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Title : Bush clings to anti-Kyoto stance ahead of climate talks
By :
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WASHINGTON : US President George W. Bush, who rejected the Kyoto protocol, remains opposed to international constraints on curbing carbon emissions despite growing isolation ahead of a world climate summit.

"Energy security and climate change are two of the important challenges of our time," Bush said this week ahead of a world meeting on global warming which starts Monday on the Indonesian island of Bali.

"The United States takes these challenges seriously and we are effectively confronting climate change through regulations, public-private partnerships, incentives and strong investment in new technologies," said the US president, reiterating his refusal to accept binding limits on greenhouse gases.

"Our guiding principle is clear; we must lead the world to produce fewer greenhouse emissions, and we must do it in a way that does not undermine economic growth or prevent nations from delivering greater prosperity for their people."

Bush is expected to press for a sort of generalized "Bali road map," that will lay out steps to begin after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012.

A total of 172 countries and government entities have ratified the protocol, which requires them to meet targeted curbs in their greenhouse-gas emissions by 2012, but exempts developing countries.

That means countries such as China and India are exempt, even though they are on track to outpace the United States as the world's biggest polluter. Washington has made their exemption a central argument for not signing on to the protocol which was established in 1997.

Bush's administration has called Kyoto "fatally flawed," and said it would cripple the US economy.

Regarding China and India, James Connaughton, chairman of the president's Council on Environmental Quality, said Wednesday that Washington does not "expect a decision on those in Bali."

Frank Maisano, from the energy industry lobby group Bracewell and Giuliani, said he thinks the Bush administration is moving in the right direction but doubts it will obtain the support desired from other countries at the Bali summit, called the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

"In general these UN forums, like the one in Bali, are more of a soapbox for discussion and finger-pointing but not for moving things forward," he said.

He also noted that Bush had lost an ally with the recent departure of Australian conservative prime minister John Howard, whose successor Kevin Rudd has already indicated he will sign on to Kyoto.

In addition, the Bali conference comes as the Democratic-controlled Congress is considering new legislation on energy and climate that calls for restrictions on carbon dioxide emissions.

Even though lawmakers disagree when it comes to the extent of such measures, the principle of emission ceilings has garnered support even among members of Bush's Republican party.

The chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, Democrat Barbara Boxer, plans to send to the Senate for a vote next week a bill that would call for a 70 percent reduction in pollutants by 2050.

Boxer plans to attend the Bali conference along with other lawmakers who are pressing for changes in US environmental policy. And legislators are not the only ones beginning to shift stance.

"A growing number of major corporations have embraced the notion of national economy under the US cap," said Joseph Aldy, economics professor at Georgetown University and an expert of the private energy and environment research group "Resources For The Future."

Industries are increasingly concerned about the growing number of state initiatives aimed at reducing pollution, such as recent moves by the states of California, New Jersey and New York to take steps to regulate their own emissions.

Some big companies would prefer to see less strict federal guidelines, such as those being debated in Congress, applied across the United States instead of state-by-state moves which could possibly prove harsher, Aldy said.

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