



(L to R) Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Polish President Lech Kaczynski, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and US President Barack Obama cross a bridge from Kehl, Germany to Strasbourg, France yesterday during the Nato summit.

# France, Germany endorse Obama's Afghanistan plan

AP, Strasbourg

France and Germany fully endorsed President Barack Obama's new Afghan war strategy but continued to firmly resist US demands for more combat troops yesterday in a rift that overshadowed symbols of unity at Nato's 60th-anniversary summit.

Obama told Nato leaders the alliance should remain open to new members, another stance that is likely to meet resistance from his allies. Germany, France and many other Nato nations believe that any more eastward expansion will further damage ties Russia that the alliance is trying hard to mend.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and two dozen other Nato leaders walked across a bridge separating Germany and France in a moment of unity before the summit began. The leaders met French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the halfway point on the Europa bridge spanning the Rhine river - a symbolic departure from the enmity that once tore apart Europe

and a setting aside of current differences, at least for a few minutes.

Nato's ability to succeed in Afghanistan is seen as a crucial test of the power and relevance of the alliance founded to counterbalance the Soviet Union and now fighting a rising insurgency far beyond its borders. European leaders and voters remain deeply sceptical about whether more troops can stabilize a country devastated by decades of war.

As the summit itself got under way, Obama took a moment to welcome Albania and Croatia to being alliance membership to 28. Obama said he looked forward to the day when Macedonia will join Nato. Macedonia's accession to Nato has been blocked over a dispute the country has with Greece.

Obama also said that "the door to membership will remain open" for countries that meet Nato standards and can make a meaningful contribution to allied security. He did not specify whether future members could come from the former Soviet

Union, which Russia opposes.

But Afghanistan remained at the heart of the summit. Sarkozy and Merkel again stressed their support for the new strategy on Afghanistan that Obama formally unveiled.

"We cannot afford to lose," Sarkozy said in opening remarks, "because there (Afghanistan), some of the freedom of the world is at stake." Merkel, the summit co-host, said that Afghanistan was a "test" case for the alliance.

Good will toward Obama, who worked the room patting leaders he had just met on the back, was in ample evidence.

"We trust him," Sarkozy said. "We were expecting and waiting for the words we heard."

However, both Merkel and Sarkozy stressed the need for Afghanistan's government and security forces to shoulder an increasing share of the burden. They gave no sign they were prepared to send more troops. Both countries believe civilian aid and training for police are what is needed to stabilise Afghanistan.

## Japan aims for walking robot on the moon by 2020

AP, Tokyo

Japan hopes to have a two-legged robot walk on the moon by around 2020, with a joint mission involving astronauts and robots to follow, according to a plan laid out Friday by a government group.

Specifics of the plan, including what new technologies will be required and the size of the project's budget, are to be decided within the next two years, according to Japan's Strategic Headquarters for Space Development, a Cabinet-level working group.

Development of a lunar robot is part of a broad framework outlined by the group, which is charged with plotting a new course for Japan's space strategy. As a next step, joint exploration of the moon involving robots and astronauts will be considered.

## Wind may have forced N Korea to delay rocket launch

AP, Seoul

High winds may have forced North Korea to delay its rocket launch, despite the country's insistence Saturday that preparations were complete for the liftoff that many suspect is intended to test the country's long-range missile capabilities.

Regional powers deployed warships and trained their satellites on the communist country to monitor what they suspect will be a test for a missile capable of reaching Alaska.

Preparations for sending "an experimental communications satellite" into space were complete, North Korea's state-run media said in a dispatch Saturday morning, adding, "The satellite will be launched soon."

However, the day's stated 11 am to 4 pm timeframe passed without any sign of a launch. North Korea had announced last month the

launch would take place sometime between April 4 and 8 during those hours.

Winds reported as "relatively strong" around the northeastern North Korean launch pad in Musudan-ri may have kept the North from launching the rocket Saturday, analyst Paik Hak-soon of the private Sejong Institute think tank said.

"North Korea cannot afford a technical failure," he said. "North Korea wouldn't fire the rocket if there's even a minor concern about the weather."

Japan again urged North Korea to refrain from a launch that Washington, Seoul and Tokyo suspect is a guise for testing the regime's long-range missile technology a worrying development because North Korea has acknowledged it has nuclear weapons and has repeatedly broken promises to shelve its nuclear program or halt rocket tests.

## Demos disrupt Strasbourg visit by Nato leaders' spouses

AFP, Strasbourg

Demonstrations in Strasbourg, where leaders of the member states of Nato are celebrating its 60th anniversary, disrupted a programme laid on for their spouses yesterday.

A planned visit to a cancer research centre in the morning was called off and replaced by a brief meeting at a museum as hardcore groups of protesters clashed with riot police for a second day.

Around 10,000 police were deployed in buses around the city which looked like a ghost town. In the city centre the only traffic was the occasional bicycle. Cafe owners had been told to close down. Locals and reporters covering the meeting had to undergo identity checks.

The wives, plus German Chancellor Angela Merkel's husband, Joachim Sauer, met at a museum, which had once been a prince's home, where the red carpet laid for the visit Friday by US and French Presidents Barack Obama and Nicolas Sarkozy was still in place. French first lady, a smiling Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, wearing black trousers with a mauve coat and matching handbag welcomed the spouses on the steps of the building.

A security glitch meant that three wives arrived before the 11:00 am (1000 GMT) time scheduled for the reception.



Anti-Nato protesters set fire to a barricade on the Europe Bridge in Strasbourg, eastern France yesterday to protest against the Nato summit. Small mobile groups of protesters played cat and mouse with battalions of French riot police, seeking to cause maximum disruption on the final day of the Nato summit in Strasbourg.



