

FOURTH BRICS Summit March 29, 2012 : New Delhi



Heads of the BRICS countries (L to R) President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Chinese President Hu Jintao and President Jacob Zuma of South Africa pose prior to the BRICS summit in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Dialogue only option in Syria, Iran crisis

AFP, New Delhi

The world's emerging powers yesterday said dialogue was the only answer to crises in Syria and Iran...

The BRICS -- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa -- made several criticisms of the rich world...

At their fourth summit together, leaders from the five members also issued a pre-emptive warning against any military action by the West or Israel...

"We agreed that a lasting solution in Syria and Iran can only be found through dialogue," Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said...

A summit declaration warned of the "disastrous consequences" of allowing the Iran standoff to escalate...

only be resolved by "peaceful means". Alongside the statements on the need for dialogue in Syria and Iran...

Much of the final statement at the conclusion of the one-day meeting dwelt on how the BRICS alliance would coordinate their positions together...

"In the future the BRICS agenda will be a step-by-step transformation of this forum into a strong and powerful organisation," Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said.

Though it remains in the planning stages, the newly proposed BRICS development bank is an attempt to cement the countries together.

BRICS finance ministers will examine the "feasibility and viability" of the proposal and report back before the grouping's next summit, in South Africa in 2013.

The leaders also pushed for the reform of international financial and economic institutions -- a cornerstone of the BRICS agenda -- and criticised the "slow pace" of reforms at the International Monetary Fund.

Two UN staff, 4 Shias killed in Pakistan

AFP, Quetta, Pakistan

Gunmen separately killed four Shia Muslims and two local UN employees yesterday in Baluchistan...

There were angry demonstrations after the killings of the Shia, in what police described as the latest sectarian attack in the volatile southwest province.

The gunmen, who were on a motorbike, fired at a van carrying members of the minority Muslim community in the Speeni Road neighbourhood of Quetta city...

"Four people including a woman were killed and seven others were wounded," Kakar said, adding that it appeared to be a sectarian attack.

IRAN NUKE PROGRAMME Turkey voices support

AFP, Tehran

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday voiced his country's unwavering support for Tehran's nuclear ambitions...

"The government and nation of Turkey has always clearly supported the nuclear positions of the Islamic republic of Iran, and will continue to firmly follow the same policy in the future," Erdogan was quoted as saying...

Ahmadinejad thanked Turkey for its "clear and frank" stance on the issue, the statement added.

The exchange occurred on the last day of a two-day visit Erdogan was making to Iran to discuss the nuclear issue and bilateral ties.

The Turkish prime minister was to hold talks later with Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, before flying home.

Erdogan flew into Iran on Wednesday from South Korea, where he attended a nuclear security summit alongside other leaders, including US President Barack Obama.

Obama told the summit that "time is short" for a diplomatic solution to the standoff with Iran and urged Iran's leaders to engage in the talks with a "sense of urgency."

President stripped of doctorate for plagiarism

AFP, Budapest

Hungary's Semmelweis University plans to strip the country's president of his doctorate for plagiarism even though an investigative committee cleared him of wrongdoing...

"The doctorate council of Semmelweis University believes that it would be justified to relieve President Pal Schmitt of the doctorate won in 1992," Tivadar Tulassay told reporters after an extraordinary meeting.

"We aim to begin proceedings." On Tuesday the university's investigative committee said that Schmitt had copied large parts of his thesis.

Key Arab summit opens eyeing Syria

Leaders divided; no strong resolution expected

AFP, Baghdad

Arab leaders on Thursday urged a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria at a landmark summit in Baghdad, marred by stayaways and a mortar attack near the Iranian embassy...

No casualties were reported. Only nine visiting leaders of the 22-member Arab League turned up for the summit...

The meeting was opened by UN chief Ban Ki-moon who called on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to move swiftly to implement a peace plan crafted by UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan.

But reflecting the rift between Arab countries on steps they believe should be taken to end the bloodletting in Syria, officials said a final summit statement would not call on Assad to quit nor consider arming the rebels against him as some states have demanded.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia, two states seeking the most aggressive measures on Damascus, only sent envoys to Baghdad.

Qatar explained its decision as being designed to send a "message" to the host, Iraq, which has taken a softer position than most other League members on its neighbour and trading partner.

Even as the summit got underway, Syrian security forces assailed rebel strongholds across the country, a day after Assad's regime made clear it would not abide by any Arab League initiatives.

At least 23 people were killed in clashes in Syria on Thursday, monitors said.

While regional officials wanted to tackle a wide variety of issues, ranging from the Arab-Israeli conflict to jumpstarting the bloc's economies, the summit was firmly focused on Syria...

In his speech opening the summit, Ban called for Syrian authorities to implement Annan's peace plan and for an end to violence ravaging the country.

"It is essential that President Assad put those commitments into immediate effect. The world is waiting for commitments to be translated into action. The key here is implementation. There is no time to waste," he said.

Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah called on Damascus to "listen to the language of reason and wisdom and end all sorts of violence against its people," saying that "prolonging the crisis in Syria will only make it more complicated."

Arab leaders have said they will call at the summit for talks between the Syrian government and opposition based on Annan's six-point peace plan, according to a draft copy of the Baghdad Declaration obtained by AFP.

