

Carbon emission reached record levels in 2005

AFP, Geneva

Global concentrations of carbon dioxide, the major greenhouse gas blamed for climate change, reached in 2005 the highest levels ever recorded, the UN's weather agency said Friday.

The trend of growing emissions from industry, transport and power generation from burning fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal is set to continue despite an international agreement to cap emissions, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) warned.

"To really make CO2 level off we will need more drastic measures than are in the (1997) Kyoto Protocol today," senior WMO scientist Geir

Braathen told reporters.

"Every human being on this globe should think about how much CO2 he or she emits and try to do something about that," he said.

The latest data gathered from monitoring stations, ships and aircraft around the world were contained in the WMO's second annual Greenhouse Gas Bulletin.

Globally averaged mean ratios of carbon dioxide (CO2) in the atmosphere reached 379.1 parts per million (ppm), an increase of 0.5 percent over 2004.

Concentrations of nitrous oxide (N2O), another key greenhouse gas, reached 319.2 ppm in 2005, an annual increase of 0.2 percent, the bulletin added.

"In 2005, globally averaged concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere reached their highest levels ever recorded," the WMO said in a statement.

Braathen said the levels of the two greenhouse gases were increasing at steady rates, in line with a decades-long trend.

"It looks like it would continue like this for the foreseeable future," he added.

"The current Kyoto Protocol will not be sufficient to stabilise. It will maybe reduce the increase, but this will still take time," he added.

The treaty sets limits for emissions of six greenhouse gases emitted mainly by burning oil, gas and coal, including carbon dioxide, from 2008,

for the 165 countries that have ratified it.

The United States and Australia have rejected the compulsory cap, while developing countries, including China and its booming economy, are not covered by Kyoto.

Report for the British government released this week warned that unchecked climate change would cause huge economic damage worldwide, estimated at between five and 20 percent of global gross domestic product every year.

The governments involved in the Kyoto Protocol are due to meet in Nairobi from Monday to examine their future path in combating global warming.

Militants kill 2 alleged US spies in Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

Militants beheaded an alleged US spy and shot dead another following a deadly air raid on a religious school in Pakistan's troubled tribal belt, security officials said yesterday.

Attackers late Thursday beheaded a 45-year-old Islamic school teacher and pumped his body full of bullets near Makin, a town in North Waziristan district bordering Afghanistan, an official said.

The body of the man, named as Maulvi Salahuddin, was found dumped near a drain with a note saying that he was a "US spy", residents said.

Separately a man named as Jan Mohammad, 40, was shot dead in the troubled Bajaur district hours after Monday's airstrike that killed 80 people, another security official said requesting anonymity.

Residents said the victim was seen near the bombed madrassa in Chingai, a small town in Bajaur, talking on a satellite phone after the attack.

He also had a note left on his body accusing him of espionage. "We had suspicions that he had been working for US forces and the attack today confirmed that he was US spy," it said.

Residents said his family members refused to claim the body and very few people attended his funeral prayers.

At least half a dozen alleged spies for US forces in neighbouring Afghanistan have been killed in the semi-autonomous Pashtun tribal belt this year.

Pro-democracy activists urge UN to push for Suu Kyi's release

AFP, Yangon

Pro-democracy activists in Myanmar yesterday urged the United Nations to consider their petition seeking the release of political prisoners, including Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

The activists say they have collected 530,000 signatures on their petition in a rare show of political dissent in the military-ruled nation.

The petition asks the military government to agree to talk to Aung San Suu Kyi's political opposition, and to free her and the 1,100 other prisoners of conscience that are believed to be locked away here.

The campaign was organized by a group that calls itself the '88 Generation Students, led by former students who staged a pro-democracy uprising in 1988 that was brutally crushed by the military.

"Our government ignores the true desire of the people. It's important to reveal their desires to people around the world and the United Nations. That's why we urge the UN to think about what the people want," said Kyaw Min Yu, better by known by his nickname Jimmy.

Amnesty appeals for Guantanamo man arrested in Pakistan

AFP, Washington

Amnesty International launched a global appeal Thursday after Pakistan arrested a freed Guantanamo prisoner after he wrote a book on his experience at the controversial US detention facility.

The human rights group sent an "urgent action appeal" to its 1.3 million members worldwide to lobby governments and leaders, and press for the release of Abdur Rahim Muslim Dost, an Afghan national, poet and magazine editor.

"We are expressing concern and fears for his safety and calling on the Pakistani authorities to reveal immediately where and in whose custody he is being held," said T. Kumar, Amnesty's Washington-based Asia-Pacific advocacy director.

Muslim Dost's whereabouts are now unknown and "he is at risk of torture and disappearance," Kumar said.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani protesters shout slogans and burn a US flag during a protest in Multan yesterday against the army operation in Bajaur tribal area. More than 5,000 armed men rallied in Pakistan's tribal belt ahead of planned countrywide protests against an airstrike on a madrasa on October 30 that killed 80 students.

