

G8 chiefs boost pressure on N Korea, Iran

REUTERS, Huntsville, Ontario

The Group of Eight rich nations yesterday deplored what it said was North Korea's sinking of a South Korean warship and urged Pyongyang and Tehran to halt atomic sabre-rattling, which has set the world on edge.

The G8 closed its annual summit with a strongly worded statement accusing Pyongyang of stoking dangerous tensions that could spread far beyond northeast Asia.

"Such an incident is a challenge to peace and security in the region and beyond," the G8 final communiqué said at the end of a two-day meeting in Huntsville, Ontario, north of Toronto.

The group, which includes the United States, Japan, and Russia, called for "appropriate measures" to be taken against the perpetrators of the March 26 attack which killed 46 South Korean sailors.

They also pressed Israel and the Palestinians to work for direct peace talks, and said conditions in Gaza under an Israeli blockade were "not sustainable and must be changed."

A senior US official said the strong statement G8 statement on North Korea would add to pressure over the Cheonan incident, which he said was an "egregious" violation of international norms.

South Korea is pressing for a UN resolution condemning North Korea for the attack, but Pyongyang's main backer, China, a veto-wielding permanent member of the Security Council, has not yet indicated it is ready to support such a move.

The G8 flagged mounting worries over North Korea's nuclear program, asking all nations to enforce existing UN sanctions against Pyongyang and expressing "grave concern about the nuclear test and missile activities" carried out by the North Korean government.



Protesters serenade riot police during a demonstration against the G20 summit in downtown Toronto yesterday. Activists, labour groups and other protesters demanding Group of 20 (G20) countries do more to fight poverty marched through downtown streets but were blocked by police as they neared the security zone authorities have established around the venue for the summit on Saturday and Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

UK to introduce cap on non-EU migrants

AFP, London

Britain will begin capping the number of non-European Union migrants coming into the country to live and work for the first time next month, a Home Office source said yesterday.

Just 24,100 workers will be allowed in between next month and April 2011 -- a five percent cut on the number who arrived in the same period last year.

The aim is to prevent a sudden influx in arrivals before a permanent annual limit, a key election pledge of Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative party, is introduced next year.

"It's not about cutting, it's about preventing a rush," the source said on condition of anonymity.

North Korea to elect leaders in a succession bid

AP, Seoul

North Korea said yesterday it will elect new party leaders at a rare meeting in September in what analysts say could be a move to strengthen a campaign to hand over power from supreme leader Kim Jong Il to his youngest son.

Kim, who suffered an apparent stroke in 2008, is believed to be grooming his youngest son, Kim Jong Un, to succeed him as leader of the nuclear-armed communist nation of 24 million. His health has raised regional concerns about instability and a possible power struggle if he were to die without naming a successor.

North Korea's ruling Workers' Party will convene its conference in early September to elect "its highest leading body," the country's official Korean Central News Agency reported. The report did not elaborate.

The planned conference first since 1966 sparked speculation that the North could publicly announce Kim Jong Un as his father's successor by giving him senior party jobs.

Kim Jong Il was tapped in 1974 to succeed his father, the North's founder Kim Il Sung. The succession decision was made public in a 1980 party convention. Kim Jong Il formally assumed leadership upon his father's death in 1994.

"Kim Jong Un was named as a successor last year, though it was not made public to the outside world," Cheong Seong-chang, a senior analyst at the security think-tank Sejong Institute, south of Seoul, citing South Korea's top spy agency.

The conference "should be seen as a stage to publicize Kim Jong Un as a successor," Cheong said, noting he could be elected to the party's key positions, including a secretary of the party's central committee.

The National Intelligence Service was not immediately available for comment on Saturday.

Little is known about Kim Jong Un, including his exact age, though he is believed to be in his mid-20s. Kim Jong Il's former sushi chef says in a 2003 memoir that the son looks and acts just like his

father and is the leader's favourite.

South Korea's spy chief Won Sei-hoon said Thursday that North Korea has launched a propaganda campaign aimed at making its people adore the junior Kim.

Won told lawmakers North Korea has been publicizing songs and poems praising Kim Jong Un and holding poem-reciting contests, said Lee Kyung-jik, an aide to Hwang Jin-ha, a ruling party lawmaker who attended a closed-door parliamentary session on Thursday. Hwang himself could not be reached for comment.

North Korea is focusing on the succession issue because of Kim Jong Il's health, and the junior Kim frequently travels with his father on inspection visits to army bases and factories, Won was quoted as saying.

