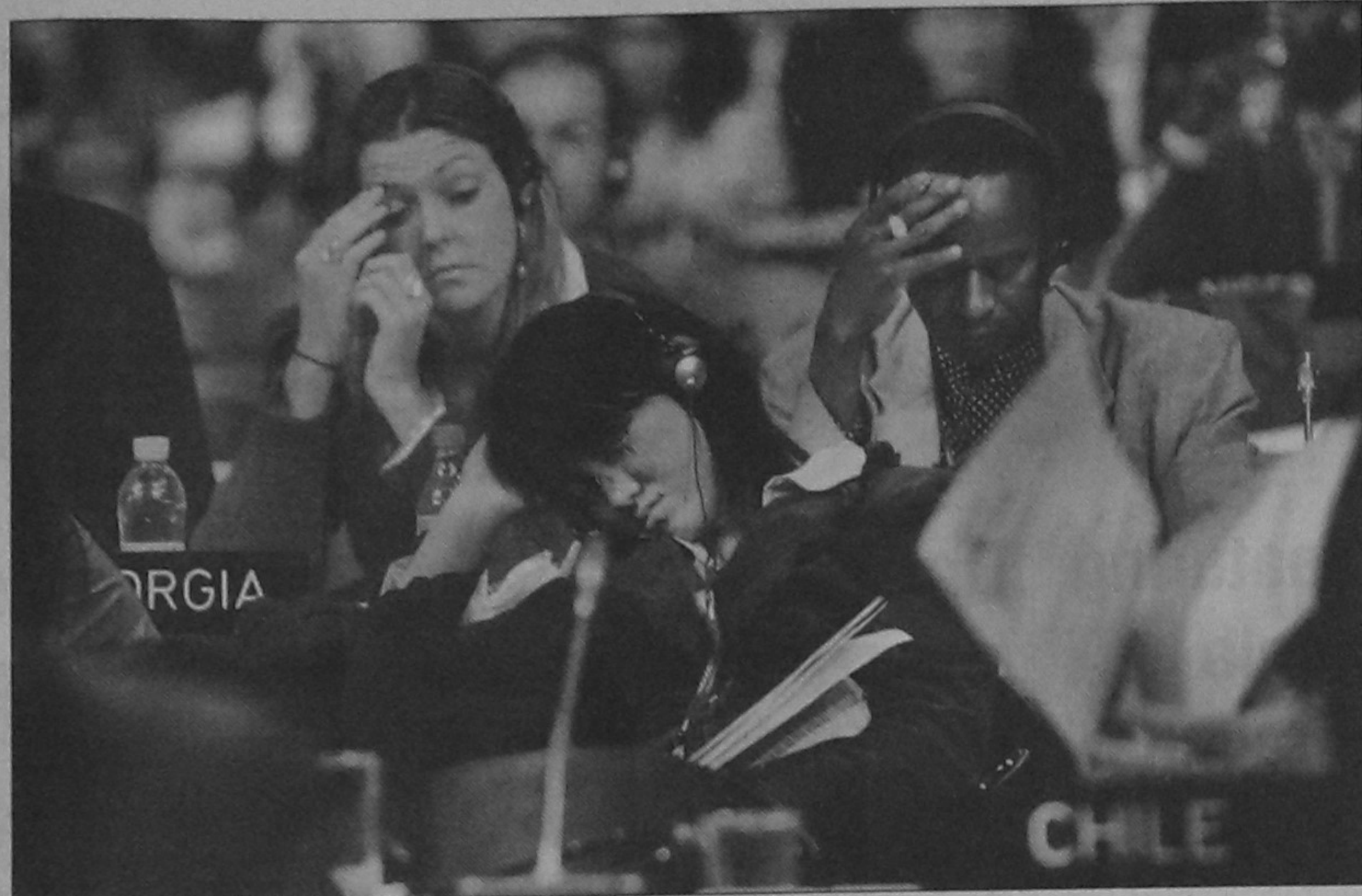




Members of delegations attend a plenary session at the Bella Centre of Copenhagen yesterday at the end of the COP15 UN Climate Change Conference. Fury erupted among delegates at the Copenhagen climate talks Saturday over a draft accord agreed by a select group of leaders, with several poor nations saying it amounted to a coup d'etat against the United Nations.

Fury erupts at climate talks

AFP, Copenhagen

Fury erupted at the Copenhagen climate talks Saturday over a draft accord agreed by a select group of leaders, with some delegates comparing it to the Nazi Holocaust and Biblical betrayal.

"It is asking Africa to sign a suicide pact, an incineration pact in order to maintain the economic dependence of a few countries," said Lumumba Stanislas Diapina of Sudan, chairing the Group of 77 and China bloc of 130 poor nations.

