

Bush dumps Kyoto climate treaty

Britain slams US decision

AFP, Washington

The White House said Wednesday that President George W. Bush has essentially dumped the Kyoto climate change treaty, refusing to seek Senate ratification on grounds it unfairly penalises the US economy.

"The President has been unequivocal: He does not support the Kyoto treaty. It exempts the developing nations around the world, and it is not in the United States' economic best interest," said Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer.

That came just days after the European Union reaffirmed its commitment to the 1997 climate change treaty, and a day before Bush meets with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who last week urged the US leader to respect the agreement.

Last week the EU expressed "deep concern" after Bush scrapped a campaign vow to seek mandatory cuts in carbon dioxide emissions from US power plants, saying that scientific evidence linking the pollution to global warming was incomplete.

Britain warned Wednesday that Bush's decision to effectively abandon the Kyoto climate change treaty was "extremely serious" and an "issue of transatlantic global foreign policy."

Environment Minister Michael Meacher said the planet

faced extreme weather conditions if nothing was done to reduce polluting greenhouse gases caused by transport and industry.

As the US discharged a quarter of the global total, he told BBC TV, it was "unthinkable" for it not to be part of the treaty.

Environmentalists reacted with fury and dismay to Fleischer's comments, with Friends of the Earth Europe warning in a statement that "the world is tottering on the brink of climate disaster" and accusing Bush of trying to "rat" on the treaty.

Opposition Democrats quickly assailed the abandonment of the treaty, which was signed by former president Bill Clinton.

"The president is saying we want a foreign and environmental policy that is unilateral," said Democratic House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt.

"This is a go-it-alone American policy on the environment, and it must not stand. We have to turn it around," he added.

But Fleischer countered that the world's actions spoke louder than its words.

"When only one out of 55 nations required to put the treaty into effect has acted," he said, "it's a signal worldwide that others agree with the President's position."

Only Romania has ratified the accord, Fleischer said. He dismissed questions as to whether the administration

effectively sought to "unsign" the protocol, saying that "there's nothing to withdraw from because there is no treaty in effect."

"We are not looking at a question of unsigning Kyoto," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher. "We're looking to develop technologies, market incentives and other creative ways to address global climate change."

A White House national security spokeswoman said it was wrong to assume Washington would not take part in UN talks on the protocol set for July in Germany, saying "we can still discuss the issues" with key nations.

The Kyoto Protocol requires 38 rich industrialised countries to cut "greenhouse gases" -- mainly the carbon by-product of burning oil, gas and coal -- an average of 5.2 per cent by 2010 compared with 1990 levels.

Bush contends the UN treaty is unfair to the United States because it does not commit big developing countries such as China and India to any carbon dioxide (CO2) reduction. And he suggested scientific knowledge about global warming was incomplete.

No major European nation has ratified the accord. Negotiations to agree on rules collapsed in The Hague last November amid divisions within the European Union (EU), and accusations Washington was exploiting loopholes to ease the cost of meeting the treaty's targets.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian man hoses down burning cars in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Wednesday following deadly air strikes launched by Israel in retaliation for a renewed wave of bloody anti-Israel attacks.

Indian president undergoes surgery

AP, New Delhi

Doctors performed surgery on India President Koccheril Raman Narayanan to remove gall bladder stones yesterday, a news agency reported.

Doctors at the Sir Gangaram Hospital in New Delhi said the operation was successful and the 80-year-old president was recovering, Press Trust of India reported.

Narayanan had cancelled all appointments because of acute pain and was admitted to the hospital on Wednesday.

Tornado kills 4 in Pakistan

AP, Islamabad

A tornado roared through a small swath of Pakistan's eastern Punjab province killing four people, injuring dozens more and destroying 100 homes, a government official said Thursday.

The tornado that struck late Wednesday heavily damaged Chak Miran, a village of several hundred homes about 200 kilometres south-east of the federal capital of Islamabad, said Mohammed Siddiq, deputy commissioner of the area.

Two women and two children died when the tornado hit, he said. Hundreds of others in the village have been left homeless.

Arab summit backs Palestinians

REUTERS, Amman

An Arab summit pledged financial support to Palestinians and edged towards reviving a boycott of Israel on Wednesday, but failed to resolve the divisive issue of Iraq.

