

Executives urged to back new climate change treaty

COPENHAGEN

FROM NEWS REPORTS

Ban Ki-moon, the secretary general of the United Nations, and Al Gore, the former U.S. vice president and Nobel Peace laureate, on Sunday urged more than 500 business leaders to lend their corporate support to reaching a global agreement on reducing greenhouse gases.

The appeal was made as corporate executives began three days of meetings in Copenhagen, where politicians are scheduled to gather in December to negotiate a new climate treaty brokered by the United Nations.

Despite the global financial crisis, Mr. Ban and Mr. Gore said, there is no time for delay in hashing out the specifics of how to cut greenhouse gases that contribute to warming the planet.

"We have to do it this year. Not next year. This year," Mr. Gore said. "The clock is ticking, because Mother Nature does not do bailouts."

The executives are attending the World Business Summit on Climate Change, which is a precursor to the negotiations to determine what will succeed the Kyoto Protocol after it expires in 2012.

Mr. Ban said: "Continuing to pour trillions of dollars into fossil-fuel subsidies is like investing in subprime real estate. Our carbon-based infrastructure is like a toxic asset that threatens the portfolio of global goods, from public health to food security."

A new treaty on global warming would build on the Kyoto Protocol's mixed success in requiring that 37 industrialized nations reduce emissions of greenhouse gases an average of 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. The treaty was negotiated in December 1997 and came into effect on Feb. 16, 2005.

Erik Rasmussen, the founder of the Copenhagen Climate Council, which is sponsoring the meeting, said that business leaders were discussing binding targets for reducing greenhouse gases within 10 years and 20 years and that the targets would be announced at the end of the conference. (AP, REUTERS)

Indonesia goes wild for American-style reality TV

JAKARTA

In a nation where income varies widely, shows offer a look at how others live

BY NORIMITSU ONISHI

On Indonesia's hottest reality TV show, participants are reunited with long-lost friends and loved ones. On another show, a family going through a rough stretch is chosen for an extreme home makeover. A spoiled rich girl, appearing in another hit that may sound familiar, is plucked from the city and dropped in the hinterland.

The programs are from Indonesia's rich and ever-growing array of reality television shows, with Indonesian faces and backdrops but American roots. They have become so popular that they recently displaced soap operas as the country's ratings leaders and are exploring every subgenre of reality television, like talent contests and dating shows and social experiments.

The United States has long worried about the fate of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, where radical Islamic groups staged a series of attacks against Western interests in the early years of this decade. But the country's television viewers have embraced shows that, though not explicitly American, are American in their formats, concepts and, often, values.

The genre is ascending here as political Islam, surging five years ago, has lost momentum among voters. The success of reality television — technically British in origin but identified here with American culture — reinforces the results of the country's recent general election. In that election, voters seemed to be motivated by issues like good government and better living standards rather than the role of religion in society.

"The influence of American culture is growing, and these reality TV shows present not an innocent hope for the future, but a particular American version of it," said Ariel Heryanto, an Indonesian scholar and editor of "Popular Culture in Indonesia," a collection of essays on Indonesian film and television.

"A lot of people were taken aback by the Islamization of Indonesia, and the pendulum has swung back the other way," said Mr. Heryanto, who recently became head of Southeast Asian studies at the Australian National University in



Ayu Handayani handling a noodle cart on "Tukar Nasib" ("Fate Swap"), where a middle-class family and poor family swap fortunes.

"A lot of people were taken aback by the Islamization of Indonesia, and the pendulum has swung back the other way,"

Canberra. "We're trying to experiment with different versions of modernity, and this time, American culture is in."

Reality television shows have been around for a few years, but they began dominating the ratings late last year, according to AGB Nielsen Media Research, which tracks programs on Indonesia's 11 national stations as well as 10 local ones. They scored high in all social and economic categories, but especially among affluent urban viewers.

"I'm not surprised that they've become popular, but I'm surprised at how huge their ratings are," Indriena Basarah, general manager for Asia for Fremantle Media, the production company

behind "American Idol" and the worldwide "Idol" franchise, said here in Jakarta.

