

Stakes high at Copenhagen

Hopes dwindle as world leaders gather for climate conference

AFP, Copenhagen

Driven by an ever-louder drumbeat of alarm, the world's nations come together today in a bid to lift the curse of climate change hanging over coming generations.

In the brief history of environmentalism -- and, some would argue, in the longer sweep of human history itself -- the stakes at the 12-day conference in Copenhagen have never been higher.

The goal: to roll back the peril of hunger, disease, drought, flood, storm and rising seas created by mankind's unwitting impact on the weather system.

To achieve this aim, the 192 members of the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) must show solidarity and sacrifice on an unprecedented scale.

More than 100 leaders are set to attend the finale on December 18. They are under ratcheting pressure to seize the day rather than a photo opportunity, to seal a deal rather than preside over a fiasco.

Trillions of dollars, powerful economic and national interests and the livelihoods of millions underpin the Copenhagen moment.

Countries must agree to curb their use of coal, oil and gas, the fossil fuels hewn from the ground and drilled beneath the earth that have powered our prosperity -- and helped create the carbon monster.

And they must set up a financial safety net for poor countries least to blame for global warming but most exposed to its wrath, and provide them with technology to avoid becoming big polluters in turn.

"The aim is nothing less than to slice through the Gordian knot intertwining climate change and development," says Jean-Charles Hourcade of the International Centre on Environment and Development (CIRED), a French thinktank.



This Nasa handout image received on July 31, 2007 shows the spectacular "blue marble", the most detailed true-colour image of the entire Earth to date. Driven by an ever-louder drumbeat of alarm, the world's nations come together today in a bid to lift the curse of climate change hanging over coming generations.

Key negotiator pulls out of India's team

PTI, New Delhi

India's campaign at the crucial climate change talks appeared set for a rocky start with a key negotiator pulling out of the delegation to Copenhagen, apparently upset over the government's announcement of undertaking voluntary carbon intensity cuts.

Former IFS officer Chandrashekar Dasgupta has not joined the other negotiators who left for Copenhagen last evening to participate in the talks to decide a successor to the Kyoto Protocol to tackle global warming.

CO2 unleashes more warming than thought

AFP, Paris

Carbon dioxide indirectly causes up to 50 percent more global warming than originally thought, a finding that raises questions over targets for stabilising carbon emissions over the long term, a study said on Sunday.

In a paper published in the journal Nature Geoscience, British scientists said a tool commonly used in climate modelling may have badly underlooked the sensitivity of key natural processes to the warming caused by CO2.

As a result, calculations for man-made global warming on the basis of carbon emis-

sions may be underpitched by between 30 and 50 percent, they said.

The study was coincidentally published on the eve of a 12-day UN conference in Copenhagen aimed at providing a durable solution to the greenhouse-gas problem.

The authors stressed that the more-than-expected warming would unfold over a matter of hundreds of years, rather than this century.

The findings do not mean that the predictions for temperature rise by 2100, established notably by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), should be rewritten, they said.

Melting Himalayan glaciers threaten 1.3 billion Asians



AFP, Kathmandu

More than a billion people in Asia depend on Himalayan glaciers for water, but experts say they are melting at an alarming rate, threatening to bring drought to large swathes of the continent.

Glaciers in the Himalayas, a 2,400-kilometre (1,500-mile) range that sweeps through Pakistan, India, China, Nepal and Bhutan, provide headwaters for Asia's nine largest rivers, lifelines for the 1.3 billion people who live downstream.

But temperatures in the region have increased by between 0.15 and 0.6 degrees Celsius (0.27 and 1.08 degrees Fahrenheit) each decade for the last 30 years, dramatically accelerating the rate at which glaciers are shrinking.

As world leaders gather in Copenhagen this month for a crucial climate change summit, campaigners warn that some Himalayan glaciers could disappear altogether within a few decades.

"Scientists predict that most glaciers will be gone in 40 years as a result of climate change," said Prashant Singh, leader of environmental group WWF's Climate for Life campaign.

