

Bush pushes new climate change plan

AFP, Washington

US President George W Bush said Thursday he would urge major industrialised nations at a summit next week to join a new global framework for fighting climate change after the Kyoto Protocol lapses.

Environmental groups immediately criticised the plan as vague and based on non-binding limits on the greenhouse gases blamed for global warming, but Britain and Germany hailed the move as an important, if symbolic, step forward.

"The United States will work with other nations to establish a new framework on greenhouse gas emissions for when the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012," Bush said in a speech laying out his agenda for the June 6-8 G8 summit in Germany.

Bush, weighed down by the Iraq war and facing European criticisms over the US approach to global warming, also urged rich countries to eliminate barriers poor countries face to getting new environment-friendly technologies by 2008.

"If you're truly committed to helping the environment, nations need to get rid of their tariffs, need to get rid of those barriers that prevent

new technologies from coming into their countries," he said.

Bush's initiative may deepen a dispute with Germany, the current G8 president, which seeks a strong resolution on fighting climate change at the summit and which wants to bring as many nations as possible to the table.

"My proposal is this: By the end of next year, America and other nations will set a long-term global goal for reducing greenhouse gases" in consultation with major greenhouse gas-producing nations, including fast-growing India and China, and industry leaders, over the next 18 months, Bush said.

Countries would also set "mid-term national targets and programs" depending on "their own mix of energy sources and future energy needs," he said, adding that there would be a "strong and transparent" method to assess progress in reaching the non-binding targets.

"It's important to assure that we get results," said Bush, who made the initiative a key goal of his talks next week with leaders from Europe, where critics have accused Washington of dragging its feet on climate change.

The US president said he would push G8 leaders to boost invest-

ment in research and development of environment-friendly technologies, and would help poor countries acquire such cutting-edge science by cutting tariffs and other barriers by year's end.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Bush's proposal showed "a huge step forward."

"The significance of this is America accepting this (climate change) as a real problem now, accepting it's got to offer real leadership on this issue and being prepared to be part of a global deal at the heart of which will be the reduction of emissions." German Chancellor Angela Merkel called the initiative "an important statement" but gave no sign of backing off efforts to get G8 leaders to back a draft declaration on climate change over fierce US opposition.

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).

Environmental groups were less kind, with the Natural Resources Defense Council's top climate expert, David Doniger, warning that "it's too late to slide by on vague

calls for unenforceable long-term goals."

"The president will have no credibility with the countries he wants to bring to the table unless he is committed to specific limits to cap and cut our own global warming pollution," he said.

Senate Democratic Majority Leader Harry Reid (news, bio, voting record) said he hoped the proposal marked "the beginning of a reversal of the administration's untenable and unwise position on global warming and not a public-relations stunt to defuse criticism going into the G8 discussions in Germany."

The 35 industrialised nations that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol are required to make targeted cuts in emissions of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide (CO2), by 2012.

The United States, the world's number one emitter of greenhouse gases, has signed but refused ratify the protocol, saying that China and India's exemptions from its goals make the pact meaningless.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN
A father playfully throws his child up in the air to catch him back at Kamalapur Railway Station in the city after the baby started crying as it's so hot out there. The country sweaters in heat wave that has been sweeping for the past several days. The temperature rose up to 35.9 degree Celsius in Dhaka yesterday.

Cot death on rise in Australia

AFP, Sydney

Cot death campaigners yesterday expressed concerns that the number of babies dying unexpectedly in their sleep was on the rise in Australia.

The number of children dying from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) increased from 59 in 2004 to 87 in 2005, SIDS and Kids Western Australia spokeswoman Angela Doyle said.

Doyle said education programmes about safe sleeping practices for babies had reduced cot deaths from more than 500 in 1988 and some parents now felt that SIDS was no longer a risk.

"It is of grave concern that 20 years on, the statistics seem to reveal there could be a growing level of complacency in the community," she said.

"We think it is because people feel the SIDS thing is sorted."

Doyle said some parents were worried that following advice to put their babies to sleep on their backs would result in their skulls failing to form properly, a condition known as plagiocephaly.

But she said there was no greater risk of this condition from doing so.

SIDS campaigners recommend parents put their babies to sleep on their backs, provide them with a safe mattress and cot, keep them away from cigarette smoke and leave their faces uncovered while sleeping.

It is not known what causes SIDS, but the risk is highest among infants aged between one and six months.

Thaksin loyalists vow to voice anger at ballot box

AFP, San Kamphaeng

Heavy security blankets this Thaksin Shinawatra stronghold but the ousted prime minister's supporters say they will voice their anger over his ban from politics at the ballot box, not on the streets.

Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) was dissolved and its leaders barred from politics Wednesday after a special court found senior party officials guilty of tampering with elections in April 2006.