UN refugee agency sounds alarm over crisis in Iraq

AFP, Geneva

The UN refugee agency has warned donors that it is "distressed" at the lack of an international response to a growing humanitarian crisis in Iraq caused by alarming levels of violence, a spokesman said yesterday.

"UNHCR officials who just returned from the region warned that we are now facing an even larger humanitarian crisis than we had initially prepared for in 2002 to 2003," said Ron Redmond, a spokesman for the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Redmond told reporters the agency briefed representatives of donor governments at a meeting in Geneva on Thursday about the impact of the violence and a massive wave of displacement involving hundreds of thousands of people.

"The longer it goes on, the more difficult it gets," he said, warning that the problem was now "practically beyond" the capacity of relief agencies to deal with.

The UNHCR called for "a renewed focus" on the humanitarian crisis, warning that billions of dollars in international funding provided for Iraq's recovery development could not be spent because of security concerns.

By contrast, humanitarian funding was neglected, Redmond said, partly because of the international community's mistaken assumption that the situation in Iraq would stabilise after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

"UNHCR said it was increasingly alarmed over the incessant violence in Iraq and distressed over the lack of an international humanitarian response to deal with the massive numbers of people who are being displaced," he added.

At least 1.6 million Iraqis are displaced internally, including 425,000 who fled their homes this year largely due to sectarian violence, the UNHCR said Friday.

Democrats optimistic about Senate races

AP, Washington

Democrats were starting to taste what they hope will be victory in one if not both chambers of Congress. Republicans, meanwhile, were playing down indications that many of their incumbents were in trouble.

With congressional elections four days away, campaign officials for the Democratic Party were feeling optimistic that they would retake the House with a 15-seat gain and had a chance of netting six seats for a majority in the Senate.

House Democrats have expanded their advertising efforts into numerous races once thought safe for Republicans. Strategists in both parties said nearly 20 Republican-held seats could tip either way in a belt of states stretching from Connecticut through New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana.

Republican strategists have written off the re-election prospects of incumbent Sens Rick Santorum in Pennsylvania and Mike DeWine in Ohio, as well as six or more seats in GOP hands in the House. Dozens more Republican lawmakers were

struggling to survive.

Prominent among the GOP's positive thinkers was President Bush, who was undertaking a get-out-the-vote drive via Air Force One.

"We've been through this before," Bush said Thursday while visiting Billings, Montana, on behalf of Sen Conrad Burns. "We will win the Senate and we will win the House."

Democrats said they were ahead in many races because of the public's growing dissatisfaction with the war in Iraq. Polls show that a clear majority of Americans see the war as a mistake and far fewer support the president's handling of it.

Bush, undeterred, continued to argue that Democrats had no plan to win the war.

"The White House seems to be playing into our hands," Sen Chuck Schumer, D-Illinois, told reporters as he offered a positive preview of his party's prospects. "In an effort to strengthen their base, they keep reminding the public that there's not going to be any change in Iraq."

Pak tribesmen protest against madrasa raid

AFP, Khar

More than 5,000 armed men rallied in Pakistan's tribal belt yesterday, ahead of planned countrywide protests against an airstrike on an Islamic school in which 80 people were killed.

The demonstrations were the latest in a series against Monday's raid, which the government said its forces launched because the madrasa doubled as an al-Qaeda training camp. Locals say the dead were merely students.

"The people of Bajaur are 100 percent convinced that the attack was launched by US forces," tribal elder Akhunzada Chatan told over 3,000 people in Khar, the main town in Bajaur district, near the site of the attack.

Another 2,000 tribesmen waving assault rifles in the air chanted anti-government slogans in the small tribal town of Enayat Killi. Speakers denounced the killing of "innocent students and teachers".

Nuke talks progress depends on US Says N Korea

AP, Seoul

North Korea's No 2 leader said yesterday that any progress at revived talks on the communist nation's nuclear programme will depend on the United States.

The North agreed earlier this week to return to the arms talks after Washington said it would address financial restrictions that have limited the regime's access to outside banks.

"Results of the six-party (talks) depend on the US attitude," Kim Yong Nam told a visiting South Korean delegation, Yonhap news agency reported from Beijing.

The comments indicate a break-

through could be tough to achieve. North Korea has boycotted the talks which also include China, Japan, Russia and South Korea since November 2005.

Kim accused the US of seeking to bolster the Republican Party's popularity ahead of next week's midterm elections.

"The US has used the six-party talks for its elections, rather than promoting solutions to fundamental problems between North Korea and the US," he said.

The North Korean official claimed Pyongyang had given the US a way to save face and discuss the financial restrictions by the North proposing to return to the arms talks.