

UN meet breathes life into Kyoto Protocol

Montreal marathon builds bridges with US

AFP, Montreal

A landmark UN conference agreed yesterday to extend the life of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and launch a dialogue between Kyoto members and the United States on long-term action on greenhouse gases.

"We have completed our Montreal marathon, although the road before us remains so long. We are going to reconcile humanity with its planet," Canadian Environment Minister Stéphane Dion said as he brought down the gavel on a meeting high on drama, and long on exhaustion.

The meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was tasked with charting the next steps in tackling the

emissions from fossil fuel gases that scientists say are trapping heat from the Sun and disrupting Earth's fragile climate system.

After often-bitter negotiations, members of the Kyoto Protocol agreed to start talks on how to cut their emissions beyond 2012, when the treaty's present "commitment period" expires.

That agreement was a crucial show of support for a treaty that has been in deep trouble since March 2001 when the United States, the world's biggest carbon polluter, walked away from it. Australia is only other industrialised country that has refused to ratify Kyoto.

The accord also gave a powerful boost to the fledgling market in carbon emissions, a key mechanism set up under Kyoto to encour-

age cuts. The market has been beset by fears that Kyoto could die after 2012.

"Kyoto is alive and kicking," declared European Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas.

The Montreal agreement also built a bridge between the Kyoto members and the United States by agreeing to a "dialogue" on how to make long-term cuts in greenhouse gas pollution.

The dialogue is vaguely worded and, in deference to the United States, has no binding obligations or specific goals.

But, if it works, it could break US isolationism on climate change.

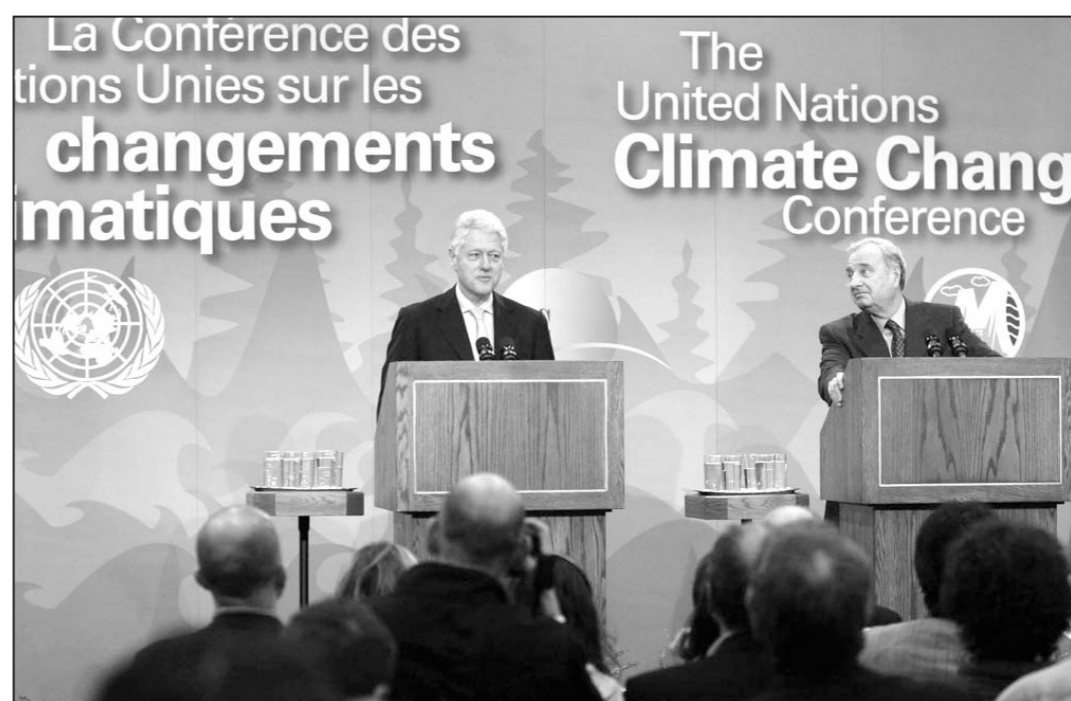
Green campaigners hope that by involving the United States more closely in a multilateral process, it will be easier for Washington to

come back into the Kyoto fold after US President George W. Bush leaves office in January 2009, they hope.

Greenhouse gases are the carbon byproduct of burning oil, gas and coal.

Billions of tonnes are released into the air each year, trapping heat from the Sun and causing what scientists say are early signs of climate change -- disruption of rainfall patterns, melting glaciers and polar sea ice and, possibly, the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season, the worst on record.

