



APEC seeks to slash emissions by 2050

SINGAPORE (AFP) — Asia-Pacific powers including the United States, China and Russia are expected to call next week for sweeping cuts in greenhouse gas emissions on the final countdown to a crunch climate meeting.

U.S. President Barack Obama and 20 other regional leaders will also say it is too early to wean their economies off stimulus spending, according to a draft summit communique obtained by AFP on Friday.

At their November 14-15 summit in Singapore, the leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum will call man-made climate change "one of the biggest challenges facing the world", the draft declaration said.

"We believe that global emissions will need to peak over the next few years, and be reduced to 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, recognizing that the time frame for peaking will be longer in developing countries," it said.

The leaders including Obama, Chinese President Hu Jintao and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will stress their commitment to reaching a "good agreement in Copenhagen", it added.

The December gathering in the Danish capital will try to thrash out a new treaty to tackle global warming, but preparatory talks have become deadlocked and officials warn that the process could drag on into next year.

Obama, who will stop in Singapore as part of his first presidential tour of Asia, faces a recalcitrant Congress and his administration wants more action from developing nations such as China.

The developing powers want more money from the industrialized world to combat what they say is a Western-produced problem.

The draft APEC text said global action to cut emissions should "be accompanied by measures to support the most vulnerable countries to assist them to adapt to the adverse impact of climate change".

On Thursday, U.S. Senate Democrats pushed a climate change bill through a key committee, shrugging off a Republican boycott. But it could still be a long way before it can clear the full Congress.

The Senate bill calls for a 20-percent emissions cut by 2020, more ambitious than a House of Representatives version passed in June calling for a 17 percent reduction from 2005 levels.

In September, Hu told the United Nations that China would reduce the carbon intensity of its economy by a "notable margin" by 2020, but did not provide a figure.

Carbon intensity is the measure of greenhouse gas that is emitted for each dollar of gross domestic product.

On the economic crisis, the APEC leaders were expected to say: "We will maintain our economic stimulus policies until a durable economic recovery is secured."

But the draft stressed that "economic recovery is not yet on a solid footing".

The United States implemented a 787-billion-dollar Recovery Act in February which the White House says has saved or created nearly 650,000 jobs, and likely more than a million.

And analysts say that massive stimulus packages rolled out by Asian governments played an important role in helping the region weather the downturn better than the United States or Europe.

Keep us safe or we're off for good — UN pulls out staff after attack

The head of the United Nations in Afghanistan threatened a complete pullout after half of his staff were evacuated following last week's terrorist attack, in which five UN personnel died.

In a blunt message to the newly re-elected President Karzai, Kai Eide, the UN Special Representative, said: "There is a belief that the international community (presence) will continue whatever happens because of the strategic importance of Afghanistan. I would like to emphasize that that's not true."

The Afghan Government must show a willingness to reform and address rampant corruption, he said. "We cannot afford any longer a situation where warlords and powerbrokers are playing their own game."

The UN temporarily pulled out 600 of its 1,100 foreign staff. The move was prompted by the attack on the Bakhtar guesthouse on October 28, in which five UN personnel were killed by gunmen and suicide bombers in police uniforms. Security forces in Kabul remain on high alert as intelligence "chatter" has suggested that militants linked to the Taliban and al-Qaeda will try more attacks soon.

"Taliban and al-Qaeda militants are emboldened and they believe that one or two attacks more will cause the UN to leave," a source said. Another diplomat said that militants captured in Kabul after the first attack had revealed that more attacks would follow.



A UN spokesman said that the organization had accommodation in secured compounds for 450 staff in Kabul at present. Many UN workers considered non-essential would be relocated to Dubai or Islamabad — described as "inside the mission area" by Mr Eide. However, the UN still needed to double its secure accommodation capacity. At present, many of its staff live in 93 different guesthouses, often private homes that have passed basic security tests and have Afghan Interior Ministry police guards outside. It was one of these that was overrun last week.

Diplomatic sources suggested that the UN would either try to defend clusters of guesthouses

or else concentrate staff in one compound, raising comparisons with the green zone in Baghdad. Security in future will be provided by the UN, probably using Gurkhas.

