

EU to offer poor countries billions for climate battle

AFP, Berlin

The EU is to offer "one to three billion euros" in aid to developing countries over the next three years so they can fight the effects of climate change, the Financial Times Deutschland reported Sunday.

The funding is to be agreed at a European Union summit in Brussels set for Thursday and Friday, which will also coincide with the world climate conference in Copenhagen that opens on Monday.

The draft text obtained by AFP says that "the Copenhagen agreement should include provisions on immediate action after Copenhagen starting in 2010 and acknowledges that this requires scaled up financial support."

"The EU calls on developed countries to announce their contributions to such support. The EU is ready to contribute with fast start funding of at least X billion euros for the years 2010 to 2012," the text said.

The German daily

quoted a diplomatic source as saying that the EU would in fact propose "one to three billion euros."

Money to help developing countries develop in a less polluting way and to help them adapt to the potentially

disastrous effects of climate change is a key issue at the Copenhagen summit.

The summit's goal is to deliver an accord that will ratchet up efforts against climate change, driven by uncontrolled emissions of

heat-trapping carbon gases from fossil fuels.

An outline accord in Copenhagen would be fleshed out in negotiations next year and take effect from 2013, when current pledges under the Kyoto Protocol expire.



A woman walks between displays, entitled "Cool Globes," an exhibition about combating global warming and climate change in the Kongens Nytorv area in the centre of Copenhagen yesterday. The Danish capital is hosting a two-week conference to discuss emissions targets and financial measures to combat climate change.

Indian govt under fire in carbon cut pledge

AFP, New Delhi

India's environment minister came under fire in parliament on Monday for his pledge last week that the country would reduce its carbon intensity by 20 to 25 percent by 2020, compared to 2005 levels.

Jairam Ramesh's announcement came ahead of the start of talks in Copenhagen on a new global climate treaty and reportedly upset many of the Indian negotiators.



European climate commissioner Connie Hedegaard, a former Danish minister in charge of the meeting, delivers a speech during the opening of the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference at the Bella Centre in Copenhagen yesterday.

People worldwide want action on climate change

AFP, London

Most people worldwide believe climate change is a very serious problem that their governments must tackle, a poll said yesterday, as the landmark Copenhagen summit on the issue was set to get underway.

However the poll of more than 24,000 people also showed concern about rising global temperatures from man-made emissions has dropped in the

United States and China -- the world's two biggest polluters.

Sixty-four percent of people think climate change is a "very serious" problem, up from 44 percent of those polled in 1998, according to the GlobeScan survey conducted for Britain's BBC World Service.

"The poll shows strong worldwide support for action on climate change, in spite of the recession," GlobeScan

chairman Doug Miller said.

"However, the mixed opinions in the United States and China suggest leadership in Copenhagen may need to come from others," he said.

Despite the global economic downturn, 61 percent worldwide support government investment to address the issue, even if it meant that it harmed their national economy, the poll conducted in 23 countries said.

Head of UN panel blasts 'Climategate' affair

AFP, Copenhagen

The head of the UN's Nobel-winning panel of climate scientists on Monday attacked the so-called Climategate affair as a suspected bid to undermine the credibility of his organisation.

Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) used the opening ceremonies in Copenhagen to lash those who had hacked into emails among top scientists in Britain assessing global warming.

"Given the wide-ranging nature of change that is likely to be taken in hand, some naturally find it inconvenient

to accept its inevitability," said Pachauri.

"The recent incident of stealing the emails of scientists at the University of East Anglia shows that some would go to the extent of carrying out illegal acts, perhaps in an attempt to discredit the IPCC."

Pachauri proudly defended the IPCC's reputation as an arena for weighing scientific evidence fairly, neutrally and objectively, and said: "Warming of the climate system is unequivocal."

The emails, hacked last month, have been seized on by climate sceptics as evidence that scientists have distorted data to dramatise the threat of global warming.

Diesel engine with very low emissions developed

ANI, Washington

Researchers at the Technische Universitaet Muenchen (TUM) in Munich, Germany, have demonstrated a diesel truck engine with barely measurable emissions.

The research team, headed by Professor Georg Wachtmeister from the Chair of Internal Combustion Engines, has succeeded in reducing the pollutants in exhaust emissions to barely measurable levels.

Iraqi MPs approve new electoral law

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's electoral authorities yesterday began preparations for parliamentary polls early next year, after MPs finally approved a law governing the vote just minutes before a midnight deadline.