A Kashmiri demonstrator throws back a tear gas shell towards Indian paramilitary soldiers during a protest in downtown Srinagar on Friday. Five militants and a civilian were killed in fresh violence in Kashmir as senior Indian officials arrived in the revolt-hit state to review security ahead of elections.

## '9 militants enter Punjab to carry out Manawan like attack'

ANI, Islamabad

Days after intelligence agencies warned that over a dozen terrorists have entered Lahore and Islamabad in the garb of religious preachers, intelligence sources have now revealed that nine militants have sneaked into Punjab and are planning to carry out attacks similar to the Manawan police training academy strike.

According to The Nation, the group of terrorists also includes two would-be suicide bombers aged 20 and 22 years respectively.

"They have entered the province on a car bearing registration No IHD-598,"

sources added.

Earlier, intelligence agencies had warned that 14 trained militants had entered Lahore and Islamabad in the garb of preachers, to carry out terror attacks on government buildings and luxury hotels.

The investigative agencies had also asked the concerned authorities to beef up security in and around all government establishments, luxury hotels and other important public places.

Reports of seven suicide bombers planning to carry out attacks on government installations in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) were also received from officials in Peshawar.

## Obama to ease Cuba restrictions

AP, Washington

President Barack Obama intends to lift the US ban on family members travelling to Cuba and remittances to the island, The Wall Street Journal reported Friday.

The move would fulfil a pledge Obama made during the presidential campaign and could signal a new openness with the communist nation, the newspaper said in an article posted on its Web site.

A senior administration official travelling with Obama in Europe declined on Saturday to confirm that anything is final on Obama's decision. But the official said Obama has been clear to Congress about his intentions. The official said that for moral and strategic reasons that president made it clear in his campaign that it was "time to address family travel and remittances."

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because Obama has not yet made any announcements.

Democrats in Congress are also moving to loosen restrictions on family travel to Cuba, but Obama plans to use presidential powers to ease the rules on his own, the Journal said, quoting an unidentified senior administration official.

The president does not intend to call for lifting the decades-long trade embargo against Cuba, which would require congressional approval, the report said.

Timing of the announcement is unclear, the Journal said, but there was speculation it could come before this month's Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago.

During the presidential campaign, Obama pledged to allow unlimited family travel and remittances to Cuba. "It's time to let Cuban-Americans see their mothers and fathers, their sisters and their brothers," he said in a speech last May in Miami. "It's time to let Cuban-American money make their families less dependent on the Castro regime."

## Suu Kyi's US backers plead to keep sanction

AFP, Washington

US Congress supporters of Myanmar's democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi pleaded Friday to keep sanctions on the military regime as a key senator said efforts to isolate the junta had failed.

President Barack Obama's administration is reviewing strategy on Myanmar, also known as Burma, whose ruling junta has crushed dissent and kept Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for 19 years.

In a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, 17 mem-

bers of Congress said they were "greatly concerned" by indications that the United States was considering lifting sanctions on Myanmar.

The lawmakers, led by longtime Aung San Suu Kyi champion Joseph Crowley, said that Myanmar's leader Than Shwe had shown no desire to engage with the world's only detained Nobel laureate.

"Than Shwe's regime continues to perpetuate crimes against humanity and war crimes so severe that Burma has been called 'South-east Asia's Darfur,'" they wrote.

## Ice shelf about to break away from Antarctic coast

AP, Paris

A massive ice shelf anchored to the Antarctic coast by a narrow and quickly deteriorating ice bridge could break away soon, the European Space Agency warned Friday.

The Paris-based agency said satellite images show the bridge that connects the Wilkins Ice Shelf to Charcot and Latady Islands "looks set to collapse."

"The beginning of what appears to be the demise of the ice bridge began this week

when new rifts" appeared and a large block of ice broke away, it said.

The Wilkins Ice Shelf which like the rest of Antarctica's ice sheet "was formed by thousands of years of accumulated and compacted snow" had been stable for most of the last century before it began retreating in the 1990s, the statement said.

The shelf, which was originally of Jamaica or the US state of Connecticut, is located on the western side of the Antarctic Peninsula, which

thrusts up from the continent toward the southern tip of South America.

Originally covering about 5,000 square miles (13,000 square kilometres), the ice shelf lost 14 percent of its mass last year alone, the statement quotes a scientist Angelika Humbert of Germany's Munster University as saying.

In two 2008 incidents, large chunks of the ice bridge fell away, shaving it down to just 985 yards (900 meters) across at its narrowest, the statement said.

## Troops on alert after Cambodia-Thai border clash

AFP, Preah Vihear

Troops on both sides of the Cambodian-Thai border were on alert Saturday after gunbattles near a disputed temple left at least two soldiers dead, a Cambodian official said.

The mood was tense after Friday's firefight, which was the biggest flare-up for months in a bitter feud over territory near the ancient temple.

"The situation at the border is quiet now and back to normal," a Cambodian commander named Yem Pem said, adding that troops were on "24-hour alert."

Soldiers exchanged rocket, machinegun and mortar fire Friday, damaging the staircase of the 11th-century Preah Vihear temple, following a brief skirmish earlier in the day, officials said.

Cambodia's foreign ministry said a local government office was damaged, and hundreds of Cambodians, who lost their homes and local market in the fighting, were evacuated to a school 20 kilometres (12 miles) away.

"We were so frightened because the situation was so tense," said Chum Vanna, 27, who was evacuated with her husband and children.



Supporter of incumbent President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono from the Democratic Party, attend an election campaign rally in Yogyakarta yesterday. Indonesia's opposition Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) is leading Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democratic Party a week ahead of general elections, a poll showed on April 2.

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