Won also said Kim's memory appears to be failing and he has made illogical comments during inspection trips due to side effects of the stroke, South Korea's mass-circulation Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported Saturday, citing unidentified lawmakers who attended Thursday's parliamentary session.

Moon enters 'magnified' eclipse in N America

BBC ONLINE

A partial lunar eclipse now under way should appear magnified to viewers in North America by an effect known as the "moon illusion".

The eclipse began at 1017 GMT, when the Moon entered the shadow of Earth, and is due to last around three hours.

Because of the timing, the eclipse is not visible from the UK or Europe.

But in many parts of the US and Canada, the eclipse should appear larger because it occurs while the Moon is so close to the horizon.

According to Nasa, low-hanging Moons look "unnaturally large when they beam through trees, buildings and other foreground objects". The reason for this is not understood.

British PM fears BP's 'destruction'

REUTERS, Toronto/Miami

President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron were expected to discuss London-based BP Plc and the Gulf of Mexico oil spill yesterday as stormy weather raised fears that clean-up operations could be disrupted.

The oil spill, the worst in US history, is overshadowing the first meeting between Obama and Cameron since the prime minister took office last month, which will take place on the sidelines of the G8/G20 summit in Canada.

The British energy giant's share price is trading at 14-year lows after falling sharply again on Friday, when Cameron offered his strongest comments yet on the issue.

"It is ... in all our long-term interests that there is some clarity, some finality, to all of this, so that we don't at the same time see the destruction of a company that is important for all our interests," Cameron told Canadian broadcaster CBC.

"This is a vital company for all of our interests. ... BP itself wants to cap the well and clean up the spill and compensate those who have had damages," Cameron said.

Obama has been highly critical of BP while his own poll ratings have fallen, in part because of perceptions that his handling of the crisis has been too slow.

British business and shareholder groups have meanwhile clamoured for Cameron to defend the company.

But Cameron insisted on Friday he believed the matter called for gentle persuasion.

Protesters storm Taipei against China trade pact

AFP, Taipei

Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Taipei yesterday as Taiwan prepares to seal a major trade deal with Beijing that opponents fear is a step towards Chinese control.

"Oppose ECFA", "Save Taiwan!", protesters shouted at the march in downtown Taipei organised by the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

The party claimed 100,000 people had turned out to demonstrate against the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), while the police put the number at 32,000.

"Taiwan should decide its own future," DPP chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen told supporters who thronged a square near the presidential office despite heavy rain. "We don't want to fall victim

to ECFA because many people will lose their jobs."

Security was tight, with over 2,000 police deployed for the event, organised before Taiwanese envoy Chiang Pin-kung travels to China to sign the agreement on Tuesday.

Taiwan and China have been governed separately since a civil war in 1949, but Beijing considers the self-ruled island part of its territory and has vowed to get it back, by force if necessary.

President Ma Ying-jeou, who was visiting the island's south and has steered a course towards rapprochement with Beijing, urged the DPP not to "oppose ECFA for the sake of opposing it."

"We respect the people's rights to rally but we hope the DPP can rationally monitor the pact," he told reporters.

AFGHAN WAR

Cameron wants troops back home by 2015

BBC ONLINE

Prime Minister David Cameron has said he wants UK troops out of Afghanistan within five years.

Speaking in Canada, Mr Cameron said he wanted to see troops home by the time of the next general election, due in 2015, "make no mistake about it".

However, ahead of talks with US President Barack Obama yesterday, Mr Cameron told Sky News he preferred not to "deal in too strict timetables".

Some 307 UK forces personnel have died since the Afghan mission began in 2001.

ARMoured VEHICLE
During the election campaign, Mr Cameron said he would like to see troops brought back during course of this Parliament.

Interviewed in Canada, where he will take part in the G8 and G20 summits, Mr Cameron told Sky News: "We can't be there for another five years, having been there for nine years already."

"But one thing we should be clear about - Britain should have a long-term relationship with Afghanistan, including helping to train

their troops and their civil society, long after the vast bulk of troops have gone home."

His aides said his comments did not suggest any new timetable for bringing troops home.

BBC political editor Nick Robinson said while there was insistence the remarks did not indicate a new policy, the prime minister's declaration "does highlight the fact that his mind is on how and when to bring British forces out of Afghanistan".

Mr Cameron spoke as four UK soldiers who died in an accident in Afghanistan on Wednesday - the latest British fatalities there - were named by the Ministry of Defence.

