

# Clinton sets a careful course on climate...

**Signatories to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will meet later this year to decide on targets for greenhouse gas emissions. Our correspondents in Washington, London and Tokyo report on the prospects.**

[WASHINGTON] President Bill Clinton is likely to promise "real action" to cut US greenhouse-gas emissions when he addresses a special session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 26 June, commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Rio treaty.

But despite anticipated pressure from the other government leaders at a G-8 summit in Denver, Colorado, before he goes to New York, Clinton is unlikely to specify at this stage what action he proposes. Instead, according to several government officials, the administration will wait until September to announce what emission targets the United States will support at the critical meeting of the parties to the Rio treaty in Kyoto, Japan, at the end of this year.

Senior administration officials met last week to discuss how Clinton should

approach concern about climate change that is expected to be raised at Denver by Tony Blair, the new British prime minister, and Helmut Kohl, the German chancellor. They also discussed the content of his address to the United Nations a few days later.

Debate continues to rage within the administration about how best to approach the issue. But optimism is growing among environmentalist groups that Clinton will share the view of Katie McGinty, his environmental adviser, and Jack Gibbons, his science adviser, that the United States must prepare for a Kyoto agreement that requires developed countries to take genuine steps to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

Observers strongly doubt that the US Senate will ratify such an agreement, however, or that the United States will itself do

anything to cut its emissions. These are now 7 per cent higher than they were in 1990, and projected to grow to 25 per cent above 1990 levels by the year 2010. Unlike Blair or Kohl, Clinton lacks the power to follow through directly on any agreement: he would have to persuade a deeply sceptical Congress that action is warranted.

But the administration may agree to cut emissions at Kyoto, and sell the idea to Congress later. "I'm more optimistic than I was three months ago that the administration will make real reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions," says Jonathan Lash, president of the World Resources Institute, a moderate environmental group, and co-chair of Clinton's Council of Advisors on Sustainable Development.

Clinton is likely to press other leaders at Denver for changes in their trade policies which will force trading partners in the developing world to plan for "sustainable development". He will also seek to impress them with demonstrations of 'clean cars' developed

## Britain seeks leadership role with ambitious greenhouse-gas targets

[LONDON] Britain's new Labour government last week attempted to take the high ground in the climate change debate when it confirmed a pre-election promise to cut UK greenhouse-gas emissions to 80 per cent of 1990 levels by 2010, and announced a cabinet committee to coordinate environment policy across government.

But in a warning shot across the English Channel, government ministers said that the UK greenhouse-gas cuts would be conditional on commensurate reductions from Britain's 14 European Union partners, who have so far collectively agreed only to a 15 per cent reduction by 2010.

There were also harsh words from both John Prescott, the deputy prime minister who has taken on broad responsibilities for environmental issues, and Michael Meacher, the junior minister directly responsible for the environment, about the United States, which has refused to reveal its greenhouse-gas targets.

These announcements have raised the government's stock among environmentalists, who had been sceptical of the Labour party's apparent lack of

enthusiasm for environmental issues while in opposition. Greenhouse-gas cuts would come from imposing pollution taxes, promoting energy efficiency, greater use of renewable energy, and a new, 'integrated' transport policy that would put more emphasis on public transport.

Both ministers praised conservation bodies for highlighting the threat of global warming, despite being "dismissed as fringe groups". And they sharply criticized fossil-fuel industry lobbyists for "seeking to deny climate change, and undermining the science".

Speaking on World Environment Day last Thursday (5 June) in London, Prescott, secretary of state for a super-ministry combining environment, transport and the regions, broke with tradition when he praised his predecessor's attempts to raise the profile of environmental issues. John Gummer, secretary of state for the environment in the Conservative government, was popular among environmentalists for his robust stand on issues such as climate change.

But Prescott said the new government would "go further". His plans include a new parliamentary

## IMAGE UNAVAILABLE FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

### Smoking gun? British ministers criticized fossil-fuel lobbyists for "undermining science"

environment committee, which would allow members of parliament to scrutinize government environment policy. And he revealed that Britain would field a five-strong team – including the prime minister, the foreign secretary and himself – at the United Nations special session in New York being held in two weeks to review progress since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

The previous day, Meacher, a former lecturer in social administration at the London School of Economics, had told a conference organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) that the new government was "committed to leading the

fight against global warming in Europe and the world community". He added: "There is no question that climate change needs to be addressed urgently. It is already happening."

Meacher pointed out that it was chance, namely the economically driven decision to shut down most of the coal industry, rather than new policies, that had enabled Britain to achieve its targets on greenhouse gas emissions. He added that not enough had been achieved through "positive policies" such as improving energy efficiency in homes and transport. "As a result," he said, "carbon dioxide emissions will start to rise again in the first half of the next decade, and are projected to be back above 1990 levels by 2005 and go on rising afterwards."

Meacher said it was important for developed countries to set an example to the developing world, which is not yet committed to making greenhouse-gas reductions, but whose emissions are expected to outstrip those of developed economies within three decades. Meacher said that Britain expected Europe and the United States to show similar leadership.

**Ehsan Masood**