

## China mine accidents inevitable while coal remains king

BEIJING (AFP) — More deadly accidents like the one that killed at least 104 Chinese coal miners at the weekend are inevitable as China remains reliant on coal to feed its energy-hungry economy, experts said.

As China talks up its commitment to clean energy on the eve of key climate change talks in Copenhagen, analysts warned that heavily polluting coal would remain the main source of energy here for at least the next decade.

"Coal will remain the dominant feedstock for power generation in China for the foreseeable future and is likely to still account for over 50 percent of China's installed generating capacity by 2020," said Thomas Grieder, an analyst at IHS Global Insight.

Deadly accidents are depressingly familiar in China and will remain so until the country kicks its coal "addiction," said Greenpeace China climate and energy campaign manager Ailun Yang.

"This is an example of the human cost of coal that China is bearing," Yang said, referring to a gas explosion at a mine in north-eastern Heilongjiang province on Saturday that killed 104 workers and left four missing.

"For a country that needs to dig so much coal on a daily basis it is impossible to avoid these kinds of accidents," she said.

"China has a lot of coal, has very limited supply of other fossil fuels, and even with rapid growth rates in renewables, it will be difficult to actually replace the coal in use for quite some time," said Deborah Seligsohn, a consultant with Washington-based think tank World Resources Institute.

China, which is widely believed to be the world's biggest source of greenhouse gases, has invested billions of dollars in clean energy alternatives such as wind, hydro and nuclear power to curb emissions growth.

President Hu Jintao told a September UN summit China would reduce the intensity of its carbon emissions as a percentage of economic growth by a "notable margin" by 2020 from their 2005 levels, but gave no figure.

China also set the goals of cutting energy consumption per unit of GDP by 20 percent between 2006 and 2010 and getting 10 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2010 and 15 percent by 2020.

Yet two coal-fired power plants are built every week, analysts say, to meet soaring demand for cheap energy.

"(Coal-fired power) plants can be built relatively quickly in comparison to nuclear power and renewables... and the coal industry is a major employer in China," Grieder said.

China produced 2.7 billion tons of coal in 2008 and was on track to exceed that amount this year, official figures show. The government has said it plans to boost output by a further 30 percent by 2015.

Valerie Niquet, a researcher at the French Institute for International Relations, said Beijing regarded coal as key to China's energy "independence".

"Thanks to it (coal), the rate of energy self-sufficiency in China is 90 percent -- 20 percent more than for the OECD countries," Niquet said in a report published in September, which added "in energy, coal is the basis".

In his recent visit to China, U.S. President Barack Obama said the United States and China wanted climate change talks in Copenhagen next month to result in a global accord that has "immediate operational effect".

# White House braces for tough sell on Afghan policy

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House braced for a tough sell of President Barack Obama's long-awaited decision on whether to commit tens of thousands of new U.S. forces to the stalemated war in Afghanistan, even as the president met Monday with top advisers for the last major discussion before an announcement "within days."

Military officials and others expect Obama to settle on a middle-ground option that would deploy an eventual 32,000 to 35,000 U.S. forces to the 8-year-old conflict. That rough figure has stood as the most likely option since before Obama's last large war council meeting earlier this month, when he tasked military planners with rearranging the timing and makeup of some of the deployments.

The president has said with increasing frequency in recent days that a big piece of the rethinking of options that he ordered had to do with building an exit strategy into the announcement — in other words, revising the options presented to him to clarify when U.S. troops would turn over responsibility to the Afghan government and under what conditions.

As White House press secretary Robert Gibbs put it to reporters on Monday, it's "not just how we get people there, but what's the strategy for getting them out."

Obama held the 10th meeting of his Afghanistan strategy review since mid-September on Monday night, with a large cast of foreign policy and military advisers, to go over that revised information from war planners. The two-hour Situation Room session was aimed at discussing "some of the questions that the president had, some additional answers to what he'd asked for," Gibbs said.

The spokesman said the president left the war council meeting without announcing a decision to the group, but added it would become public soon.

"After completing a rigorous final meeting, President Obama has the information he wants and needs to make his decision and he will announce that decision within days," Gibbs said late Monday.

The spokesman said the president did not share his thinking on what he would speak about when he makes an announcement.

The meeting was arranged for the unusual nighttime slot to accommodate both Obama's



In this image released by the White House, President Barack Obama holds meeting on Afghanistan in the Situation Room of the White House, Monday, Nov. 23, 2009.

(Photo:AP)

packed public schedule on Monday and the fact that many of his top advisers were leaving town for the holiday. No more war council meetings are on the calendar.

The presidential spokesman had said ahead of the meeting that it was possible Obama could lock in a decision then, or that one could come "over the course of the next several days." In either case, it will not be announced this week, he said, and the meeting concluded with no announcement about a decision.

The White House is aiming for an announcement by Obama next week, either Tuesday or Wednesday, after Congress returns from its Thanksgiving break.

Military officials, congressional aides and European diplomats said they expect Obama to deliver a national address laying out the revamped strategy. Obama said in a television interview last week: "At the end of this process, I'm going to be able to present to the American people in very clear terms what exactly is at stake, what we intend to do, how we're going to succeed, how much it's going to cost, how long it's going to take."

