHG emission in 1990 was 1.27 billion t, and the figure in 2018 was 1.24 billion t, reducing only 2.8% in these 30 years. For the past three decades, Japan made a great effort to address global warming (energy-saving at work and home, solar panels on rooves, and more hybrid cars). Its population sharply decreased, and many businesses left to China and SEA seeking lower costs. Despite all these efforts, we were not able to reduce GHG emissions at a meaningful level.

We have only 30 years left until the target year of 2050. It would not be possible to balance the emissions and absorption in thirty years only through technological innovation. Prime Minister Suga requested his cabinet members to take enhanced measures to combat global warming in each area of their responsibility. The Diet resolved the Climate Emergency Declaration to appeal the need to build a decarbonized society.

It is good that both the Japanese government and the Diet started to make a step forward, but the issue at stake would be the contents of the measures to be taken by the government. Among the issues to be urgently addressed, I think, should be a) add sustainability issue to the Japanese constitution, b) greening economy, c) greening technology, d) reliable education/information, and e) increase citizen participation in making political decisions. Active and persevered action by business, NGO/NPO, and media to discuss these critical issues would overcome the climate crisis. It is time to show that the saying "where there is a will, there is a way" applies to the climate issue when all social sectors work together.