

UN climate negotiations not derailed after US pullout

Bonn (Germany)

Negotiations to bolster the climate-saving Paris Agreement, crafted over two decades, closed in Bonn yesterday, deflated but not derailed by Donald Trump's rejection of the treaty and defence of fossil fuels.

The US President's decision to yank the United States from the hard-fought global pact cast a long shadow over the talks, which ran deep into overtime. Negotiations were marked by revived divisions between developing countries and rich ones.

With a wary eye on America, which sent negotiators to a forum it intends to quit, envoys from nearly 200 countries got on with the business of designing a "rule book" for enacting the agreement, which enters into full force in three years' time.

"The Trump administration failed to stop the global climate talks from moving forward," said Greenpeace observer Jens Mattias Clausen.

Closing two weeks of talks, negotiators agreed in the early hours of Saturday to hold a stocktake in 2018 of national efforts to cut fossil fuel emissions. The Paris treaty calls for limiting average global warming to "well under" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels, or 1.5 C if possible. Anything over 2 degree C, experts say, dooms the world to calamitous climate change, with more extreme superstorms, droughts, floods, and land-gobbling sea level rise.

A report this week warned that emissions of carbon dioxide, the main planet-warming gas, were set to rise by



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two percent in 2017 after three years of hardly any growth.

"Starting now, emissions need to decrease to zero over the next 40 years to prevent us breaching the 1.5 C threshold," Piers Forster, a professor

of climate change at the University of Leeds, said.

Nations have submitted voluntary emissions-cutting commitments under the Paris pact championed by Trump's predecessor Barack Obama. But

scientists say current pledges place the world on course for warming of 3 degree C or more, and counsel an urgent upgrade of the global commitment to phasing out greenhouse gases produced by burning coal, oil and natural gas.

Islands in peril

"While the Paris Agreement represents a remarkable diplomatic achievement, it will be judged by history as little more than words on paper if the world fails to take the level of action needed to prevent the loss of entire island nations," Maldives environment minister Thoriq Ibrahim told delegates Friday.

The stocktake agreed Saturday must quantify the shortfall to determine what more needs to be done.

In Bonn, negotiators also worked on a nuts-and-bolts

rulebook, to be finalised at the next UN climate conference in Katowice, Poland in December 2018, for putting the Paris Agreement into action.

Some progress was made, but observers and delegates complained that things were moving too slowly.

Many lamented the void in "political leadership" left by the departure of Obama, and by German Chancellor Angela Merkel's failure to set a timetable for phasing out coal-fired power plants, which produce 40 percent of Germany's electricity.

The talks saw rich and poor nations butt heads on several issues -- mainly money. Developing countries demand detailed progress reports on rich nations' promise to boost climate finance to \$100 billion (85 billion euros) per year by 2020. -AFP

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Xi offers support for Saudi Arabia

Beijing

China has offered support for Saudi Arabia's efforts to safeguard national sovereignty and achieve greater development.

Speaking by telephone, President Xi Jinping told Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz that China's determination to deepen strategic cooperation with Saudi Arabia will not waver, no matter how the international and regional situation changes, China's Foreign Ministry said late on Thursday.

The offer comes at a time of regional tensions between Saudi Arabia, Iran, Lebanon and Yemen.

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Xi Jinping

Remarking on the importance of maintaining close communication between the two countries' heads of state, Xi said China and Saudi Arabia are comprehensive strategic partners whose strategic mutual trust is deepening.

"China supports Saudi Arabia's efforts to safeguard national sovereignty and realise greater development," the ministry cited Xi as saying, without elaborating.

The statement made no specific mention of issues like the resignation as Lebanon Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri while in Saudi Arabia, criticism against Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah.

Saudi-led forces, which back the government in Yemen, have also been fighting against the Iran-allied Houthi militias for more than two-years.

China has had to tread a fine line between Riyadh and Tehran as Beijing has close ties with Iran as well.

The ministry statement said Xi and the Saudi King also exchanged views on international and regional issues of common concern, but gave no details. -Reuters