"The deal reached at Copenhagen will have huge ramifications for the lives of hundreds of millions of people living in the Himalayan drainage systems who are already highly vulnerable due to widespread poverty."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a UN body regarded as the world's top authority on climate change, has warned Himalayan glaciers could "disappear altogether by 2035" and experts say the effects of global warming are already being felt in the region.

In Nepal and Bhutan, the receding glaciers have formed vast lakes that threaten to burst, devastating villages downstream.

Nepalese mountaineer and environmental campaigner Dawa Steven Sherpa said he first became interested in climate change after a close call when part of the Khumbu icefall above Everest base camp collapsed during an expedition in 2007.

Sherpa, who has scaled Everest three times, was walking on the glacier minutes before the collapse, and said his near miss alerted him to the dramatic toll that global warming is already taking on the Himalayas.

"Every time I go to the mountains the older Sherpas tell me this is the warmest year yet," Sherpa, who will take part in a special "summiters' summit" in Copenhagen, told AFP.

File picture taken on October 13, 2008 shows a trekker walking close to Lirung Glacier in the Lantang Valley, some 60km north-west of Kathmandu. The glacier has retreated at least two kilometres in recent decades, an effect of global warming that is worrying local residents. The Himalayan glaciers provide water for more than a billion people in Asia, but experts say they are melting at an alarming rate, threatening to bring drought to large swathes of the continent within decades.

Philippines troops arrest 62 under martial law

AP, Shariff Aguak

Philippine troops arrested 62 people and discovered another major weapons cache Sunday after martial law was imposed in a southern province following the country's worst political massacre.

Thousands of troops, backed by tanks and warplanes, have taken control of Maguindanao province in a government crackdown on the powerful Ampatuan clan, accused in the Nov. 23 killing of 57 people travelling in a convoy of a political rival. The clan has denied involvement.

Late Friday, President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo imposed martial law in Maguindanao the first use of martial law in the Philippines since late dictator Ferdinand Marcos imposed it nationwide more than 30 years ago. The move was announced on national television Saturday morning.

US, Britain will fail to isolate Iran

Says Ali Khamenei

AFP, Tehran

Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei lashed out yesterday at the US and Britain, labelling them Tehran's main "enemies" and warning they will fail to isolate Iran over its nuclear issue, a report said.

"Americans are at the head of the list of enemies and the British are the most awful of them," state television reported Khamenei as saying in an address to thousands of people to mark a major Shiite ceremony.

"Americans, Zionists and other oppressive powers tried to isolate Iran for the past 30 years, but they failed and with God's help they will also fail in the future," Khamenei said in reaction to sustained Western threats to isolate Iran over its controversial atomic

programme.

Khamenei, Iran's all-powerful leader who has the final say in all national issues, said Western powers led by Washington are lying when they claim Tehran's nuclear programme is aimed at producing nuclear weapons.

"We ask them to stop lying and as we have said in the past the Iranian nation is pursuing nuclear technology and if we do not achieve it today, then tomorrow when the world economy is driven by nuclear power we will be late," the cleric said, re-asserting that Iran's nuclear intent is entirely peaceful.

"The Iranian nation wants to achieve it so that it does not have to beg to Westerners 20 or 30 years later. But the Westerners through the false campaign are preventing us

from getting it."

He also said that when the "oppressive powers fail to achieve their goal against a country through threats of military action or sanctions, then they start saying that there is a division inside that country."

"We have to be careful as the enemy will launch propaganda to say that there is division."

Tension over Tehran's controversial nuclear programme has peaked in recent weeks after it rejected a high-profile nuclear deal brokered by the UN atomic watchdog and also announced plans to build 10 new uranium enrichment plants.

World powers object to Tehran's uranium enrichment programme as the process can be used to enrich the material to produce fuel for a nuclear reactor or to make atomic bomb.

BDR to empower its battalions

FROM PAGE 1

According to the existing BDR Act, 1972, the director general of the force conducts the trial for mutiny.