Arab leaders and ministers from the 22-member Arab League ending a two-day summit in Jordan said in a final communique that a committee led by Jordan's King Abdullah would pursue contacts to discuss the "situation between Iraq and Kuwait".

"The leaders warned the Israeli government of the repercussions of its retreat from the foundations (of the peace process) and the princi-

ples laid down in Madrid in 1991," the communique said.

The summit called for an international force to protect Palestinians in revolt against Israeli occupation. It demanded that Israeli 'war criminals' be put on trial.

The leaders approved a proposal to send \$240 million in emergency aid to the Palestinian Authority over the next six months.

The summit welcomed a pledge by Iraq to give the Palestinians one billion euros (\$887 million). The Iraqi pledge had been rejected by the UN Security Council which controls Baghdad's revenues from oil sales.

The Arab leaders expressed

their "dismay and rejection" of a US veto at the Security Council that blocked the formation of an international observer force in the West Bank and Gaza.

The leaders asked its Damascus-based office in charge of overseeing an Arab boycott of Israel to reactivate its work. They endorsed a freeze in any new diplomatic or economic ties with Israel.

The Arab summit appointed Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa as secretary-general of the 22-member Arab League, replacing Esmat Abdel-Meguid.

India aborts launch of satellite carrier

AFP, Sriharikota, India

India's ambitions of joining the tiny club of commercial satellite launchers suffered a serious setback Wednesday when the launch of a powerful new delivery rocket was aborted seconds after ignition.

Flames could be seen licking their way up one of the four strap-on launch engines of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) after the engines were fired on schedule at 3:47pm.

Officials at the Sriharikota launch site in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh declared the launch postponed indefinitely and said the project's chief engineers were analysing what went wrong.

The three-stage, 49-meter (161-foot) high GSLV -- the most technologically challenging project so far undertaken by the Indian space programme -- was meant to carry a 1.54 tonne experimental satellite, GSAT-1, into geostationary orbit.

The failure will come as a huge disappointment to India's space operation, which has invested 10 years and 14 billion rupees (305 million dollars) in developing the GSLV.

"Certainly it is a setback for us," said a visibly crestfallen K. Kasturirangan, chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), who was in the mission control room.

'Immigrants now face tougher struggle in US'

AFP, Washington

The most recent waves of immigrants to the United States have found the American dream more difficult to realise than those who preceded them, according to a study released Wednesday.

The independent Centre for Immigration Studies, using US Census Bureau data, found that over recent decades each wave of immigrants has fared worse than the one before.

Looking at today's established immigrants -- those who have been in the country for between 10 and 20 years -- it found they were poorer, less likely to be homeowners, and less likely to have become citizens than established immigrants in 1950 to 1970.

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses," reads the inscription on New York's Statue of Liberty. That image remains valid today, as in the last three decades newly arrived immigrants have started out poorer than those who arrived in the two decades up to 1970, the study found.

Once in the country, they have not been as successful at using education as a means to improve their situation.

In 2000, more than 34 per cent of established immigrants had never completed high-school, while less than 10 per cent of those who were born in the country were in the same situation.

In 1970, only seven percentage points had separated established immigrants from natives in this respect.

The study's author, Steve Camarota, said the data on citizenship was worrisome as it without the vote, recent immigrants would remain without political representation.

Although there was a surge in applications for citizenship in the mid-1990s, partly in response to legislative changes in California, there has been a long-term decline in citizenship rates.

In 1970, more than 63 per cent of immigrants had become citizens. By 2000, this had declined to a little over 34 per cent.

Between 1970 and 2000, the percentage of established immigrant households who owned their own homes declined 11.3 percentage points.

Whereas in 1970, the percentage of immigrants and natives living in or near poverty was almost the same, a gap opened up between the two groups in the decades that followed -- although this was partly because of the decline in the percentage of native-born Americans who were poor.

Camarota noted that Hispanic immigrants featured strongly among the poorer, less-educated and non-homeowners. His study did not incorporate the recently released data from the main nationwide Census -- which counted a larger than expected number of Hispanics.

First Muharram procession in Lucknow in 20 years

AP, Lucknow

Elephants and camels joined 30,000 Muslims in black mourning in the first Muharram procession to be held in 20 years, after a state brokered deal to half fighting between Shia and Sunni sects.

Waving colourful banners and carrying symbolic wax coffins, the Shia Muslims began their sacred 10-day period of mourning in commemoration of an Islamic martyr on Tuesday evening. Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, began on Monday in the Middle East.