"It's a solution based on values that funnelled six million people in Europe into furnaces."

Dia-ping's comments triggered a storm of protests from the floor, with Sweden calling them "absolutely despicable".

Ed Milliband, Britain's climate minister, condemned the "disgusting comparison" which he said "should offend people across this conference whatever background they come from."

Tensions cracked over the draft agreement that was crafted after talks between around two dozen leaders on the sidelines of a summit on Friday, including US President Barack Obama

and China's Premier Wen Jiabao.

The agreement contains a commitment to limit global warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit), but did not spell out the important stepping stones -- global emissions targets for 2020 or 2050 -- for getting there.

Tuvalu's Ian Fry, whose country is one of the most at risk from global warming, said the agreement amounted to Biblical betrayal.

"It looks like we are being offered 30 pieces of silver to betray our people and our future," he said to applause in the chamber which sat through the night.

"Our future is not for sale. I regret to inform you that Tuvalu cannot accept this document."

The president of the Maldives, the Indian Ocean archipelago which fears being swallowed by rising sea levels, said climate change was "a present and very clear danger" to his country and said the failure to commit to a lower rise in Earth's temperature would have disastrous consequences.

"I am so sorry that this was so blatantly obstructed by big emitting countries," President Mohamed Nasheed said.

Much of the anger was directed towards Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, the conference's chairman, who was accused of overseeing a stitch-up.

Venezuela's representative Claudia Salerno Caldera said that Rasmussen was "going to endorse this coup d'etat against the United Nations".

"Those of us who wish to speak have to make a point of order by cutting our hands and drawing blood," she added, before opening a red-stained palm.

Rasmussen, looking uneasy in his chair, faced a barrage of criticism during the highly charged session which was convened several hours after Obama said he had reached a political agreement with around two dozen fellow leaders, including from China and India.

Cuba accused Obama of "behaving like an emperor," adding that the Havana government would not accept the draft declaration.

The plenary session was temporarily suspended after Costa Rica demanded explanations for key text that had disappeared from a draft resolution while the leaders' wrangling had unfolded.

Main points in draft deal

AFP, Copenhagen

Following are the main points in the draft deal agreed among leaders of more than two dozen countries at the UN climate talks in Copenhagen.

The text, called the Copenhagen Accord, is aimed at being a springboard to a world-wide pact on tackling climate change. The draft -- which delegates said would be put to a plenary session, presaging a rocky ride from nations deemed to have been excluded from the process -- spelt out these provisions:

GLOBAL WARMING "should be kept below two degrees Celsius" (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), says the draft. But it does not identify a year by which carbon emissions should peak, a position resisted by emerging giants.

