

US to make counter-proposal on climate change at G8 summit

AFP, Berlin

The United States will call at the upcoming G8 summit for a new accord on climate change that binds only the countries that contribute most to the phenomenon, the German press said yesterday.

Washington wants the new pact on the environment to be concluded by 2009, the daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung reported, citing a US text to be tabled at the June 8 summit.

"We are committed to finding an agreement on a framework for a new accord by the end of 2008," it quoted the document as saying.

The US proposal risks worsen-

ing a row with Germany, the current G8 president, which is seeking a strong resolution on fighting climate change at the summit and wants to bring as many nations as possible to the table.

Greenpeace spokesman Joerg Feddern criticised the US proposal as an attempt to undermine the United Nations' Kyoto process with its mandatory restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions.

"It is fatal for climate protection," Feddern told AFP.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, 35 industrialised nations that have signed and ratified the pact are required to make targeted cuts in emissions of greenhouse gases,

including carbon dioxide (CO2).

The United States, the world's number one emitter of greenhouse gases, has refused to ratify the protocol and abide by the Kyoto process.

China and India's status as developing nations exempts them from mandatory targets on greenhouse gas output, though they are fast becoming big emitters of greenhouse gases as they burn oil, gas and coal to power their economies.

The US administration cited this as a reason for not ratifying the protocol, which runs until 2012.

This week China and India both signalled that they were not ready to accept binding targets on cutting emissions in the post-Kyoto

era either.

UN negotiations on a new protocol on climate change will begin in earnest at a conference in Bali in December.

Washington strongly objects to a draft declaration on climate change that Chancellor Angela Merkel wants world leaders to adopt at next week's Group of Eight summit in Heiligendamm in northern Germany next week.

The text calls for a commitment to cutting global greenhouse gas emissions to 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2050 and limiting the worldwide temperature rise this century to two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit).

One-child policy violence flares again in China

AFP, Beijing

Thousands of villagers in southern China have attacked government offices and fought police in renewed violence over a harsh population control crackdown, witnesses and state press reported yesterday.

The clashes took place on Tuesday in at least three towns in Guangxi region, which this month has seen repeated riots over abuses by authorities implementing China's so-called "one-child" policy.

The worst of the new unrest appeared to have flared in the town of Yangmei, where several thousand people surrounded the local government headquarters and the family planning office on Tuesday, said a resident who withheld her name for fear of official reprisals.

They clashed with police and paramilitary units who were rushed in to disperse the crowd, then ransacked and set fire to the family planning office, she told AFP by telephone.

"It's because of the family planning problems. Many people were injured fighting police," she said, adding that things were calm on Wednesday.

In a report issued on Wednesday, China's official Xinhua news agency confirmed there was violence in Yangmei and the nearby town of Lingshan.

The crowds had gathered at the Yangmei family planning office to claim "a refund of penalties levied for having more than one child," Xinhua said, quoting a local government spokesman.

It said the crowd ransacked the

office, but did not mention the building being set on fire.

Calls to the office by AFP on Wednesday reached only an error message saying the line had been cut.

Parts of Guangxi have been on a hair-trigger since riots erupted in at least seven cities two weeks ago over what residents say was a brutal three-month campaign by local officials to enforce the "one-child" policy.

Authorities have forced women to have abortions, destroyed violators' homes, confiscated property and imposed heavy fines, residents told AFP last week.

Many also demanded the government make amends for the abuses by returning seized property and refunding fines.

Hong Kong's Oriental Daily on

Wednesday quoted villagers as saying rumours were circulating that a villager had been beaten to death in Yangmei, and that hundreds of citizens had been injured, with many hospitalised.

Hundreds of security personnel were sent to the towns from surrounding areas and had restored calm by Tuesday night, the newspaper reported.

Liang Fuxiang, a witness to the unrest Tuesday in nearby Licun town, said crowds had reassembled again on Wednesday but he saw no violence.

However, he said villagers were still angry.

"The government has posted notices telling people not to gather but it seems the villagers may continue to (protest)," he said.

Similar unrest occurred in the nearby town of Lingshan, where hundreds of people protested, according to Xinhua.

An official with the Rong county government, where the three towns are located, told AFP local officials on Wednesday went to meet villagers in Yangmei to explain the crackdown.

First introduced in the late 1970s amid fears of runaway population growth, China's controversial family planning policies limit urban residents to one child while allowing exceptions for rural and minority residents.

Four killed in Baluchistan gunfight

AFP, Quetta

Four people were killed and another four injured when suspected insurgents traded fire with security forces and pro-government tribesmen in southwest Pakistan, officials said yesterday.

The gunfight occurred Tuesday in Baluchistan province, which has been hit by a low-key insurgency involving ethnic Baluch rebels demanding greater autonomy and control over the region's extensive mineral resources.

