

# Roadblock to

## Carbon talks stall as Gore arrives

Malcolm Farr  
Cindy Wockner

KEVIN Rudd has ordered his climate change negotiators, including Peter Garrett, to "burn the midnight oil" to prevent the Bali conference crashing into a looming deadline for decisions.

As Nobel laureate Al Gore arrived to launch a last-minute push for a breakthrough, delegates to the 187 countries at the United Nations conference last night were bunkered down in gruelling backroom debates on issues which have to be resolved by noon today (2pm Brisbane time).

The former US vice-president and environmental activist has a scheduled address at a conference side event and plans meetings with key players in the climate debate.

He arrived just over an hour after UN climate chief Yvo de Boer warned that the talks were in trouble.

"If we don't manage to get the work done in time on the future then whole house of cards basically falls to pieces," Mr de Boer said, adding that he was "very concerned".

"I think it would be incredibly difficult for any politician to leave here and go home and explain that he or she has provided no political answer to what the scientific community has been saying. I think that is what's at stake for everyone, including the United States."

Prime Minister Rudd added: "These are complex and difficult negotiations, and my instructions to our negotiating team has been to burn the midnight oil, roll the sleeves up and to spare no efforts to ensure we negotiate an effective mandate for the future."

The conference is trying to draw up a set of propositions which can be discussed over the next two years until there is a second climate change summit in Denmark.

Mr Rudd said the challenge was to make sure all parties in the current negotiations moved on to the next step in Copenhagen in 2009, and he pointed to a split between developed and developing nations.

The US, which has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol, has been holding out on a draft agreement from the conference which would



STILL optimistic . . . Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, dressed yesterday in a traditional Balinese shirt, has asked Australia's negotiators to ensure the Bali meeting does not fail. Picture: Ray Strange

require developed countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 25 to 40 per cent by 2020.

Mr Rudd did not say yesterday that the Australian delegation would support the wording of the draft agreement if it contained the 25 to 40 per cent cuts.

To match this, Australia's emissions would have to peak in 2010, and then fall rapidly over the next decade.

Mr de Boer said that if there was no agreement on the cuts but an agreement to launch the negotiations for the post-2012 agreement which replaces the Kyoto Protocol then the conference would have achieved what was initially hoped for.

The US delegation claimed it

had a strong desire to reach an outcome at the conference.

The European Union, which favours the range to show that the rich countries will lead the way, is accusing Washington of being the main obstacle in Bali.

Mr Rudd on Wednesday pledged to Asian leaders he would use Australia's close ties with the US to urge America to sign a climate-change treaty.

But Mr Rudd plans to wait until mid next year for a detailed report from economist Ross Garnaut on the economics of reducing emissions, and a Treasury paper on the issue, before settling on targets.

The Prime Minister used his time in Bali yesterday to pay

tribute to the 92 Australians killed in the two Bali bombing attacks — and to warn that the threat of terrorism was still real.

He pledged expanded counter-terrorism co-operation with Indonesia and indicated Australia also would for years to come have troops in East Timor — where he plans to visit today.

Mr Rudd also used the climate change conference to patch up relations with Papua New Guinea which had collapsed over the case of fugitive Australian lawyer Julian Moti.

But he insisted that Australia would continue to seek Mr Moti's extradition from the Solomon Islands.

Solomons PM ousted» P34

## Polar icecap begins to vanish at record rate

Amanda Beck

ARCTIC ice at the North Pole melted at a record rate this year, the latest sign that climate change has accelerated in recent years, climate scientists said yesterday.

"In 2007, we had off-the-charts warming," Michael Steele, an oceanographer at the University of Washington, said at the 2007 meeting of the American Geophysical Union,

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where 15,000 researchers gathered to discuss earthquakes, water resources, and climate change.

It was an ominous sum-

mer for the Arctic region, where for the first time in recorded history, ships sailed across the Arctic Ocean in water that had been part of the polar icecap, said Donald Perovich of the US Army Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory in New Hampshire.

Scientists said two principal factors were accelerating the vanishing of the polar icepack, which helps cool the Earth by reflect-

ing the sun's rays back into the atmosphere. Mr Steele said that as temperatures in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans rose, warmer water moved into the Arctic Ocean. This helps melt the polar icecap, which this year floated in water about 3.5C warmer than its historical mean.

John Walsh, of the University of Alaska, said: "Water that is now circulating just 200 metres below the main icepack is now

significantly warmer than it was just five years ago."

Mr Perovich said companies were starting to explore for natural resources in newly exposed areas, and coastal villages were grappling with erosion as sea levels rise.

Scientists also expressed scepticism about humans' ability to help generate a cold winter soon enough that could allow the icecap to refreeze through carbon dioxide gas.

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