To make matters worse for TRT, its main political rival, the Democrat Party, was acquitted of similar fraud charges by the same court.

While the decision stunned TRT supporters countrywide, its impact has perhaps been felt more strongly in the kingdom's north, among mostly poor farmers and villagers who are Thaksin's most ardent loyalists.

"I feel hopeless about Thai politics," said Duangta Ongprom, a 40-year-old newspaper vendor whose shop sits a few hundred meters (yards) from the site of the original Shinawatra silk factory, founded by Thaksin's grandfather in this orderly northern town where the future prime minister was born.

"Since his government was ousted, many projects which benefit poor people such as scholarships were cancelled," she said, referring to the public improvement programmes that were a pillar of Thaksin's pro-poor policies.

Land grabbers kill one in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Armed land grabbers attacked landless people, living on a piece of government land, and killed one person and injured 15 others, in Satkhira in the early hours of yesterday.

The dead was identified as Kabir Hossain Sana, 45, son of Kurban Ali Sana.

Among the injured Khairul Islam, Ala Uddin, Akram Hossain, Khadja Khatun, Jeher Ali, Sufia Khatun, Abdur Rahim, Malek, Jabbar and others were admitted to Satkhira Sadar Hospital and local clinics.

Sources said a group of land grabbers led by Mahabbat Mir, Abdul Gafoor, outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) leader Abdul Halim, Pute, Ebadul and Ohab Ali Peyada attacked the landless people at Bairagirchak in Kaliganj around 12:30am yesterday. They fired 20-25 shots at the residents of the government khas land.

Panic gripped the locals and they called, over cellphone, Officer-in-charge (OC) of Kaliganj Police Station Nur Islam for help. The OC asked them to leave their homes and gather at a remote edge of the land they are living on, local sources said.

The landless people followed the OC's instructions but around 5:00am the attackers started firing at them. Kabir and the others were hit by bullets then. Kabir was rushed to Satkhira Sadar Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries.

Quoting locals, police said over 300 landless families were residing on 300 acres of government khas land. They took lease of the land from the government in 2002.

Since taking lease, a group of influential land grabbers, who had

been illegally occupying the land, was trying to evict them, sources said. They had launched attacks eight times on the landless people earlier and had beaten an old man to death in 2005.

Over 500 landless people with Kabir's body went to the residence of superintendent of police (SP) of Satkhira and a local army camp yesterday afternoon demanding arrest and exemplary punishment to the killers.

A case was filed with Kaliganj Police Station accusing 25 people.

Two of a family burnt alive in Dinajpur

A CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Two members of a family were burnt alive in a fire that broke out at their house at village Muskurpara under Birganj upazila of Dinajpur district on Thursday night.

The dead were identified as Sofia Khatun, 65, wife of Hamid Ali, and their granddaughter Liza, 8.

Fire Services sources said the fire originated from the kitchen at around 10:30pm and soon engulfed the house.

Sofia and Liza were asleep in a room. Two other members of the family—Rahima and Lopa—received burn injuries and were admitted to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

On Thursday, the fire fighters from Thakurgaon rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze.

'Computer programme could cut Caesarean rate'

BBC ONLINE

Giving women more information about the type of birth they could have may avoid around 4,000 Caesarean sections a year in England and Wales, scientists say.

A UK team found women who had already had one section were less likely to choose another if they used a computer programme to help make their decision.

Researchers say the system also reduced the anxiety of women, which can create problems during and after delivery.

The study is published in the British Medical Journal.

Rates of Caesarean section are increasing in the UK - from 9% of births in 1980 to 23% now.

Although they can be desirable, Caesareans can increase the risks of complications to the baby and the

mother, particularly for future pregnancies.

The researchers from the Universities of Bristol and Dundee looked at 742 women who had previously had one Caesarean section.

Information helps

The women in the study were split into three groups, receiving either traditional care, or using a computer-based information programme telling them the risks and likely outcomes of different delivery methods, or the more detailed "decisions-analysis system".

The decisions-analysis system asked the women what value they attached to the possible outcomes of the different delivery methods, and then gave them a "preferred option" based on their answers.

The women then discussed this option with health professionals, and

37% of those using this detailed analysis system had a vaginal birth.

This compared to 30 percent of the women receiving the usual care and just 29 percent of those using the other computer information programme.

Professor James Walker of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said this was an interesting study which could have exciting implications.

He explained: "It is very important to get information to women to help them to make a decision, so anything that improves their ability to get that information is a benefit."

He said around 75 percent of women such as these, who have already had a previous Caesarean, could have a successful natural delivery for a subsequent pregnancy.

Iraqi Sunnis revolt against al-Qaeda

AP, Baghdad

US troops battled al-Qaeda in west Baghdad on Thursday after Sunni Arab residents challenged the militants and called for American help to end furious gunfire that kept students from final exams and forced people in the neighbourhood to huddle indoors.