The mood in the Afghan capital has changed markedly since President Karzai's first election victory in September 2004. Then he was a hero, and Western aid workers, diplomats and journalists danced till dawn in the city's Western-run restaurants.

When their work allowed, UN workers relaxed by pools in secure compounds and took day trips to the Panjshir Valley north of the city. Some even went skiing in the Hindu Kush.

The first suicide bombers

struck in 2005, just as reports began to multiply of Taliban attacks on U.S. troops in the south. Initially, the bombers were so inept that they were no danger to anyone but themselves, but by the next year both they and the tactics of the insurgents were improving, confidence was dented and Westerners' lives were becoming increasingly constrained.

In February last year the five-star Serena Hotel was attacked by suicide bombers, killing five people. The kind of events that gave foreigners a taste of home ended. The annual Kabul Desert Classic, a charity golf tournament at the city's primitive nine-hole course, was called off in its fourth year be-

cause embassy workers and UN staff were no longer allowed in outlying areas of the city. Western restaurants were also placed out of bounds.

The attacks became less frequent but more spectacular and increasingly deadly. Many aid workers and diplomats now only saw the country through the bulletproof glass of their armored land cruisers. Other aid agencies told The Times that tighter security imposed during the election would remain, but many said they preferred cameras and stronger defenses to armed guards.

Some added that the UN move was not supported widely within the wider aid community. "We are really concerned about how the UN will provide services while their staff are outside the country and who will pick up the slack," said one aid worker. "There is a perception that this seems like an overreaction, which sends a bad message."

Agencies also said that they were monitoring the UN withdrawal but most appeared to be maintaining their staffing levels in the country for now. "It will not have major impact on the operations of international NGOs," Lex Kassenberg, the head of Care International in Afghanistan, said. Ban Ki Moon, the UN secretary-general, was critical of the response of both Afghan and NATO security forces after the Kabul attack last week.

Two UN guards held off the terrorists for an hour and a half before being killed. Another armed UN worker continued resistance from the guesthouse laundry room. More than 20 UN workers were able to escape as a result. However, security forces took more than an hour to arrive on the scene.

(Source: Times Online)

China adopts "malaria diplomacy" as part of Africa push

HONG KONG (Reuters) — In a laboratory in China's southern city of Guangzhou, scientists are trying to enhance the rare sweet wormwood shrub, from which artemisinin — the best drug to fight malaria — is derived.

China hopes to improve and use the drug as a uniquely Chinese weapon to fight malaria not on its own soil, where the deadly disease has been sharply pruned back, but in Africa, where it still kills one child every 30 seconds.

Already, a Chinese-backed eradication program on a small island off Africa has proven a huge success.

Away from its practical application, scientists back in the lab in Guangzhou are also achieving results. In one of the lab's refrigerators sit a dozen triangular test-tubes holding seedlings of the sweet wormwood shrub, also called *Artemisia annua*, which has only been found in the wild in China, Vietnam and border areas in Myanmar.

"There are about 0.6 parts of artemisinin in every 100 parts of the plant in the wild, but we have managed to increase the artemisinin content to between 1.2 and 1.8," said Feng Liling, assistant professor at the Tropical Medicine Institute in Guangzhou University of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

China pledged to help Africa fight malaria at the triennial Forum on China and Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2006 and has since set up 30 anti-malaria and prevention units. The next FOCAC meeting is in Egypt on November 8-9.

Helping developing countries eradicate malaria will help China project its influence and prestige as a global power, said politics professor Joseph Cheng at City University in Hong Kong.

"China is exploring cost effective ways to help the Third World and is interested in making distinct contributions," Cheng said, adding that Western interest was often lacking in a disease that seldom afflicts rich country citizens.

"Malaria suits these requirements. It is not that expensive. It is cheaper than fighting AIDS."



Tanzania, Kenya and Nigeria have begun farming hybrids of the sweet wormwood shrub with Chinese and Vietnamese ancestry, said Li Guoqiao at the Tropical Medicine Institute.

"I inspected the plantations and the plants are growing well," Li told Reuters in an interview.