Protracted negotiations over the law lasted more than two months, but lawmakers passed it late Sunday evening, paving the way for elections early next year.

"The law has been adopted with near-unanimity," said parliament speaker Iyad al-Samarrai in the Council of Representatives chamber. He did not give a breakdown of the vote because it passed by a substantial majority.

The presidency council, made up of President Jalal Talabani and his two deputies, now has to announce a date for the election, with the United Nations noting that holding it on February 27 would be "feasible."

Police clash with protesters at Iran university

AP, Tehran

Security forces and pro-government militiamen clashed with protesters shouting "death to the dictator" outside Tehran University yesterday, beating men and women with batons and firing tear gas, on a day of nationwide student demonstrations, witnesses said.

Thousands of protesters demonstrated in the streets outside the campus in support of students inside. As they chanted "death to the dictator," riot police and Basij militiamen charged the crowds, the witnesses said.

The plainclothes Basijis beat protesters on the heads and shoulders as the crowd scattered, then regrouped on nearby street corners. Nearby, protesters and Basijis pelted each other with stones, the witnesses said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

Injured UK soldiers snub Brown in hospital

ANI, London

Soldiers wounded in Afghanistan humiliated Prime Minister Gordon Brown through a massive snub when he paid a visit to their hospital in Birmingham.

Brown was humiliated as the men asked for the curtains round their beds to be closed, the Daily Star reports.

He was stunned when half the men at Birmingham's Selly Oak medical unit refused to see him.

Among them was Sapper Matthew Weston, 20, who lost both legs and his right arm in a bomb blast.

He said, "I didn't want to speak to him, I didn't want to waste my time talking to someone who was just trying to make themselves look good. I spent the day with my family instead. Many of the lads just closed their curtains and hid themselves away."

Obama's Nobel moment overshadowed by war

AP, Washington

He's the Nobel Peace Prize winner who just ordered 30,000 more troops to war. He's the laureate who says he doesn't deserve the award. He's not quite 11 months on the job and already in the company of Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama.

This is President Barack Obama's Nobel moment, an immense honour shadowed by awkward timing.

When Obama leaves for Oslo, Norway, on Wednesday to be lauded for his style of international diplomacy, he goes knowing that the American people are more concerned about something else: peace of mind.

The economy has left millions of Americans hurting. The mood of the country is dispirited more people than not think the nation is going in the wrong direction and soothing news is tough to find. Unemployment is in double digits even as the bleeding of jobs has slowed.

Pak graft amnesty challenged

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court yesterday began hearing arguments to invalidate a corruption amnesty, which could open the door for graft cases to be brought against the embattled president's allies.

The hearings come as President Asif Ali Zardari fends off rock-bottom public opinion and calls for opposition parties to relinquish much of his power, and as the nation struggles to contain a violent Taliban insurgency.

Although Zardari's position as president protects him from prosecution, cases could be reopened against key figures including the interior and defence ministers, embarrassing his government and possibly implicating the president.

Acting Attorney General Shah Khawar, however, told the court as the proceedings opened that as the law was promulgated by the previous regime, "I am under instruc-

tion not to defend it."

The so-called National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) was passed in October 2007 by then-military ruler Pervez Musharraf, as he faced increasing international pressure to hold democratic elections.

It quashed charges against Zardari and his wife and ex-prime minister Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated two months later, and other politicians in an apparent gesture of reconciliation to allow them to stand for office.

Zardari's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) went on to win elections in 2008, restoring civilian rule, but the NRO expired at the end of November.

Chief justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry last week ordered the Supreme Court to hear arguments for and against the NRO, and if it decides the law was unconstitutional, some 8,000 beneficiaries could have their cases reopened.

"At the end of the argu-

ments the bench has to decide whether the NRO was a valid piece of legislation when it was promulgated," Khawaja Haris, an advocate of the Supreme Court, told AFP.

As the hearings commenced, the 17-member bench ordered the submission of a list of all beneficiaries of the NRO.

"It is an historic occasion," said Roedad Khan, a former government official who is one of the challengers of the law.

"The courts are working independently now and we are confident those who collaborated with the military dictatorship will be defeated."

Although Zardari cannot be prosecuted, his immunity could also be challenged in court, although not in the current hearings.

Haris said, however, that many outstanding corruption cases against politicians implicated Zardari indirectly, and if there was a conviction in such a case, it could bring the government's moral authority into question.

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