

Canada moves closer to anti-Kyoto group

At least Bush was upright enough to say that the Kyoto agreement was flawed from the beginning.

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper moved Canada one step closer to joining an environmental accord with six nations at odds with the Kyoto protocol in a meeting Friday with his Australian counterpart, John Howard.

The two conservative leaders met at Meech Lake, across the Ottawa River from the nation's capital, on the second day of Howard's three-day tour, and later told reporters that Canada has expressed interest in participating in the Asia-Pacific Partnership, which also includes the United States, China and India, in addition to Australia, Japan and South Korea.

"I know that the Australians and others are looking at really focusing on dealing with this through the application of technology and technological development," Harper said. "This is very much the path our government's looking at."

Howard said his government would "warmly welcome" Canada's participation and he would be "very surprised" if the other member countries did not feel the same.

Harper's Tories have been subject to domestic and international scorn for raising doubts about the greenhouse-gas reduction plans set out for Canada under Kyoto. Environment Minister Rona Ambrose has noted that Canada's emissions have risen to 35 per cent above what they were in 1990 when the international treaty dictates that the country reduce those emissions 24 per cent by 2012.

Ambrose described the new environmental accord as a "complement to Kyoto" that would allow the private sector a greater role in fighting climate change, but Howard was less delicate in describing the different approaches between the two pacts.

"This is an issue where you have people who are very doctrinaire," he said. "They think the only path to environmental salvation is the Kyoto path and we don't hold that view and certainly from what I've heard today, from what the prime minister has said, nor does the Canadian government."

Members of the partnership, known as the AP6, tout their new pact as the only viable solution to the pressing problem of climate change and pollution because it includes the world's three largest polluters -- China, India and the U.S.

Without those three countries on side, Howard said, "you are not going to get a serious addressing of the problem."

The group seeks to "marry" emission reductions with economic progress and development," Howard explained. "No advanced country is going to sacrifice a significant amount of economic development and jobs mindlessly or carelessly and what we have to do is to find ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions that do not cost us an economic price," he said.

CanWest reported earlier this month that the Conservative government's environmental plan, expected to be rolled out this fall, will focus on the transportation and electricity sectors.

Harper said Friday that he is bullish about nuclear energy, predicting that it will be "part of the mix as we deal with energy and environmental challenges in the next century."

Former prime minister Brian Mulroney provided a window into the Conservative government's thinking on the environment several weeks ago when he said in an Ottawa speech that Canada must engage the U.S. particularly if it wants to make progress on emissions reductions.

Harper and U.S. President George Bush have made great headway in repairing the often strained relationship between the two countries in recent months, although a planned trip to Washington this spring will, it appears, be delayed.

Canadian officials planning the visit said the Prime Minister's Office and the White House were unable to find a date in June where the schedules of both men were open. "It's not off. We never did have a date," said one official. "We were never able to find a workable date in June where their respective schedules were open. The meeting could still happen in July.