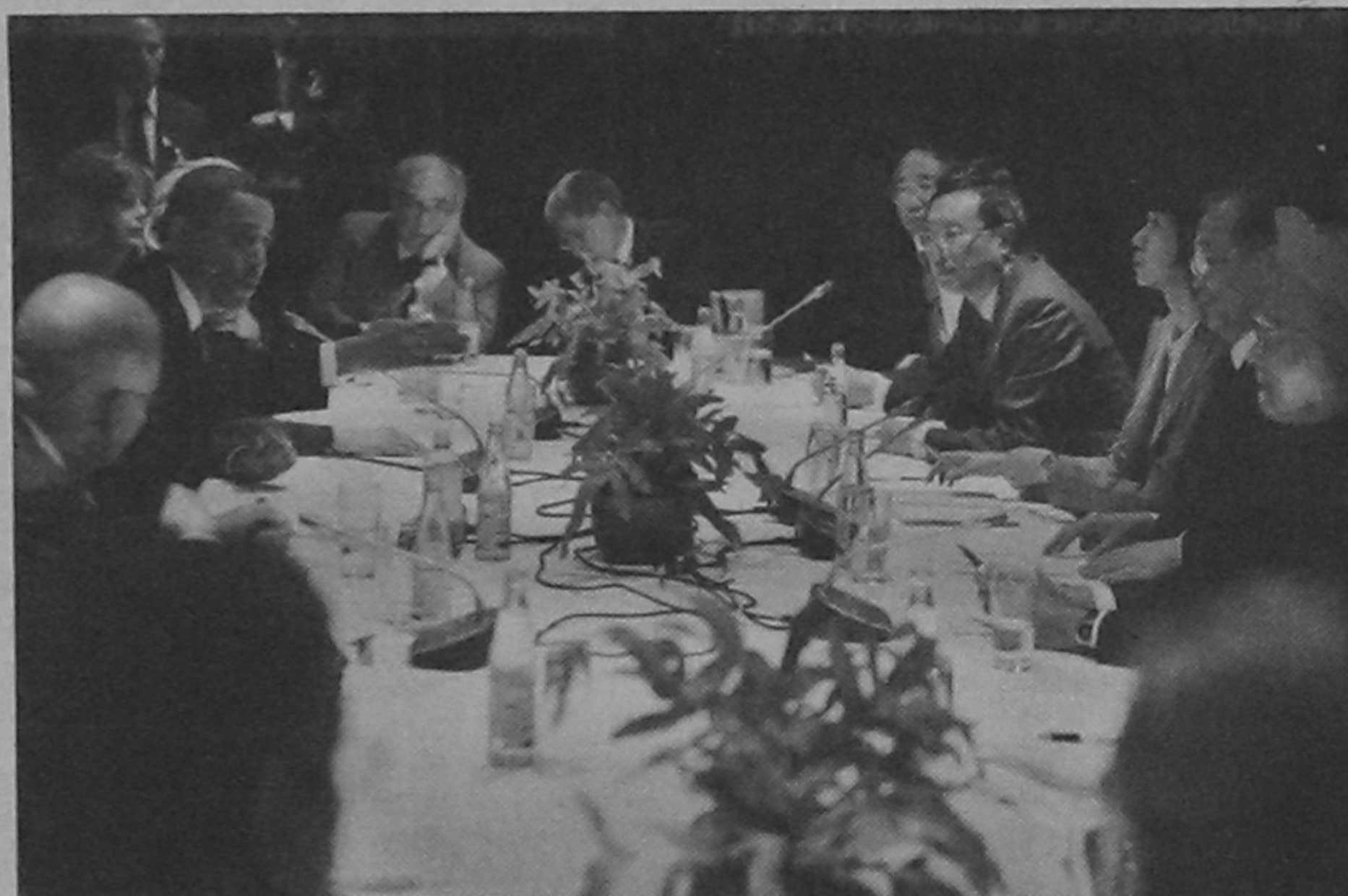
FUNDS: Rich countries are pledging 10 billion dollars in the three years from 2010-2012 to help poor countries tackle climate change. They also set the goal of "mobilising jointly" 100 billion dollars a year by 2020, drawn from "a wide variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, including alternative sources of finance."

VERIFICATION: The pledges of rich countries will come "under rigorous, robust and transparent" scrutiny under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Developing countries will submit national reports on their emissions pledges under a method "that will ensure that national sovereignty is respected."

MID-CENTURY TARGETS: The text does not endorse the goal of halving the global output of carbon pollution by mid-century, an objective many rich countries endorse.

LEGALLY-BINDING TREATY: There is no deadline for transforming the objectives outlined in the accord into a legally-binding treaty. It had been widely expected that the text would call for a treaty to be finalised before the end of 2010.



US President Barack Obama (C left) speaks during a multi-lateral meeting with Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao (2nd R), Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) and other leaders at the Bella Centre in Copenhagen on Friday on the 12th day of the COP15 UN Climate Change Conference.

Campaigners denounce 'abject failure'

AFP, Copenhagen

Environmental campaigners yesterday branded the Copenhagen climate summit an abject failure, saying it made progress on financing the battle against climate change but little else.

US President Barack Obama announced the deal at the end of the 12-day, UN-led meeting in the Danish capital, calling an agreement among key leaders "unprecedented" but conceding that it was not enough.

Nnimmo Bassey, chair of Friends of the Earth International, called Copenhagen "an abject failure."

"By delaying action, rich countries have condemned millions of the world's poorest people to hunger, suffering and loss of life as climate change accelerates," he said.

"The blame for this disastrous outcome is squarely on the developed nations."

Kumi Naidoo, head of Greenpeace International, said the agreement contained so many loopholes "you could fly an airplane through it -- Airforce One, for example".

"The only thing we can agree on is the science. Everything else is a fudge, everything else is a fraud, and it must be called as such," he said.

Naidoo added that the outcome of what was intended as a planet-saving deal should be a "wake-up call" for civil society.

"We have to put our leaders under much more pressure than they have been," he said.

The Sierra Club, a leading US environmental group, said that the blame lay largely with the US Senate, which has yet to approve legislation backed by Obama to curb carbon emissions in the world's largest economy.

"President Obama and the rest of the world paid a steep price here in Copenhagen because of obstructionism in the United States Senate," said Carl Pope, the Sierra Club's executive director.

Media disappointed too

AFP, Paris

The world's media yesterday highlighted the bitter taste left by the provisional climate change deal struck by the major powers at the UN summit in Copenhagen.