Even if all the present Kyoto goals are met, industrialised countries will have trimmed output of greenhouse gases by just one or two percent by 2012 as compared to a 1990 benchmark.



Former US president Bill Clinton (L) and Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin (R) address a press conference during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Friday in Montreal. In a show-stealing appearance rumored to have irked the US delegation, Clinton defended the UN's Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases that was ditched by his successor, George W. Bush, and said the switch to cleaner energy would create millions of jobs for the American economy.

Nepal cops net 100 anti-king protesters

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepalese police yesterday fired water cannon and arrested more than 100 pro-democracy demonstrators who rallied in the heart of Kathmandu where protests were banned after King Gyanendra seized power, witnesses said.

The demonstrators, shouting "Down With the King" and "We Want Democracy", had gathered in the capital for a demonstration to call for a return to democracy and to mark International Human Rights Day.

Police could not be reached for comment on the number detained but witnesses said more than 100 were taken away.

The demonstration near the royal palace was organized by the Citizen's Movement for Democracy and Peace.

Last February Gyanendra seized power, insisting the move was necessary to suppress a deadly Maoist revolt in the poverty-racked nation.

Australia inks pact with Asean

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Australia signed a peace treaty with its Southeast Asian neighbours yesterday and rejected what it called puerile comments about it being America's deputy sheriff in the region.

"I think even you could move beyond the puerile allegations of deputy sheriff," Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer snapped at a reporter when asked about the role often ascribed to Australia as a proxy for Washington in the region.

Downer was speaking at a news conference in the Malaysian capital moments before he signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, which calls for signatories not to interfere in each other's internal affairs.

The treaty was born within the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), which made signing the pact a condition for entry into next week's inaugural East Asian summit.

Australia hesitated to sign the treaty, saying it might conflict with its existing security arrangements with the United States, but reconsidered when it became clear that Canberra would not be invited to the summit without its signature.

"Being part of the East Asia summit, that's a quid pro quo we are happy to live with," Downer said, adding that Australia had received guarantees from Asean that its signature on the treaty would not disturb its existing treaty arrangements.



Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer (L) looks on as the Asean Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong (2nd L) receives the signed documents from Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar (R) on Instrument of Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation at the 11th Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Red Cross codifies war rules, targets terror crimes

AFP, New Delhi

The Red Cross has codified a set of rules on warfare aimed at making it easier to prosecute people who commit acts of terror and other crimes, an official said yesterday.

The code, which took a decade to draft, sets out the "customary rules of warfare" and is particularly intended to help bring to justice those combatants who commit crimes but may not belong to the army of any state.

With the fast-changing nature of warfare that increasingly involves attacks on innocent civilians, "the implications for conflicts based on the use of terror should be obvious," senior Red Cross official Michael O'Brien said.

Lawyers at a conference in New Delhi to mark the regional launch of the code hailed it as a legal landmark.

"It's a major step in holding to account those who commit crimes in conflicts who might not have otherwise been held to account," O'Brien told AFP.

The three-volume work was prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross with the help of experts

from over 50 countries.

It draws its "customary rules of warfare" from those found in common usage among "civilised states."

Its 161 rules define as illegal attacks on innocent civilians, torture, the use of human shields and a host of other offences.

The code was commissioned 10 years ago by the 192 states, which signed the Geneva Convention that lays down rules of warfare.

While virtually all states have ratified the 1949 Geneva Convention, not all have ratified treaties dealing with such matters as internal conflicts and the code is aimed at helping plug the gap, O'Brien said.

"These rules bind people whether or not they're fighting for a state that has accepted treaties on warfare conduct or whether they belong to an army of a country," O'Brien said.

The warfare rules in the code are backed up by a host of legal precedents from around the world and examples of international practices based on military manuals and legislation.

Britain helped launch Israel's nuke plan

AP, London

Two British lawmakers have accused the government of a cover-up for refusing to admit that Britain helped launch Israel's nuclear programme in 1959 by secretly selling the Jewish state a batch of heavy water a key ingredient in producing weapons-grade materials.

The British Broadcasting Corp. first reported the allegations contained in previously classified documents in August, but Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells swiftly denied the claims to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Howells' account "simply flies in the face of the known facts, now that we have access to previously classified documents," Menzies Campbell, a lawmaker and foreign affairs spokesman from the small centrist Liberal Democrat party, told the BBC's Newsnight programme Friday.

Jeremy Corbyn, a lawmaker from the governing Labour Party who wants a committee of lawmakers to investigate, told the program that Howells' statement is "simply untrue."

