

Developing nations dig in heels on climate

REUTERS, Davos, Switzerland

Developing countries, who stand to suffer the worst effects of climate change, said on Thursday they would not shoulder full responsibility for a problem created mainly by the rich.

At a gathering of 2,400 of the world's most powerful people at Davos, a ski resort in the Swiss Alps, leaders from India, China and Brazil asserted a right to stoke their own economies, even if greenhouse gas levels rise as a result.

"Compromising with the growth objective is simply out," said Montek Ahluwalia, deputy chief of India's planning commission.

Noting that many rich signatories to the Kyoto Protocol -- an international climate change treaty -- have missed their emissions-cutting targets, Ahluwalia said the developing world wanted stronger support to help them reach environmental goals.

"Anything that creates an incentive mechanism with some assured financial support that would enable developing countries to put in place

cleaner technologies, that should be welcome," he told a World Economic Forum session.

Zhang Xiaoqiang, vice-chairman of the Chinese national development and reform commission, told the same meeting that while China was committed to using energy more efficiently, the main burden for fighting global warming lay with Western powers.

"Apart from our own efforts we expect developed countries to play a more fundamental role," Zhang said, listing investments in climate change research, technology transfers for emerging countries, assistance for adaptation, and leadership in setting concrete emissions targets as key requirements.

Global warming concerns have dominated much of the Davos proceedings this year, which started the day after U.S. President George W. Bush acknowledged climate change as "a challenging issue" in his State of the Union address.

Without making specific pledges, rich-country participants

at the World Economic Forum repeatedly raised the need to help developing countries -- particularly booming economies such as China and India -- respond to environmental pressures.

In Tokyo, the head of the United Nations Climate Secretariat said that more active involvement from emerging nations was crucial for global efforts to cut greenhouse gases.

"But for this they need international help," Yvo de Boer told journalists on Thursday after a climate change conference.

Barbara Stocking, director of Oxfam Britain, said that "big sums of money" would be needed to help poor countries cope with global temperature rises, which have already triggered irregular rainfall, floods, droughts and storms, intensifying humanitarian crises in East Africa and elsewhere.

"We have already seen that the effects of climate change are hitting poor people hardest and earliest," she said in an interview in snow-covered Davos, where chill winds have marked the end of a mild early winter in Switzerland.

Emissions-cutting technologies, particularly tools to help trap carbon dioxide from burning coal, were repeatedly cited in Davos as a necessity for developing world players to temper the environmental impacts of their fast growth.

Nicholas Stern, advisor to the British government on climate change, said getting such technology to countries like China and India, which rely on coal as a key power source, was critical.

"This is not about stopping growth. It is about doing things in different ways," Stern told Reuters Television. "I think that rich countries should shoulder the bulk of that cost."

Others said that more stringent monitoring of emissions from the Western powers would help convince emerging nations of the need to act. Brazil's trade and industry minister, Luiz Fernando Furlan, said "an international task force" to enforce commitments made under Kyoto could be a useful step.



PHOTO: STAR
Winners of a drawing competition for children and juveniles, organised by Save the Youth Forum, pose for photograph at the prize giving ceremony at National Press Club in the city yesterday. The Forum also held a discussion on 'Violence against children -- existing laws and their enforcement'.

Pakistan ranks high in nations giving death

REUTERS, Islamabad

More than 7,000 people are on death row in Pakistan, one of the most in the world, a leading human rights group said in a report released on Thursday.

The report, compiled by the Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and the private Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRC), said more than 50 Pakistanis were executed in the first half of 2006.

"There are 7,400 prisoners currently lingering on death row in Pakistan, including 42 women," HRC chairwoman, Asma Jahangir, told reporters at the launch of the report.

Christine Hubbard of FIDH, who authored the report, said flaws in legal systems in countries like Pakistan made the death sentence an unjust punishment.

"Given the serious defects in the law itself, of the administration of justice, of the police service, the chronic corruption ... capital punishment in Pakistan is discriminatory and unjust."

Most of the death sentences were carried out in Punjab, the country's most populous province, where some 6,985 prisoners are on death row, the report said.

Executions in Pakistan are carried out by hanging.

Scientists use radio waves to detect explosives

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Scientists in Japan have developed a new technique for detecting explosives such as TNT in landmines or luggage using radio waves.

Writing in Superconductor Science and Technology journal this week, they said the technique is superior to conventional methods of detection such as X-rays, and can identify different types of white powder, from flour and salt to drugs and explosives.

The technique can also identify landmines, an improvement from traditional metal detectors that cannot tell bits of metal in the ground from an actual mine.

"This will not hinder the equipment from being used in places such as airports as liquid nitrogen is becoming much easier to deal with and is already routinely used in hospitals and laboratories," said Itozaki.

One hitch for now, though, is that the screening time takes "several minutes", something the team is working to improve.

"We are improving our system. If the sensitivity becomes better, the measuring time can be reduced," He Dongfeng said.

Indonesia calls on troops to fight bird flu

REUTERS, Jakarta

Indonesia called on the military yesterday to help fight bird flu, a day after a young girl became the country's sixth victim this month.