Officials said the dead included two passers-by, an insurgent and a pro-government tribesman. One injured rebel was captured and three tribesmen allied to the government were injured.

The rebels and the pro-government tribesmen were also from the area's Bugti clan of late Baluch tribal chief Nawab Akbar Bugti, who was killed by security forces last year.

His son, Talal Bugti, who heads Jamhoori Watan Party, denied that his supporters opened fire on the security forces. He accused the security forces of opening fire on his loyalists without any provocation.

4 held for murder of Pak CJ's aide

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police have arrested four alleged burglars for the murder of a court official with close ties to the country's suspended chief justice, sources said yesterday.

Syed Hamad Raza, a deputy registrar at the Supreme Court and personal assistant to suspended chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, was killed by gunmen who broke into his house on May 14 in Islamabad.

The 37-year-old's family described the shooting as a targeted assassination and lawyers for Chaudhry had said he was eliminated because of his connections with the chief justice.

"Four men were apprehended in Pakistani Kashmir a few days ago. They have confessed to the murder," one police source told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"During preliminary interrogation the suspects said they went to the house for a robbery and shot at the victim after he tried to close the door on them," the source said.

Raza was brought by Chaudhry to the Supreme Court from a position in southwestern Baluchistan province in 2005.



Garbage thrown on the road near Mirpur Zoo in the city causes immense environmental pollution while the authorities concerned have turned a blind eye to the problem. The picture was taken yesterday.

JAPAN LAYS MINISTER TO REST Troubles deepen for PM

AFP, Tokyo

Hundreds of mourners turned out yesterday for the funeral of Japan's corruption-tainted farm minister, who committed suicide, as political woes widened for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The shocking death of Toshikatu Matsuoka was the hardest blow yet for Abe, who has suffered sliding public confidence due to scandals and gaffes affecting his cabinet ministers and government agencies.

Dressed in black, hundreds of local residents and Matsuoka's political associates walked into a Buddhist temple in his home town in southern Japan for the private ceremony, television footage showed.

Entering the temple in Kumamoto prefecture, the mourners stopped at desks set up under tents to sign their names in condolence books.

First Lady Akie Abe read a statement by Abe, who was unable to attend the funeral because he had to appear at a legislative session for a debate with the opposition.

"Minister Matsuoka's death was

SRIPUR PILOT PROJECT FOR VOTER LIST Training for officials begin

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A training workshop for officials of the pilot project for voter list preparation with photos and national ID card began at Sripur Upazila Parishad auditorium yesterday.

The project work will begin on June 10, according to decisions taken at a preparatory meeting held on Tuesday.

With Gazipur Deputy Commissioner Syed Mizanur Rahman in the chair, Tuesday's meeting was attended by Police Superintendent Alamgir Alam, Sripur UNO and project coordinator Jalaluddin Ahmed, District Election Officer Shah Alam, Sripur Municipality Chairman Anisur Rahman and an official from Gazipur army camp.

The meeting decided that in 21 days from June 10, 16 to 22 camps will be set up.

Data collectors will go to voters' houses and distribute forms to be filled up and submitted by voters immediately or later to the camps.

Voters will go to camps where officials will take their photographs and fingerprints in front of data collectors.

Local municipality commissioners will identify the voters at camps that will remain open from 10am to 10pm.

A control room will also be set up at Sripur UNO office.

Those who will fail to enlist their names in the voter roll in 21 days will have to go to the control room later to enroll their names.

District Election Officer Shah Alam said 120 data collectors have already been selected primarily.

A letter has been sent to Pally Bidyut office to ensure smooth power supply during working hours at the camps.

so sudden and he was too young. The minister gave dreams and hopes to the young people who carry out Japan's farming," Akie Abe said.

Matsuoka's widow Hatsumi wept and thanked the First Lady and other visitors.

"After receiving the prime minister's condolences, he must now be standing still and bowing his head on his journey in the world of the departed souls," she said, invoking Japanese images of a peaceful afterlife.

"As a bereaved family, we will live proud that he fulfilled his duty as a farm minister," she said.

Matsuoka, 62, known as a fervent lobbyist for farmers in his district, hanged himself Monday as he was set to face questioning in parliament over a bid-rigging scandal.

The scandal, and a separate row over massive blundering of pension payments, have taken a heavy toll on Abe, whose poll numbers have dropped sharply less than two months ahead of national elections.

The Social Insurance Agency has said it cannot identify some 50 million payment records on its keep, some of which may be for dead people, and has lost other payment accounts.

Opposition parties have presented testimony from senior citizens who paid pension premiums for decades but were denied benefits because welfare officials lost their records.