These days, there are 79 Indonesian reality television shows made by local production companies. The current ratings champion, "Termehek-Mehek," which roughly means "Sobbing," reunites people — anyone from long-lost relatives to wives abandoned by their husbands — in highly emotional and often confrontational settings. Other shows have a sharper social edge, like "Jika Aku Menjadi" ("If I Were"), which places a middle-class or wealthy person in rural Indonesia.

In a recent episode, a college student named Tashia, born and raised in Jakarta in a well-to-do family, is seen playing the piano in a living room and singing "What a Wonderful World." Suddenly, she is transported to a dilapidated house in a village where she experiences how an elderly couple, Abah and Emak, survive by making and

selling snacks made of coconut and sugar. In the end, it is clear Tashia is happy to be going home. "Thank you Abah and Emak for giving me this precious lesson, so I can live my life," she says.

In another show, "Tukar Nasib" ("Fate Swap"), a poor family and a middle-class family switch houses temporarily.

In a recent episode, ominous music played as the middle-class family struggled to live in the poor rural family's house. One daughter was so terrified that she could not fall asleep. Still, the family adapted, dutifully doing the poor family's farm work and even clearing cow manure.

Meanwhile, happy music comes on as the poor family is seen enjoying life in the middle class, eating red apples out of a fruit bowl and, of course, watching television. The father is too lazy to take on his middle-class counterpart's job at a transportation company, but his wife gets the idea. "We have to work

harder," she says, "so that our son can go to school, be smart, successful and become a rich man."

In a country with a wide income gap, the show offers a rare look into how others live and serves to affirm the lifestyle of the tiny urban middle class, said a psychiatrist named Dr. Andri who has written about reality television and, like many Indonesians, uses only one name.

The reality shows represent another chapter in the evolution of Indonesian television. During the three decades of the Suharto dictatorship, stations, whether state outlets or privately owned, hewed to the military government's point of view. Except for news, there was little original content; airtime was filled with American shows like "MacGyver" and "The Golden Girls."

Eventually, the American diet inspired a reaction as Islam began playing a larger role in the private lives of Indonesians and in politics.

The American shows gave way to additional local programming as well as less politically sensitive imports, in the form of soap operas from Latin America, Japan, Hong Kong, India and South Korea.

"Now we have these reality shows that are copycats of American shows," said Rachma Ida, an expert on Indonesian television at Airlangga University in Surabaya, in East Java. But for the most part, she said, "people don't realize that these new shows are very much American."

Eko Nugroho, the president of Dreamlight World Media, a producer of reality television, said the shows succeeded not by promoting American values but by tapping into universal desires.

One of his shows, "Bedah Rumah" ("House Change"), focuses on a poor, deserving family whose house undergoes radical improvement. Mr. Eko was also responsible for "Tukar Nasib," the show in which poor and middle-class families trade places.

Mr. Eko, 41, who earned a master's degree in business administration from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, said that producing "Tukar Nasib" made him realize that everybody in the world had the "same dream, no matter who you are, no matter what nationality you are."

"But," he added, "Americans are the ones who first promoted this dream and these values through the media, so people think this kind of dream or values is American."

Latvia straining under huge debt

LATVIA, FROM PAGE 1

I.M.F. that the European Union, of which Latvia is a member, also supported.

Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis, acutely aware that the previous government fell after Riga was shaken by riots in January, must now convince wary lawmakers that the country's choices have narrowed to bad and worse.

"There is a growing awareness of what the problems are, but also what the alternatives are," Mr. Dombrovskis said in an interview. "The alternative is not receiving international financing."

The alternative, in other words, is default.

In better times, the global financial system would barely flinch at the idea of Latvian insolvency. But the other Baltic countries, Estonia and Lithuania, as well as Romania and Bulgaria and even Western stalwarts like Ireland all gorged on cheap credit and are all groaning under a heavy debt load. The last thing they want to see is a default, which could reignite a crisis that appears to be easing.

"Latvia is a reminder that there are other countries struggling with huge imbalances, though nobody has turned out as bad as Latvia," said Lars Christensen, chief analyst at Danske Bank in Copenhagen, who has long warned of a convulsion in the region.

In the heady days after it gained membership in the European Union in 2004, Latvia pegged its currency, the lat, to the euro in anticipation of eventually adopting the European currency. Its economy blossomed and Riga, blessed with its abundance of stunning Art Nouveau architecture, emerged as a kind of capital of the Baltics.