"Right back to the late 1950s we were a party to the transfer of nuclear technology to Israel," he said. "We were party to the development of a nuclear facility in Israel that could and has been used for the manufacture of nuclear weapons."

TIGERS ASK LANKA Avail last chance to avert war

REUTERS, Kilinochchi

Sri Lanka's government faces its final opportunity to avert a return to a civil war, the Tamil Tigers have warned, vowing to use all available resources to fight unless given a separate homeland.

The Tigers, who used suicide bombers to devastating effect in their drive for autonomy and have threatened to resume their struggle next year unless given political powers in the north and east, said their deadline depends on new President Mahinda Rajapakse's response.

"We don't prefer war. If a war is thrust on the Tamil people, the Tamil people and the LTTE (will) make use of all the resources available to fight back," S.P. Thamiselvan, head of the Tigers' political wing, told Reuters in the northern rebel stronghold of Kilinochchi in an interview late on Friday.

"We consider this is an important final opportunity," he added, saying the Tigers would give Colombo a "short space" to come up with a peace blueprint that accepts their demands for a homeland for ethnic Tamils and self-determination.

"Whether the short space is

going to be first half, mid or the latter half (of 2006) is in the hands of Colombo."

Rajapakse, allied to hardline Marxists and Buddhists who detest the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has already ruled out a separate homeland for Tamils outright.

A surge in attacks against the military, which culminated in two claymore mine blasts this month that killed 14 soldiers in the northern Jaffna peninsula, have raised fears of a return to a war that killed over 64,000 people up until a 2002 truce.

The Tigers, accused of assassinating the island's foreign minister in August, deny any hand in attacks on military patrols and sentries -- which analysts say is a stock denial -- and the ceasefire is at its lowest ebb.

Some tsunami aid workers are considering pulling out of coastal rebel territory and Colombo's stock exchange has plunged amid fears a return to war will torpedo any hope of an influx of much-needed foreign investment into the \$20 billion economy.

No word on hostages as deadline passes

Kidnapped Egyptian found dead in Iraq

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Kidnappers holding four Westerners made no contact with Iraqi authorities yesterday, the day they had set as a deadline to kill the Christian peace activists unless US and Iraqi authorities release all prisoners, the interior ministry said.

The ministry had received no information about the four Christian activists by late morning Saturday, a spokesman said. He asked that his name not be used due to the sensitivity of the situation.

The previously unknown Swords of Righteousness Brigade set Saturday as a deadline for killing Norman Kember, 74, of London, Tom Fox, 54, of Clear Brook, Va., and Canadians James Loney, 41, and Harmeet Singh Sooden, 32.

The group seized the four members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams two weeks ago. It first set a

Thursday deadline but then extended it until Saturday, without setting a precise hour.

On Friday, Sunni Arab clerics used their main weekly religious service to plead for the hostages' lives because of their humanitarian work and condemnation of the US-led war in Iraq.

Meanwhile, an Egyptian kidnapped in Iraq was found dead yesterday near Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, said a source at the local Iraqi-US coordination centre.

Mohammed Ibrahim al-Hilali, 46, was snatched by gunmen under cover of darkness late Friday outside his home in Tikrit, north of Baghdad, a police source said.

His bullet-riddled body was discovered dumped on a roadside just north of the city, said the official at the coordination centre.

Nine cops killed in Taliban raids

5 militants also die in attacks

REUTERS, Kandahar

Nine policemen were killed in two separate attacks by Taliban guerrillas in Afghanistan, police said yesterday.

The incidents happened in the southern province of Helmand on Friday night and followed a spate of militant violence in the troubled south, police officials in the province said.

They said five guerrillas died in one of the attacks.

Seven policemen were killed in Hazar Joft district after dozens of insurgents raided and burned the district and police headquarters and the other two died in a raid in Baghran district, they said.

Six police officers were wounded in the Hazar Joft attacks, district police chief Haji Bahadur said.

"Apart from our casualties, five Taliban were also killed in the fighting," he told Reuters.

A Taliban spokesman, Qari

Mohammad Yousuf, said Taliban fighters killed 10 policemen and only one insurgent had died.

Helmand was a key Taliban bastion until US-led forces overthrew their radical Islamic government in 2001.

The attacks followed a flare up of violence in the past week in which Afghan and US military officials said at least two dozen Taliban fighters were killed in adjacent Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces.

At least 10 soldiers from the US-led foreign force battling the insurgents were wounded in clashes.

They included five hurt when two US CH-47 Chinook helicopters were forced to make hard landings after being fired on by the guerrillas.

Some 20,000 US-led troops, most of them Americans, are hunting Taliban guerrillas and their Islamic allies, including Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda fighters.