Asked if China would export the high-yielding *Artemisia annua* to Africa, Li said: "We want to grow them in China and whatever we export depends on bilateral relationships."

Li is spearheading a project on the tiny African island of Moheli, which belongs to the Comoros group of islands at the northern mouth of the Mozambique Channel.

In mid-November 2007, he launched a "mass drug administration" exercise on the island. Its entire population of 36,000 had to take two courses of anti-malarial drugs to flush the parasite from their bodies — on day one and day 40.

The rationale was that while mosquitoes pass the parasite from person to person, they are merely "vectors" and not hosts. The real reservoir of the disease is people, and many carry the parasite in their bodies without even showing symptoms.

"The key is to eradicate the source, which is in people. Without the source, the vectors are harmless," he said.

The results were startling. While the parasite carrier rate in Moheli ranged from 5 to 94 percent from village to village before the exercise, that fell to 1 percent or less from January 2008 and has stayed around that figure since.

"Before, 70 to 80 percent of hospital patients were there for malaria. After that, you hardly find any," Li said.

Comoros now bars anyone from entering Moheli unless they take a course of antimalarial drugs — a mix of artemisinin, primaquine and pyrimethamine that China provides for free.

Its government has asked Beijing to roll out the same program in two of its larger islands, Grande Comore and Anjouan, with a total population of 760,000. Li said Beijing supported the idea in principle and that funding was being worked out.

Nepal accuses UN chief of interfering

KATHMANDU (AFP) — Nepal's ruling parties have angrily accused United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon of political interference after he called for the establishment of a national unity government.

They said the UN had no right to dictate the make-up of the administration, formed after the Maoists resigned from power in May over a row with the president.

The former guerrillas, who fought a 10-year war before winning 2008 elections, make up the largest party in parliament, but have rejected invitations to join the new coalition government as a junior

partner.

"Ever since this government was formed we have been trying to ensure all parties are included, and that effort continues," the 22 ruling parties said in a statement issued late Thursday.

"But only Nepal's people and political parties have the right to decide what kind of government they should have, and under whose leadership."

The UML party, which leads the ruling coalition, said the parties had written to the UN to register their anger.

"The United Nations has no right to meddle in our internal political affairs,"

said Pradeep Gyawali, a senior party leader.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's comments came in a report on the government's request for the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) to be extended beyond its current mandate, which expires on January 23.

In it, he expressed serious concern over the slow progress of the peace process, blaming continuing disagreements between the political parties more than three years after the civil war ended.

"Nepal is on the path of major social and political transformation," he said.



Gunmen again target army officer in Pakistan



ISLAMABAD (AP) — Gunmen on a motorcycle wounded a senior army officer and soldier in the Pakistani capital Friday, the third such attack in about two weeks as militants retaliate against a new military offensive along the Afghan border.

The militants hope the wave of attacks, which have killed some 300 civilians and security forces in the past month, will weaken the army's resolve as it pushes deeper into South Waziristan, the mountainous stronghold of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Pakistan.

Gunmen opened fire at the personal vehicle of the army officer, who held the rank of brigadier, while it was in a residential district of Islamabad, said police official Mohammad Asghar. The gunmen then sped off, he said.

Hospital official Arshad Khokhar said the brigadier and the soldier, who was also in the vehicle, were in stable condition. A brigadier is equivalent to a brigadier general in the U.S. Army.

The attack followed two similar shootings last month in Islamabad.

Gunmen on a motorcycle shot and killed a brigadier and a soldier on Oct. 22 as they were riding in an army jeep in Islamabad in what was believed to be the first assassination of an army officer in the capital.

Less than a week later, gunmen attacked another brigadier as he was driving to a bank in Islamabad with his mother, but they escaped unharmed.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but suspicions fell on the Pakistani Taliban, which has declared war on the government because the group deems it un-Islamic and is angry about its support for the U.S. war on terror.

The Taliban have claimed responsibility for scores of attacks in Pakistan, many of them carried out by suicide bombers. The recent shootings could indicate the militants are also turning to targeted assassinations to stoke even more fear.