With the wrangling unfinished, editorials spoke of "failure", "disappointment" and face-saving measures by the leaders at the summit with their deal which failed to set targets to cut the carbon emissions blamed for global warming.

"Low targets, goals dropped: Copenhagen ends in failure," said a headline in the online edition of British daily, The Guardian.

"The 'historic' climate change deal at the Copenhagen climate summit has descended into chaos after some developing nations rejected the plan for fighting global warming championed by US President Barack Obama," The Daily Telegraph said.

"Many goals unmet," declared a New York Times headline.

Iran ready to examine nuke fuel swap offers: FM

Stop threats for striking nuclear deal: Ahmadinejad

AFP, Tehran/ Copenhagen

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said yesterday Tehran was ready to examine the West's proposals for a nuclear fuel swap, the official IRNA news agency reported.

"We are ready to examine proposals by the other side about the fuel swap," Mottaki told IRNA.

Mottaki's comment came after Iran's proposal on how to provide fuel for a research nuclear reactor in Tehran was rejected by Washington.

The United States dismissed earlier this month an offer to swap on the Iranian island of Kish 400 kilograms (880 pounds) of low-enriched uranium for nuclear fuel enriched to 20 percent, in what would be the first phase of a deal with world powers.

Mottaki reiterated a mid-December statement that Iran did not "insist on" the Kish plan.

"The objective to offer that proposal was to open a way for the other side."

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told AFP on Friday that Iran was ready to strike a uranium enrichment deal if the United States and the West respect the Islamic Republic and stop making threats.

"Everything is possible, 400 kilos, 800 kilos, it's nothing," for enrichment abroad, he said in a new gesture to try to end the nuclear standoff.

"But not in a climate where they threaten us. They have to change their vocabulary, in respect and legality."

"In this case we will say, very good you want to keep your word, in this case we are ready to sit down at the table to reach an agreement," Ahmadinejad said in an interview in the Danish capital.

US President Barack Obama's administration has signalled that time is running out for Iran to seize an offer of diplomatic engagement for resolving the nuclear issues.

Iran is under three sets of UN sanctions for refusing to suspend enrichment and risks a further round after rejecting a UN-brokered deal to send its low

enriched uranium abroad to be further refined into fuel for its research reactor.

Enrichment lies at the heart of fears over Iran's atomic work as the process to make nuclear fuel can also be used to make the fissile core of an atom bomb in much higher purifications.

Iran insists its nuclear programme is solely for civilian purposes and rejects Western suspicions that it is covertly trying to develop a bomb.

The United States and the five other world powers trying to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions are expected to consult by telephone on December 22 amid threats of a fourth round of UN sanctions against Tehran.

Washington has urged Iran to take up a UN proposal for Iran to send 2,645 pounds (1,200 kilograms) of its low enriched uranium to Russia "in one batch."

Ahmadinejad said that 1,200 kilos "is not such a large amount. We have the technology and we are currently producing this uranium (enriched) at 3.5 percent."

Moment of truth for healthcare in Senate

AP, Washington

Senate Democrats appear within reach of the 60 votes necessary to pass President Barack Obama's healthcare legislation after a long year of struggle and a final burst of deadline bargaining with hold-out Sen Ben Nelson of Nebraska.

Emerging from marathon talks with Majority Leader Harry Reid and White House officials late Friday night, Nelson said "real progress" had been made toward his call for greater restrictions on abortion within the legislation.

Majority Leader Harry Reid decided to unveil a final package of changes in the long-debated legislation on Saturday "and is confident that it will prevail," his spokesman, Jim Manley, said in a late-night statement.

Iran admits taking over Iraqi oil well

AFP, Tehran

Iran on Saturday acknowledged its takeover of an oil well on the Iraqi border but insisted the well lies on its land, playing down the fallout from the first such incident since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

"Our forces are on our own soil and, based on the known international borders, this well belongs to Iran," the armed forces command said in a statement, quoted by Iran's Arabic-language Al-Alam satellite television.

On Friday, Iraq's state-owned South Oil Co in the southeastern city of Amara said "an Iranian force arrived at the field... It took control of Well 4 and raised the Iranian flag even though the well lies inside Iraqi territory."

Nasa jumbo jet plans to unlock origins of the universe

ANI, Washington

A Nasa jumbo jet that will help scientists unlock the origins of the universe with infrared observations reached a milestone on December 18 when doors covering the plane's telescope were fully opened in flight.

The Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy, a modified 747 jet known as SOFIA, flew for one hour and 19 minutes, which included two minutes with the telescope's doors fully opened.

The goal was to allow engineers to understand how air flows in and around the telescope.