Euro-denominated lending exploded, to the point where 85 percent of household debt was held in euros. But that seemed immaterial at the time, since the euro would soon replace the lat as the country's currency, or so it was thought.



Oskars Barkovskis, left, says more and more people need food aid in Riga, Latvia.

The lat is still with Latvia, however, and so is a colossal problem of how to devalue the currency — the usual adjustment mechanism in a financial crisis — without creating a crushing debt burden. Rather than let the currency decline, the government has chosen what it calls an "internal devaluation," in which wages are forced downward to restore the economy's equilibrium.

In December, the previous government reduced wages by at least 15 percent for most civil servants, and Mr. Dombrovskis is promising more. The government's procurement budget was cut by a quarter, while the value-added tax increased to 21 percent from 18 percent.

Exceptions for books and hotels fell away; excise duties on alcohol and gasoline rose.

The experience is weakening the bonds that Latvians feel for their state. Though proud of their heritage in language and culture, many now speak

openly of emigration, and fading memories of citizens standing together with leaders to throw off Soviet domination 19 years ago only accentuate the alienation.

"Independence or bondage is an easy question to answer," said Krisjanis Karins, a former Latvian economy minister. "This time it is not so cut and dried."

Girts, a lanky 40-year-old doctor's assistant, works three jobs in three hospitals for a monthly salary of \$1,350 and spends half his income servicing a euro-based mortgage on his apartment.

The mood at Latvia's state-run hospitals, he said, is now one of foreboding, as employees gripe that managers did not share in the pain of a 20 percent wage cut in January — one that covered all government workers — and will dodge another later this year. "I have very little faith left in the Latvian state," said Girts, who asked that his surname be withheld for fear of retribution by supervisors. "I don't know how much longer this can go on."

For Latvia's poor, the mood falls somewhere between bewilderment and frustration, as families struggle to comprehend why their world has come apart.

It did not make them rich, but Latvia's boom over the past few years reached Aija Voitov and her husband, Juris, who live in a two-room shack down a dirt road outside Riga.

Though Mr. Voitov switched jobs from time to time, work was plentiful, and Mrs. Voitov had only to walk over to the nearby main road to find work at a big supermarket. Three months ago, Mr. Voitov lost his job at a food processing factory where he had earned \$735 a month. Since then, as the family scrapes by on state assistance, Mrs. Voitov confesses that she has little comprehension of exactly what went wrong but knows only that in the past, things were better.

"It was normal, it was good," Mrs. Voitov said. "There was plenty of work."

Singer's video scores, but show's producers don't

YOUTUBE, FROM PAGE 13

people said. The deal would enable FremantleMedia to claim the unofficial copies of the show as its own and place ads against them, using YouTube's "Video ID" system that companies like Universal Music already use. For now, the copies simply show a message directing users to the official talent show channel managed by FremantleMedia.

A spokesman for YouTube declined to comment.

How much money have the parties lost? In the days following Ms. Boyle's debut, The Times of London published what it called a "crude estimate" suggesting that the parties involved had left \$1.87 million on the table. That was based on 75 million streams of the various clips of Ms. Boyle, which the news-

paper estimated could get \$20 to \$35 for every 1,000 views in the United States and more than that in Britain.

While other TV networks act quickly to remove videos when users upload them without copyright permissions, ITV has "nonexistent piracy enforcement on YouTube," said David Burch, a marketing manager at TubeMogul, an online measurement firm. The broadcaster and producers allowed the copies to stay online because they created conversation and buzz around the program. The clips have received more than half a million user comments.

The view counts continued to grow as people awaited Ms. Boyle's next performance. Visible Measures, a company that tracks online video placements, said Ms. Boyle was responsible for the

fastest-growing viral video in the roughly five-year history of Web video. Only three other videos have received more clicks, said the company, which tracks views across about 150 sites. (YouTube is the biggest by far.)

Matt Cutler, the vice president for marketing and analytics for Visible Measures, said the level of interest was "off the charts."

"On TV, watching the content is the end of the experience," he said. "Online, watching the content is the beginning of the experience." When new clips about a subject become available — in Ms. Boyle's case, her new performance on Sunday — it "actually boosts the viewership of the existing assets."

Miguel Helft contributed reporting.

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