Congressional hearings would immediately follow that address, including testimony from the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley

McChrystal. Others likely to take part in hearings would be Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry. All four were among the approximately 20 top administration officials and Obama advisers participating in the talks Monday night — one of the biggest groups gathered for these sessions in some time.

Obama must not only sell his plan to the public, but to foreign allies whose additional resources the White House wants in Afghanistan and to lawmakers on Capitol Hill who would be asked the fund the effort.

Gibbs said that the subject of a war tax on the wealthy, proposed by a handful of leading Democrats, has not come up yet in the president's extensive war council meetings. But the idea, though unlikely to pass Congress, is one way for Democrats who are coming to dislike the war in greater numbers to challenge the president to confront the cost of any escalation.

Democratic allies of the president, such as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Armed Services Chairman Carl Levin, have become more outspoken on the war in other forums as well.

The force infusion expected by the military would

represent most but not all the troops requested by Obama's war commander, for a tailored war plan that blends elements of McChrystal's counterterrorism strategy with tactics more closely associated with the CIA's unacknowledged war to hunt down terrorists across the border in Pakistan.

McChrystal presented options ranging from about 10,000 to about 80,000 forces, and told Obama he preferred an addition of about 40,000 atop the record 68,000 in the country now, officials have said.

Obama has already ordered a significant expansion of 21,000 troops since taking office. The war has worsened on his watch, and public support has dropped as U.S. combat deaths have climbed.

The additional troops would be concentrated in the south and east of Afghanistan, the areas where the U.S. already has most of its forces, military officials said. The new troops that already went this year were directed to help relieve Marines stretched to the limit by far-flung postings in Helmand province and that would continue, while the U.S. effort would expand somewhat in Kandahar.

The increase would include at least three Army brigades and a single, larger Marine Corps contingent, officials said.

All officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision is not final.

U.S. war planners would be forgoing the option of increasing U.S. fighting power in the north, a once-quiet quadrant where insurgents have grown in strength and number in the past year. But McChrystal's recommendation never called for a quick infusion there.

In the absence of large additions of ground forces, dealing with the north would probably require relying more heavily on air power, two military officials said. Any such additional air strikes would be more successful if, as U.S. officials hope, Pakistan turns up the heat on Taliban militants on their side of the border.

As originally envisioned by McChrystal, the additional U.S. troops would begin flowing in late January or after, on a deployment calendar that would be slower and more complex than that used to build up the Iraq "surge" in 2007. McChrystal's schedule for full deployment has it taking nearly two years, military officials said.

The relatively slow rollout is largely driven by logistics. But it also could give the White House some leverage over Afghan President Hamid Karzai. U.S. officials note that where and how fast troops are deployed are a means to encourage fresh and more serious efforts at cooperation and a clean government in Afghanistan.

## Philippines imposes emergency rule after massacre

AMPATUAN, Philippines (Reuters) — Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo placed two southern provinces and a city under emergency rule on Tuesday after 24 people were killed in the worst-ever election related violence in the country.



"There is an urgent need to prevent and suppress the occurrence of several other incidents of lawless violence," Cerge Remonde, the president's press secretary, told reporters.

The provinces of Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat and Cotabato City will be under an indefinite state of emergency, which gives the military and police wide powers of arrest and detention.

The orders were issued as troops, using shovels and bare hands, dug up hastily covered graves on a grassy hillside in Maguindanao to recover the victims of the massacre on Monday.

A Reuters photographer at the scene saw 22 bodies -- 14 women and 8 men -- with bullet and hack wounds. Some of the dead men had their hands tied behind their back and one of the women was pregnant. Eight of those found dead were local journalists.

They were part of a group of 40 people abducted by gunmen when on their way to file a candidate's nomination to contest the governorship in elections next May. The army said it had found 24 bodies and was searching for the others.

"We are expecting that more bodies will be recovered today," Lieutenant-Colonel Romeo Brawner, military spokesman, told reporters in Manila.

The election process for the May 2010 national polls began last week with the filing of candidacies for more than 17,800 national and local

positions.

Elections in the Philippines are usually marred by violence, especially in the south, where security forces are battling communist rebels, Islamic radicals and clan rivalries.

Arroyo ordered extra troops to the region and sacked the Maguindanao provincial police chief.

Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno said investigations would be completed within a couple of days and arrests made.

"There are no sacred cows," he told television. "It is going to be a direct investigation of the crimes committed. We have some information about specific names, not just those who ordered this thing, but also those who committed it."

Military officials said the dead included Genalyn Tiamzon-Mangudadatu, who was on the way to file the nomination of Esmael, her husband, to contest the governorship of Maguindanao against Datu Andal Ampatuan, the head of a powerful local family.

The town near where the massacre took place bears the name of the family.

Ampatuan has been elected governor of Maguindanao three times previously, always unopposed, although he resigned from the post earlier this year, apparently to circumvent term limits on elected officials.

One of his sons is the governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, an area which covers six provinces, and the family is politically allied to Arroyo.

None of the Ampatuans made any comment to local or foreign media.

Esmael Mangudadatu, Genalyn's husband, told radio that four people had escaped the massacre and were under his care. "They will come out at the right time, they are safe with us," he said.

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