Abe and main opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa started their debate with brief remarks about Matsuoka before a heated exchange over pensions.

"I wish he felt the courage to explain things to the public," Ozawa said of Matsuoka and the scandal the opposition had grilled him over. "We hope that his soul rests in peace."

Ozawa asked Abe to take responsibility for the pension payment row.

Abe said the problems developed before he was in power but promised to set the issue straight within a year and set up an expert panel to examine pension accounts.

Abe also promised to do away with a five-year statute of limitations that had prevented some elderly people from claiming unpaid benefits.

"We have a responsibility to ease the concerns of the Japanese people," Abe told Ozawa in the 45-minute televised debate. "People must receive the benefits they are entitled to."

The ruling bloc immediately passed a bill on reforming pensions in committee. The opposition argued that more debate was needed and briefly scuffled in committee with ruling coalition lawmakers.

The full lower house, where Abe enjoys a strong majority, is expected to approve the bill on Thursday.

Pensions are the basic foundation of livelihood. We must not politicize the issue," said chief government spokesman Yasuhisa Shiozaki, urging "non-partisan efforts."

Recent polls have shown that the public regarded pension reform as the top political priority, ahead of Abe's signature issue of rewriting the post-World War II pacifist constitution.

Edict against Indian army in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

A top Muslim cleric has issued an edict against the Indian army for renovating mosques in Indian Kashmir and urged Muslims to resist such moves "tooth and nail."

The fatwa by Mufti Bashiruddin -- Kashmir's grand mufti -- declared that Islam permits only Muslims to carry out work on their shrines.

"No person, organisation, other than Muslims can construct, reconstruct, renovate any mosque or shrine," the professional jurist and scholar, who interprets Muslim law, said in a statement released late Tuesday.

"I appeal to all the Muslims in general and Islamic clerics, scholars and imams to resist such plans tooth and nail," he said, calling upon Muslims to repay the army for the work it has carried out.

The army has spent 5.5 million rupees renovating various Sufi shrines and mosques as a "goodwill gesture" for a war-weary public that generally views Indian soldiers as occupiers.

An estimated half-a-million Indian soldiers are in Kashmir battling a separatist revolt that erupted in 1989. The war has claimed at least 42,000 lives, more than a third of them civilians, according to official figures.

The grand mufti branded the Indian army's renovations a "naked interference" in religious matters.

The army has launched operation "sadbhavana" or goodwill across Kashmir and set about rebuilding schools, bridges and roads in rural areas.

Most Kashmiris follow the traditionally political Sufi branch of Islam, and some clerics have urged a boycott of mosques and shrines renovated by the army.



Claudia Amaral speaks at a workshop on 'Disaster risk reduction and lessons learned' at the auditorium of Dhaka Ahsania Mission in the city yesterday.

Preparedness needed for disaster risk reduction

Speakers tell workshop

Speakers at a workshop here yesterday underscored the need of adopting disaster preparedness policy and creating awareness among people to reduce losses caused by natural disasters, says a press release.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission and Concern Universal jointly organised the workshop on 'Disaster risk reduction and lessons learned' at the auditorium of Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM).

DAM Deputy Executive Director M Ehsanur Rahman chaired the workshop while Concern Universal Country Director Stephane Bonduelle gave the welcome address.

Speakers further said that disaster preparedness should be sustained by

creating public awareness through their participation. Disaster preparedness is more important than relief distribution, they stressed.

Concern Universal in partnership with Dhaka Ahsania Mission has been implementing the community-based approaches to disaster preparedness (CBADP) project since March 2006 with the support of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Department, Third DIPECHO Action Plan for South Asia.

This project is being implemented in 26 unions of six upazilas under the districts of Jamalpur, Narsingdi and Bogura.

Participants shared their experiences gathered from the activities on disaster preparedness in the 241

Gono Kendras (local community centres) and 52 high schools. Documentary film shows of CBADP Project and earthquake were also displayed in the workshop. Disaster risk reduction concepts and approaches were also presented.

Besides, recommendations were finalised through an open discussion and sharing of experiences. Different government agencies, national and international NGOs, representatives of educational institutions and media professionals participated in the workshop.

DAM Programme Director Shafiqul Islam conducted the entire programme while CBADP Project Manager Claudia Amaral and OXFAM GB DIPECHO Project Manager Tanja Berretta also spoke.



The participants of a two-day special training course on 'Managing People' pose for photograph with the guests at a local hotel in the city recently. Rapport Bangladesh Limited Chairman and Managing Director Dr M Mosharrar Hossain, sitting third from right, and trainer from India Upal Majumdar, sitting fourth from left, are seen among the participants. Rapport Bangladesh Limited for Heidelberg Cement Bangladesh Ltd organised the course.

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