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HEADLINE: At Climate Meeting, Unlikely Ally for HaveNots

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BODY:

When India's prime minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, finished speaking at the international conference on climate here on Wednesday, the fissure between richer and poorer countries over how best to tackle global warming could no longer be papered over.

In his speech, he argued that poorer countries could not be expected to invest money in tackling the causes of global warming. They bear little responsibility, he said, producing fewer greenhouse gases than industrialized countries, and yet have been hit harder by the natural calamities, from drought to floods, caused by climate changes. They have weaker economies, and with pressing needs in everything from health to education, can little afford to invest in clean-air technologies.

His speech articulated sentiments-- resentments, in some cases-- widely shared among developing nations. So while it produced little new of substance, the conference, the eighth since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted in 1992, illuminated the challenges in crafting a global response to global warming.

It highlighted a divide between north and south, between the industrialized and developing worlds, over who should bear the obligations and burdens of trying to reduce the emissions that cause global warming.

But on several points, the south found itself with an unlikely ally: the United States, which under the Bush administration has also blanched at joining efforts to reduce emissions.

Instead, the United States joined India and other developing countries in encouraging a focus on developing the technology and finding the resources to adapt to climate change.

India and others argued that developed countries should offer technical and financial assistance to help developing countries adapt.

It was not clear whether the conference's final declaration, which was still being negotiated this morning would contain a reference to the Kyoto Protocol, the 1997 climate pact completed last year and endorsed by most of the world's countries.

The Bush administration had rejected the pact, saying that fulfilling its requirements to reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases could hurt America's economy. The United States is the largest producer of greenhouse gases, and many believe its rejection of the pact has undercut its potential effectiveness.

A draft declaration drawn up earlier this week did not mention Kyoto at all. But the latest version included an innocuous reference that said that parties that have ratified the protocol should encourage those that have not to do so "in a timely manner."

The pact must be ratified by at least 55 countries and by the industrialized nations that emitted at least 5: percent of the industrialized world's carbon dioxide in 1990. With the United States out, that number can only be reached if Russia ratifies the treaty. At the conference, the Russian delegation indicated that ratification was eventually likely, but only after Parliament passed a law in favor of ratification.

If Russia has been hesitant about ratifying the Kyoto pact because of the withdrawal of the United States, India may have been emboldened by America's rejection of formal commitments to reduce emissions of warming gases.

"We do not see targets and timetables as realistic for developing countries," the head of the American delegation, Paula Dobriansky, the under secretary of state for global affairs, said in an interview today.

Instead, the American delegation here repeatedly sounded two themes: that adapting to climate change is as essential as preventing it, and that economic growth is the key to environmental progress.

The European Union and Japan, accordingly, have been pressing developing nations to commit to reducing the emission of warming gases.

But it was exactly such pressures that seem to have contributed to the estrangement between north and south. A member of the Indian delegation said that the pressure from the European Union and Japan had crossed the line from "persuasion" to "aggression." Mr. Vajpayee's speech was partly in response.

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