It was the first time that outside air has interacted with the part of the plane that carries the 98-inch infrared telescope.

"Today we opened the telescope cavity door, the first time we have fully exposed the telescope and the largest cavity ever flown while in flight," said Bob Meyer, SOFIA programme manager at Nasa's Dryden Flight Research Centre in Edwards, California.

"This is a significant step toward certifying Nasa's next great observatory for future study of the universe," he added.

Time for new border

FROM PAGE 1

on a range of bilateral issues like Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India, security, transit, trade, water sharing, etc and he is very much optimistic about breaking out of these very old issues.

According to official sources there is a stretch of 6.5 km unmarked border, and some 110 enclaves are inside Bangladesh while 55 others in Indian territory.

Pinak Ranjan said during joint visits of Indian and Bangladesh officials in the past, it was found that people of the enclaves do not want to leave the land in which they have settled, worked and have farms. "These pieces of land are all contiguous, so there is a possibility that we redraw the international border and finish this problem once and for all. Of course we will need a joint survey, which we will start soon after the summit meeting of the prime ministers of India and Bangladesh," he added.

The Bangla speaking Indian diplomat, who spent over six years as deputy high commissioner and high commissioner in Bangladesh, said, "We have only 6.2 kilometres of undemarcated border when we have settled dispute over 4,000 kilometres. My suggestion is, let us draw the line along the places where status quo is imposed."

Asked whether there is any progress made in this regard, Pinak said the issues have been discussed at the highest level and by and large there are agreements in principle. The unmarked land and enclaves are not in a position of great strategic importance, so it is doable and solvable.

Turning to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's upcoming visit to India, Pinak said he was very much optimistic about the summit meeting. Presently, the India-Bangladesh relations are breaking new grounds and there is renewed commitment between the two new govern-

ments to break out of long-standing unresolved issues through innovative solutions.

He said the PMs had already met twice, once in NAM summit and then in Commonwealth summit, so dialogue has started. "Now I look at the visit as culmination of the dialogue. We hope there will be a joint declaration, in which all the issues of our bilateral significance will be covered. Let me say that we will surprise you with what will happen."

Asked what will be the surprise for Bangladesh, the outgoing high commissioner said, "No, nothing dramatic, I mean there will be no earth-shaking event, but solutions will be there. And we will break some new grounds as we have said."

Citing example, he said India has already promised 100 MW of power to Bangladesh and there will be an agreement on the provision of power from India. "I think the grid connectivity work will start soon after the agreement. May be in a couple of years time we may actually find power flowing in from India to Bangladesh."

At the summit meeting of the two PMs, he said, another important issue would be transit for Bangladesh to Nepal and Bhutan. "We are hoping that motor vehicle agreement will be signed or at least work will start immediately after the visit, so that we can have Bangladesh trucks go to Bhutan and Nepal through Indian territory. And vice versa Indian trucks to come to offload goods up to certain points as Benapole and Petrapole are highly congested land ports. Some kind of dispersion would help in decongestion."

The other major issue, he said, the officials are working on is how can containers come over land from India and Bangladesh to each other's territory. Train and waterways are very viable and the cost of trade would go down that would

ultimately benefit the people.

On security issues, he said, cooperation between the two countries in the field of security is expanding and the present government in Bangladesh is very sensitive and both the countries are now working closely to combat terrorism, insurgency and criminal activities. "I think the issue needs to be get down on the microscope... we will naturally pursue it vigorously because we think security is so essential to our development, well-being and future prospects."

He also said that India will not give shelter to anybody who is wanted in Bangladesh and will be happy to hand them over to Bangladesh. "I am confident that it is already happening. I am sure this will send a huge message to those who want to disturb the peace of either country or destabilise them. I think they will get the message that Bangladesh and India are not the places where they can get away with it."

On trade gap, he said India has already shortened the negative list and will probably reduce more so that Bangladeshi products can get duty free access. In this context, he said, India has provided duty free access to 8 million pieces of readymade garment, of which Bangladesh has not used 60 percent or thereabout. He suggested that Bangladeshi exporters go to the Indian market and do a lot of advertising because there is no such presence of marketing and advertising of Bangladeshi products.

About his personal feeling prior to departure Pinak Ranjan said, "I am very satisfied, but my only regret is that I am not able to stay on for the visit of the Bangladesh prime minister next month as I am going to take my new diplomatic assignment. Now my successor who is coming here on 26th will have the honour... and I shall surely watch with great interest from Bangkok."

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Environmental activists from AVAAZ.org carry portraits of world leaders participate in a rally dubbed "Climate shame" during the last day of the UN climate summit in Copenhagen on Friday.