Denmark seeks new climate treaty

Copenhagen hopes for Asian support on new pact by 2009 to replace the Kyoto Protocol

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WITH the clock ticking away, Denmark has sought Asia’s support for a pact with Europe for a new global climate change treaty by 2009.

A shared vision on climate change by the two could influence others to lend support, Denmark’s Environment Minister Connie Hedegaard said when inaugurating the Asia-Europe environment ministers meeting here yesterday.

Ms Hedegaard did not name any country, but the United States has yet to agree to the treaty.

The Danish minister hoped that the new treaty would include large developing nations like China and India, which are currently exempt from greenhouse gas emissions cuts under the current Kyoto Protocol.

“It is a European priority to get as many countries and contributors on board as possible,” she said.

The Kyoto Protocol, which requires 35 industrial nations to cut emissions of carbon dioxide and other harmful gases collectively by 5 per cent from 1990 levels, expires in 2012.

Denmark will host a UN climate summit in 2009 and hopes to get an agreement on a new climate deal in place to replace the Kyoto agreement.

With energy consumption expected to increase rapidly, the world cannot stand still, Ms Hedegaard said.

Ministers will discuss issues such as deforestation, biodiversity loss and clean technologies over the next two days.

Environment ministers from Germany, Britain, Indonesia and Denmark are attending the conference, while many countries, including India and China, have sent junior ministers or other officials.

Deforestation is a pressing issue, Ms Hedegaard said, with its extent in places such as Indonesia contributing to over 20 per cent of global greenhouse emissions.

“At the same time, forest clearance and fires are major threats to biodiversity as well as to the lives and health of millions of people around the world that depend on forest ecosystems for their livelihood,” she said.

Indonesia’s State Minister for Environment Rachmat Witoeur told The Straits Times that he expects the problem of forest fires to be doused within two years.

“We are eager to make all efforts to...look at potential hot spots and to prevent forest fires from happening,” he said.

Teams have been sent into vulnerable areas to educate smallholders, while village chiefs are being roped in to “be lookouts”.

As well, the government is talking to big plantation owners, warning them that the law will not be kind to offenders, he said.

Civil society activists are certainly hoping that some changes will be made.

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