Pte Alex Isaac, Pte Douglas Halliday, Colour Sgt Martyn Horton and L/Cpl David Ramsden were travelling in a Ridgeback armoured vehicle when it left the road and landed in a canal.

Mr Obama wants a US drawdown of troops to begin next summer although US General David Petraeus - who this week replaced the sacked commander of multinational forces Stanley McChrystal - is among those insisting that has to be based on conditions on the ground.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Kyrgyz guards of honour march in front of the Independence Monument at Ala-Too square in Bishkek yesterday. Kyrgyz soldiers voted on Friday in the first stage of a referendum to create what will be Central Asia's only parliamentary democracy, two weeks after ethnic clashes killed more than 250 people.

Jute export booms Nirmul forms

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scientists has also paved the way for higher productivity and quality of jute, he added.

Meanwhile, the government gave Tk 300 crore to the BJMC to buy raw jute as its mills had liquidity crisis.

"Until June, BJMC mills don't have any problems for raw jute, but it is facing problems for power outages," said a top BJMC official.

The 16 BJMC mills now produce 475 tonnes of jute goods a day, which could be more than 600 tonnes if continued power supply was ensured, he said.

The BJMA secretary said they are upbeat about this sector as the government is providing loan facilities. "With credit facilities, jute mills can do amazing things." He however said frequent power outage worries them.

Thirteen of the 92 BJMA mills are now closed while many run partially due to fund crunch and power crisis, he said. Production capacity of BJMA mills now is 20,000 tonnes a month but their present production is around 13,000 tonnes.

The jute minister said the government has directed the state-owned banks to disburse loans to both private and public sector jute mills by July 15 so that middlemen cannot manipulate the market.

In reply to a question, he said, "Power crisis is a common problem. It will be solved nationally in a year or two."

He went on, "We don't want to export raw jute. We want to add value to it and create job opportunities locally."

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of bureaucrats who are loyal to BNP and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami are creating barriers to the trial of war criminals. He demanded the government identify such bureaucrats and take action against them.

He also urged the government to provide the tribunal with adequate logistic support and manpower. He said the tribunal needs at least 25 lawyers and the same number of investigators.

Shahriar Kabir has been made convener of the platform while barrister Turin Afroz member secretary.

Kabir said though three months have elapsed since formation of the tribunal, no remarkable progress has been made.

He identified some reasons for the slowness like inadequate number of prosecutors and investigation officers and inadequate security arrangements for them and lack of involvement of top lawyers in the trial process.

Replying to a question Kabir said, "We assume that if the four-party alliance comes to power once again the trial

process might be stopped as we had seen for the Bangabandhu murder case. So, we want the trial to be completed within the term of this government."

President of the Nirmul advisory committee Kabir Chowdhury said Jamaat and its allies are trying to stop trial of the war criminals anyhow.

"We are hopeful that the trial would be completed within the term of this government. We are keeping pressure on the government for that," said Chowdhury.

Justice Golam Rabbani and journalist Kamal Lohani were also present at the press conference.

NEW COMMITTEE FORMED
New executive and advisory committee of Ekatturer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee for the term 2010-11 were also announced at the press conference.

Justice Golam Rabbani, journalist Shahriar Kabir and Kazi Mukul have been elected president, executive president and general secretary respectively in its recently held national council.

Office bearers include vice-presidents Prof Muntasir

Mamun, Shyamoli Nasrin Chowdhury, Ferdousi Priyabhashini, filmmaker Shahim Akhter and Dr Syed Shafiqul Alam and organising secretary advocate Bayezid Akkas, treasurer Mamtaj Latif, women affairs secretary Salma Haque, information and research secretary Ali Akbar Tabi, publicity and media secretary Mohammad Arafat, publication secretary Syed Mahbubur Rashid, international secretary Sabbir Rahman Khan and law secretary Turin Afroz.

National Professor Kabir Chowdhury has been elected president of the new advisory committee again.

Advisory committee members are singer Kalim Sharafi, columnist Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, artist Kayum Chowdhury, Prof Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir, writer Syed Shamsul Haque, journalist Kamal Lohani, Prof Ajay Roy, Hasan Azizul Haque, Prof Anupam Sen, Justice Kazi Ebadul Haque, Justice Syed Amirul Islam, Justice AK Badrul Haque, Sector Commander Col (ret'd) Abu Osman Chowdhury and Dr Nurunnabi.