The region's leaders "denounce the violence, murder and bloodshed, and are in favour of a political solution via national dialogue," said the document, to be issued after the summit.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said Wednesday that the summit would steer clear of strong moves advocated by Qatar and Saudi Arabia to resolve the Syria crisis, and that a ministerial meeting on Wednesday did not discuss arming the country's rebels.



HACKING SCANDAL Scotland Yard media chief quits

AFP, London

The media chief at Scotland Yard has resigned after he faced gross misconduct charges over the phone hacking scandal at Rupert Murdoch's News of the World...

Dick Fedorcio stood down a week after the Metropolitan Police said it would start proceedings against him for hiring Neil Wallis, a former deputy editor at the now-closed paper, as a media consultant.

It is the third major resignation from Scotland Yard, after the head of the force and another senior policeman stood down in July last year at the height of the scandal.

An initial 2006 police investigation into hacking led to the jailing of a News of the World journalist and a private detective, but the tabloid insisted it was a one-off.

India army chief calls leak of letter 'high treason'

AFP, New Delhi

India's army chief yesterday said the leaking of a damning letter he wrote describing the army as unfit to fight a war was treason and urged "ruthless" treatment of the culprit.

Army Chief General VK Singh told Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the letter that India's tanks lacked shells to fire, its air defences were out of date and its forces "woefully short" of weapons.

"The leakage of the letter should be treated as high treason... and sources of the leakage should be found and dealt with ruthlessly," Singh, who is due to retire on May 31, said in a statement.

Defence Minister AK Antony also slammed those responsible for releasing the letter, calling it an "anti-national" move that "only helps enemies". Antony said at a defence trade show in New Delhi that "we will take strongest action under laws after going into the root of the leak of the army chief's letter."



The opposition outcry over the letter, which was splashed across the media on Wednesday, forced Antony to promise parliament that the government would do everything "necessary for the security of the nation."

The general said in his letter, dated March 12, that India's air defences were "97 percent obsolete" and its tank fleet was "devoid of critical ammunition to defeat enemy tanks."

The army chief has been in a public dispute with the government over the date of his retirement and was again in the headlines earlier this week over a bribery scandal.

On Monday, Antony ordered a probe into allegations by General Singh that he had been offered a \$2.8-million bribe to clear a sub-standard defence procurement deal.

The uproar is the latest blow for Prime Minister Singh's government, which has been paralysed by a series of graft cases, including the mis-selling of mobile phone licences estimated to have cost the treasury up to \$39 billion.

Japan executes first prisoners since 2010

AFP, Tokyo

Japan yesterday resumed its use of capital punishment after a 20-month break, with an unapologetic government minister signing death warrants for three multiple murderers.

The convicts went to the gallows on the orders of the justice minister, who said he was performing his job and acting in line with public opinion, which overwhelmingly supports the death penalty. Polls have shown 85 percent support for capital punishment.

Apart from the United States, Japan is the only major industrialised democracy to carry out capital punishment, a practice that has led to repeated protests from European governments and human rights groups.

Pakistan using militants against India: Pentagon

PTI, Washington

Pakistan has an "addiction" of "playing around" with militant groups against India, a top Pentagon official has said.

"They have an addiction to playing around with militia groups to achieve certain interests, particularly vis-a-vis India. That gets them in all kinds of trouble,"

Michael Sheehan, assistant secretary of Defence for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, told lawmakers at a Congressional hearing. Responding to questions, Sheehan said the US has been having discussion with Pakistan in this regard, but without much success.

"We've had these conversations with them forever about that. I don't see that changing. I don't see any set of talking points that's going to be delivered by some new diplomat that's going to change their mind," Sheehan said, adding the US has virtually "given up" in its effort to change the mindset of Pakistan with regard to India.

"It's the way they view the world. We have to understand the way they view the world and try to work through it. But it's not going to be easy, but I think at the end of the day we have been successful in the FATA in degrading al-Qaeda over the last 10 years despite all these problems.

"And I think that we're going to continue to work through it and hopefully again have another 10 years of success in degrading al-Qaeda's strategic capability in the FATA and elsewhere," Sheehan said.

Swedish minister quits in Saudi arms scandal

AFP, Stockholm

Swedish Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors has quit, the prime minister said yesterday, following weeks of controversy over revelations Sweden planned to help Saudi Arabia build an arms factory.

"I have today, upon request from Sten Tolgfors, decided to relieve him (of his duties)," Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt told a news conference.

Reinfeldt stressed that Tolgfors, who has served as defence minister since 2007, had begun hinting months ago that he wanted to leave, but had speculated that media focus on the weapons factory scandal had sped up his exit.

"The probe and the questions around this issue will continue... and that is of course a good thing," Reinfeldt said, adding that Tolgfors would maintain his seat in parliament while Infrastructure Minister Catharina Elmsaeter-Svaerd would temporarily take over the defence portfolio.

Public broadcaster Swedish Radio revealed earlier this month that the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) had secret plans since 2007 to help Saudi Arabia build a plant for the production of anti-tank weapons.

Sweden has in the past sold weapons to Saudi Arabia, but classified government documents say Project Simoom "pushes the boundaries of what is possible for a Swedish authority," the radio said when it broke the story on March 6.



Sten Tolgfors

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