But the draft of the new law proposes that the DG convene the court comprised of other officers whenever it is necessary and would never preside over any court of the force himself.

"If the draft is approved by the government and passed in parliament, the new law would be named as proposed -- Border Guard Bangladesh Law [Bangladesh Simanto Bahini Ain]," says a BDR official involved in formulation of the draft law.

The existing law allows the authorities to jail any soldiers for highest seven years for involvement in mutiny. The convicted soldiers may also be fined and dismissed from job.

But the force cannot try grievous offences like murder as the existing law does not empower its court to hand down capital punishment.

As a result, the force is currently conducting the trial of mutiny by its own court, while the accused of killing, looting, arson and other grievous

offences will be tried in civil courts.

BDR sources say the draft law proposes to empower the BDR court to award highest capital punishment for mutiny or provoking a mutiny.

The draft law would also allow a convict to appeal against the punishment or submit a prayer for exemption from the punishment, which is absent in the existing law.

It also proposes to have a special tribunal in the force where a convict can appeal against the conviction.

The special tribunal can check the trial proceedings to decide about the appeal. It would be empowered to cut, add or even exempt the punishment handed down by the BDR court.

Now the power of awarding punishment is very much centralised in the force, and only the headquarters can exercise it when necessary. But the new law proposes to give such power to the battalions, which directly command the troops in the field, say sources.

"As part of brining decentralisation, the authority of punishing a member of the force

for any sort of unruly activities would go to battalion level," adds the official.

"Besides the appeal provision in the special tribunal, a convicted soldier can also be able to apply for exemption," the official continues.

But the convicted soldier would be allowed to apply for exemption on condition that he wouldn't challenge the decision of the special tribunal.

Any convicted soldier would be able to apply for exemption to the immediate superior officer of the official, who gave the verdict.

"We are going to suggest such provisions to modernise the law and uphold human rights to ensure check and balance in the entire trial proceedings," adds the official.

Insiders say there is no clear definition or interpretation of many offences in the existing BDR Act. But the draft law is proposing to incorporate definition of many offences, which are not at least allowed in a disciplinary force, or make those clearer.

Citing an example, a source says there was very sketchy definition about bribery and border crimes, which actually

did not help the force take any action in this regard.

But the proposed draft law would elaborate more about such crimes.

The BDR authorities would also propose in their reform proposal to decentralise the power of promoting staffs.

The official says currently only the officers can get immunity for doing something wrong in good faith. But the draft law offers immunity also to the soldiers.

Meanwhile, the three-member BDR court starts trial of 7 Rifles Battalion today at the 41 Rifles Battalion headquarters, reports our Satkhira correspondent.

BDR DG Maj Gen M Mainul Islam would lead the court, which also has Lt Col Khalid and Maj Lutful Karim as members.

The court is set to try at least 61 accused soldiers of 7 Rifles Battalion at Nildumur, said Lt Col Iqbal Azim, commanding officer (CO) of 41 Rifles Battalion.

Of the accused, 34 are behind bars, while the others will be hauled before the court during trial, the CO added.

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Virgin Galactic readies maiden suborbital flight

AFP, Los Angeles

British billionaire Sir Richard Branson will unveil a craft yesterday that could soon carry tourists on an out-of-this-world trip into space -- for a mere 200,000 dollars.

The lunar-like landscape of the Mojave desert between Los Angeles and Las Vegas will stage the roll-out of Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo (SS2), the brain child of aerospace engineer Burt Rutan.

SS2, which can carry six passengers and two pilots, plans to begin test flights next year and start commercial flights between 2011 and 2012.

Virgin Galactic, owned by Branson's Virgin Group and Abu Dhabi's Aabar Investments, says about 300 adventurers from around the world have paid a total of 40 million dollars in deposits to guarantee spots on the carbon composite wonder machine.

Aerospace experts are already bidding on suborbital flights as the next generation of business travel.