The Indian mourners marched through the Muslim dominated old city of Lucknow, capital of the largest state, Uttar Pradesh. Since 1905, more than 400 people had been killed during annual clashes between the two Islamic sects over the route the processions would take. The state government banned the processions in 1981, but allowed them to resume this year after arranging an agreement to keep the peace.

The mourning period culminates on the 10th day, Ashura, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein(R).

The Lucknow mourners marched between two buildings made of rock by the cities Islamic rulers in the 18th century.

Anwar will abscond if allowed surgery overseas: Mahathir

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim would not return to Malaysia if he was allowed to go overseas for spinal surgery, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was reported as saying yesterday.

Mahathir said this was a key reason why the government had refused to let the ex-deputy premier, who has been in hospital for four months due to back pain, seek treatment in Germany.

"We know why he wants to go overseas for treatment. We know that if we allow him to go, he will

never come back," the premier was quoted as saying by The Star newspaper.

Mahathir said the government had been "very lenient" with Anwar over his medical treatment, adding that "never in the history of this country has a prisoner been treated this well."

However Anwar's wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who heads the opposition National Justice Party, told AFP the premier's claim was baseless.

"It never crossed his mind. I give an ironclad guarantee that he will

return if he is allowed to seek medical treatment abroad. Anwar will not run away. He will return to serve the people," she said.

Anwar's request for treatment overseas was based entirely on recommendations by a Dutch specialist and had no political agenda, Wan Azizah added.

Anwar is serving a 15-year jail term for abuse of power and sodomy but considers himself a political prisoner. He has been in a government hospital since November 25 with acute back pain due to a slipped disc.

Ruling party to elect Mori's successor on Apr 22: Report

AP, Tokyo

A news report said yesterday that Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's ruling party will hold an election to choose his successor on April 22, but a party spokesman denied a date had been set.

The vote would be for the president of the Liberal Democratic Party. Because the ruling coalition has a majority in both houses of Parliament, the LDP president is expected to then be elected prime minister.

The Asahi newspaper, citing unidentified government and LDP officials, said Parliament would vote for the new prime minister on April 23, and the victor was expected to name his Cabinet the same day.

The Nihon Keizai newspaper also reported yesterday that Mori is expected to announce on April 5 his resignation and his intention not to run for another term. That report also cited unidentified sources.

The party refused to confirm the

reports. LDP spokesman Yoshiaki Tamari said that the party has not decided when it will elect a new president. He declined further comment.

Mori indicated earlier this month that he would move up elections for ruling party president, which were originally scheduled for September. That was widely viewed as an acknowledgment that he intends to step down.

The party has been under intense pressure to replace Mori ahead of elections this summer for the upper house of Parliament.

Mori's tenure, which began last April after Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi suffered a fatal stroke, has been marred by scandals and frequent verbal gaffes. He has repeatedly come under fire for his remarks evoking the nationalism of Japan's wartime leaders.

His public support ratings have plunged below 10 per cent, making him the second-most unpopular prime minister Japan has had since World War II.

N-waste convoy reaches final destination

AP, Gorleben

Under heavy police protection, a 60-ton shipment of nuclear waste that provoked environmentalist protests on its way across Germany arrived early Thursday at its final destination a waste dump in this northern town.

The convoy completed the 20-kilometre journey from a rail terminal at the northern town of Dannenberg shortly after dawn, a trip of little more than an hour after a much-disrupted journey across the country. Gathered in the rain, a small group of protesters whistled and waved flags.

Preceded by a column of armoured vehicles, the trucks inched into the Gorleben dump site a squat warehouse with three police helicopters hovering overhead and riot police lining the road. The last leg of the route was considered particularly vulnerable to

protest.

But police had left little to chance. The slow-moving six-truck convoy was briefly delayed by a tractor blockade at Laase, just short of Gorleben, police said, but the final stretch otherwise passed without major problems.

Police in riot gear and on horseback lined the road, which runs through a thick forest. Authorities said there were no protests overnight.

The final stretch by road was the scene of clashes between police and protesters during the last such shipment in 1997. To prevent a repeat, about 20,000 police were in action in Germany's biggest security operation in years.

Police had patrolled the area with night-vision equipment ahead of the shipment, which was delayed a day by protesters who chained themselves to the tracks about 25 kilometres before the rail terminal.