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## Pressure rises on governments as UN climate talks end first week

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Cancun, Mexico - Pressure grew Friday on governments to unblock global climate change talks as negotiators ended their first week at a UN summit in Mexico.

A band of environmental groups and scientists warned that the death toll from extreme-weather disasters could hit 5 million by 2020 if nothing is done to reverse global warming. The consortium - called The Climate Vulnerability Monitor - said about 1 million people per year could die in such disasters by 2030, with extreme weather events affecting 170 nations.

Also Friday, a group of US businesses and retired military leaders wrote letters urging the United States to take the lead in stepping up funding for poorer countries to deal with the causes of climate change.

Government negotiators have been working since Monday to resolve a long-running impasse on international action to tackle global warming. The talks in Mexico's resort city of Cancun will move into high-gear next week as ministers arrive from more than 190 countries.

The talks are largely designed to restore trust after the widely- viewed failure of last December's UN summit in Copenhagen, where talks between world leaders on a new global climate treaty collapsed.

But Japan dealt the Cancun summit a blow earlier this week by stating categorically that it would not sign up to a renewal of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the world's first international climate treaty, which expires in 2012. Japan insisted it would only join a binding treaty that included major polluters like the US and China.

Emerging powers and developing countries have demanded an extension of Kyoto, which for the first time placed legally-binding limits on the industrial carbon emissions of wealthy countries, before they would consider signing up to any deal that forces cuts in their own emissions.

But there were some signs of progress on other fronts. China, the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases blamed for global warming, suggested it might be willing to allow some outside evaluation of its own efforts to curb climate change.

China's opening marked a key departure from the failed UN summit in Copenhagen last December and could help answer a key demand of the United States. India has also signaled a willingness to work out a deal on improving the transparency of emerging powers' actions.

"I am cautiously optimistic," Jochen Flasbarth, the president of Germany's federal environment agency (UBA), told the German Press Agency dpa. "The Chinese are really trying hard and also investing a lot in climate protection."

The United States has acknowledged that reaching a deal at the climate summit, which ends December 10, will depend on the US and China finding agreement. Together the two powers emit about 40 per cent of the world's greenhouse gases.

Both governments and environmentalists have acknowledged that Cancun will not be the place for governments to hammer out a new global treaty on curbing climate change.

But there are hopes the summit could make some progress by setting up a so-called Green Fund to channel climate-related aid to poorer countries. Some deals are also expected on critical issues like deforestation and improving cooperation on green technologies.

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US business groups wrote a letter to President Barack Obama's urging his administration to take the lead in creating a fund for developing countries.

"It is imperative that the United States reassert its credibility and leadership on climate change and establish a fund at this critical juncture," the letter said.

Posted by Earth Times Staff  
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