In Azerbaijan, officials feared a return of the H5N1 bird flu virus there after a 14-year-old boy was sent to hospital as a suspected case.

Adding to global worries, Japanese officials were awaiting test results to confirm if the virus had killed poultry at farm in the south, while Vietnam is trying to control the disease spreading among birds in the Mekong Delta.

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono ordered the military chief to deploy soldiers to help fight the disease, Cabinet Secretary Sudi Silalahi told reporters.

"He called on governors, regents, mayors to be more active in leading efforts to fight bird flu in affected areas," Silalahi said after ministers held talks with Yudhoyono.

The sense of alarm was heightened by the country's welfare minister earlier in the day.

"Even though our continued effort is giving some significant progress, we are still on highest alert," Aburizal Bakrie, said at a ceremony to receive 100,000 sets of protective equipment donated by the United States.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Lanka seeks to destroy rebels, but can they win?

REUTERS, Colombo

the hawks are in the driving seat and they're going to go forward because they think they're winning ... and they think they can go all the way," the diplomat added. "(The Tigers) need to do something to achieve parity."

As troops hunt down routed Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka's eastern jungles and consolidate their grip on an eastern coastal swathe of what used to be rebel-held territory, the security forces have the upper hand for now.

But the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) withdrew from the area to fight another day, and analysts say their military apparatus is still intact.

Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, the President's brother, says the military will seek and destroy all rebel military assets -- including in the northern de facto state they control under the terms of a tattered 2002 ceasefire.

The Tigers, who resumed their fight for an independent state in the north and east after the majority-Sinhalese government ruled out their demands for a separate home-

land for minority Tamils, warn they retain their military capability and can resort to guerrilla jungle warfare.

END-GAME?

"This is a very clear enunciation that the government will wage all-out war against the Tamil Tiger rebels until they are defeated," said Iqbal Athas, an analyst with Jane's Defence Weekly in Colombo.

"It will mean there is going to be bloody war in the weeks and months to come," he added. "This very clearly shows that there won't be a peace process until such time as the LTTE agrees (to talks) or the LTTE is militarily defeated."

Athas said the fact the rebels' powerful naval arm was still intact, and their fighters still retained their capability because they withdrew rather than facing a full frontal assault, meant the Tigers are still a formidable opponent.

"With the capture of Vakarai in the east, the government has certainly has got the upper hand, but that is not to say that the Tigers' military capability has in any way been dented," he said.

"Completely eliminating the Tigers from the east is going to be a gigantic task for the army," he added. "We can't rule out the fact they (the Tigers) may try to open up new fronts."

The foes have turned a deaf ear to repeated calls from an increasingly worried international community to halt the fighting and stop mushrooming rights abuses like murders and abductions.

And many observers and ordinary Sri Lankans are worried fighting will escalate at a time when hundreds of thousands of civilians remain displaced in camps and rudimentary shelters because of war past and present.

"We are concerned that with the Tigers being driven out of the east, that this could lead to fighting spreading," said Thorfinnur Omarsdorff, spokesman for Nordic ceasefire monitors the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission.

"Both sides are talking tough, and that is definitely not in the spirit of the ceasefire agreement."

US asks Nato allies to boost Afghan help

REUTERS, Brussels

The United States yesterday urged Nato allies to do more in Afghanistan, pledging more US troops and aid while warning of a "dangerous and bloody spring" offensive from an emboldened Taliban.

But US frustration at what Washington sees as a lack of commitment by European partners was unlikely to have been assuaged at a meeting in Brussels, with few signs of concrete new commitments from US allies and an announcement by the European Union's executive of a

fall in its aid from 2007-10.

The Pentagon announced on Thursday it was extending tours of 3,200 troops in Afghanistan. Taken with other troop movements, the move will add 2,500 more soldiers in coming months as insurgents are expected to mount a new offensive.

US State Secretary Condoleezza Rice separately unveiled plans for \$8.6 billion to train and equip the Afghan army and police, and \$2 billion for reconstruction.

"We need greater commitments to reconstruction, to development, to fight the poppy economy. We need

additional forces on the ground -- ready to fight," Rice told ministers according to a prepared text of her remarks.

Richard Boucher, US assistant secretary of state for south and central Asia, told the BBC that Nato faced "a difficult and dangerous and bloody spring" as the weather improved and the Taliban stepped up their offensive.

NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said after the talks he was "relatively optimistic" other nations will step up to the plate" on extra troops and aid but gave no details.

Germany said it was weighing a possible deployment of Tornado jets to the dangerous south. But Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot said his country was already more than pulling its weight and Spanish officials ruled out providing more forces.

"We have 1,000 men (in Afghanistan). I don't think anyone can tell us our contribution is insufficient," French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy told a news conference.

A senior US official told Reuters the United States wanted to show allies there was no question of the

Bush administration abandoning Afghanistan because of its difficulties in Iraq.

"The challenge for the Americans was to show ... Iraq doesn't suck up all the resources and all the oxygen," said the official, who spoke on condition that he not be identified.

Nato's 4-year-old presence in Afghanistan has been dogged by US accusations that its allies are not shouldering their share of the security burden and European retorts that Washington is underestimating their overall commitment to the country.

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