Backed by helicopter gunships, US troops joined the two-day battle in the Amariyah district, according to a councilman and other residents of the Sunni district.

The fight reflects a trend that US and Iraqi officials have been trumpeting recently to the west in Anbar province, once considered the heartland of the Sunni insurgency. Many Sunni tribes in the province have banded together to fight al-Qaeda, claiming the terrorist group is more dangerous than American

forces.

Three more US soldiers were reported killed in combat, raising the number of American deaths to at least 122 for May, making it the third deadliest month for Americans in the conflict. The military said two soldiers died Wednesday from a roadside bomb in Baghdad and one died of wounds inflicted by a bomb attack northwest of the capital Tuesday.

Lt Col Dale C Kuehl, commander of 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, who is responsible for the Amariyah area of the capital, confirmed the US military's role in the fighting in the Sunni district. He said the battles raged Wednesday and Thursday but died off at night.

Although al-Qaeda is a Sunni organisation opposed to the Shia Muslim-dominated government, its ruthlessness and reliance on for-

eign fighters have alienated many Sunnis in Iraq.

The US military congratulated Amariyah residents for standing up to al-Qaeda.

"The events of the past two days are promising developments. Sunni citizens of Amariyah that have been previously terrorized by al-Qaeda are now resisting and want them gone. They're tired of the intimidation that included the murder of women," Kuehl said.

A US military officer, who agreed to discuss the fight only if not quoted by name because the information was not for release, said the Army was checking reports of a big al-Qaeda enclave in Amariyah housing foreign fighters, including Afghans, doing temporary duty in Iraq.

Indian families seek POWs in Pakistan

AP, New Delhi

A group of Indian families is travelling yesterday to Pakistan, where they will visit jails and scan their records, looking for traces of relatives in the military who went missing during the 1971 war between the south Asian rivals.

Chances are remote that they will find any of the 54 men from the Indian army and air force who went missing in action more than three decades ago.

The Indian government has repeatedly raised the issue with the Pakistani government, which says it has no Indian prisoners of war.

Family members remain hopeful, however.

"I have a hope that I will come

back with him," said Nirmal Kaur, whose husband Asa Singh was among those missing.

Kaur and 13 others are expected to visit 10 Pakistani jails, look through their records and meet other Indian prisoners during a two-week visit to Pakistan, a defence ministry official said on condition of anonymity as he was not authorised to talk to reporters.

Defence Minister AK Anthony, who met the family members in New Delhi on Thursday, said the government would not give up efforts.

Pakistan President Gen Pervez Musharraf said earlier this year that his government was ready to open the country's prisons to the families of the Indian soldiers.

Palestinian factions to hold direct talks in mid-June

AFP, Cairo

Palestinian factions are to hold direct talks in Cairo later this month to shore up a more than two-week-old ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the Hamas movement of prime minister Ismail Haniya said yesterday.

"A broad dialogue involving all of the Palestinian factions will be held in Cairo in mid-June," the Islamist group's spokesman Ayman Taha said after two days of talks with Egyptian mediators.

"We have agreed on the continuation of the ceasefire and on the implementation of the agreements reached between Hamas and Fatah as well as on restoring confidence between the two factions," Taha said.

More than 50 people were killed in fighting in Gaza between Hamas and the secular Fatah faction of president Mahmud Abbas before the ceasefire went into effect on May 16.

Taha said agreement had also been reached on "restructuring the Palestinian security forces on the basis of citizenship and not on the basis of party affiliation."

The mainstream security forces under the control of Abbas are dominated by Fatah loyalists but the then-Hamas controlled interior ministry established a paramilitary Executive Force under its own command last year.

PEDESTRIANS' WOES



A portion of a road in Bailey Road area goes under sewage water as a manhole overflows, left, while construction materials occupy a footpath at Panthapath in the capital, right, adding to the suffering of road users.



PHOTO: STAR

Inter-Korean talks end without agreement

AFP, Seoul

Reconciliation talks between North and South Korea ended yesterday with no agreements reached, following a row over Seoul's decision to link promised rice aid to Pyongyang's denuclearisation.

After four days of high-level talks, the two sides issued a four-sentence statement that set no date for the next ministerial meeting.

The South's Unification Ministry had said earlier in the day that no joint statement would be issued and described the mood as "not good."

The two sides said only that they "have sufficiently presented their positions and held sincere discussions on fundamental and actual matters linked to progress in inter-Korean relations."

They agreed "to continue to further examine ways to boost reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas and peace on the Korean peninsula."

The South has refused to make its first shipment of much-needed rice aid until the North begins honouring a six-nation nuclear disarmament deal reached in February.

The communist state says that the two issues are unrelated and that "foreign powers" -- a reference to the United States -- are interfering with the rice deal.