

G8 'unified' against Iran, Syria

AFP, Camp David

Group of Eight leaders agreed in their discussions at Camp David yesterday that Iran needs to disclose more about its nuclear ambitions and that it was time to focus on a political transition in Syria, said President Barack Obama, the host.

"I think that all of us agree that Iran has the right to peaceful nuclear power but that its continuing violations of international rules and norms and its inability thus far to convince the world community that it's not pursuing the weaponization of nuclear power is something of grave concern to all of us," Obama said.

"We're unified when it comes to our approach with Iran."

Iran has said sanctions over its disputed nuclear program should be lifted in talks with world powers next week in Baghdad, but yesterday maintained that the punitive measures would not compel it to abandon its atomic "rights."

G8 leaders yesterday vowed to ensure oil markets are "fully and timely supplied" to ensure that tough new sanctions coming into force against Iran do not send energy prices soaring.

In what one official called an "unusual" statement, leaders meeting at the Camp David summit said they would keep a close watch on supplies and would ask the International Energy Agency to take action if the situation demanded.

Iran is to meet representatives of the so-called P5+1 group,



US President Barack Obama chairs a G8 summit plenary session at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

comprising the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany, in Iraq's capital on Wednesday for the second round of talks which were revived in April in Istanbul after a 15-month impasse.

US President Barack Obama also said that the G8 -- which includes Russia -- agreed that the political process in Syria should move forward "in a more timely fashion."

"We had a discussion about Syria, we all believe that a peaceful resolution and a political transition in Syria is preferable," Obama said, flanked by leaders of the G8 industrialized

nations at a Camp David summit.

More than 12,000 people, the majority of them civilians, have died since the Syrian uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began in March 2011, including more than 900 killed since the putative truce came into effect, rights activists say.

"We are all deeply concerned about the violence that's taking place there, the loss of life," Obama said.

"We're supportive of the Annan plan, but we agree, and I expect that this will be reflected in our communique, that the Annan plan has to be fully implemented and that a political process has to move forward in a more timely fashion to resolve that issue."

But Russia's non-intervention stance on Syria remained unchanged yesterday.

"There cannot be any change of regime through force," the Kremlin's Africa envoy, Mikhail Margelov said, adding that G8 leaders meeting at Camp David had yet to agree on the Syria part of their final summit declaration.

"You cannot use an ax to shear your way through the Syrian crisis, you have to use a pair of pincers to somehow sort it out."

At the end of the Friday night dinner, Obama had a chocolate birthday cake delivered for Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, whose birthday is today. The G8 at Camp David was scheduled to end yesterday afternoon, at which time Obama and several of the other leaders will head to Chicago for a Nato summit.

MYANMAR REFORM World will do all it can: Obama

AFP, Camp David

President Barack Obama, fresh from easing US sanctions on Myanmar, said at the G8 summit yesterday that world powers would do all they could to promote the country's political reforms.

Obama lifted some investment restrictions on the nominally civilian-ruled nation this week, hoping to reward President Thein Sein for taking steps toward political change, and to encourage the government to go further.

He said at the G8 summit at his Camp David retreat that fellow leaders "are hopeful" about developments in impoverished Myanmar, formerly known as Burma.

"Our hope is that this process will continue and we're going to do everything we can to encourage that process."

Obama on Thursday eased investment sanctions on Myanmar and named the first US ambassador to the country in 22 years, seeking to reward an easing of "iron fist" rule.

But seeking maximum leverage on Myanmar's government and to preserve his options in case of "backsliding," he maintained wider US sanctions on Myanmar and figures linked to the former junta.

The US government will now license certain types of investment in financial services and allow American businesses to work in Myanmar, though will ensure that those who abuse human rights and seek to slow progress do not benefit.

It will maintain restrictions on investment with the military, which has deep commercial interests in the country's economy.

Blast, attacks kill 19 in Syria

AFP, Damascus

A suicide bomber detonated a car bomb in eastern Syria yesterday killing nine people, as US President Barack Obama said the G8 wanted a political transition in the violence-ravaged country.

The bombing was the first of its kind in Deir Ezzor, eastern Syria's biggest city, since an anti-regime uprising broke out last year, and at least 10 other people were reportedly killed elsewhere in the country.

Among the dead were a woman and her two children gunned down in the northern city of Aleppo, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

A "terrorist suicide bomber" used 1,000 kilograms of explosives in the attack on the Deir Ezzor neighbourhood of Ghazi Ayyash, said state television.

The powerful explosion left a crater 3.5 metres deep and damaged buildings within a radius of 100 metres, the channel said.

It occurred on a road housing a military and air force intelligence headquarters and a military hospital, according to the Observatory.

There was no claim of responsibility for the bombing but, as typically happens in such cases, the opposition blamed it on the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

Elsewhere, a rocket slammed into the ruling Baath party's offices in northern Aleppo province, the Observatory said, a day after unprecedented anti-regime protests in the provincial capital of the same name.

Blast at Italy school kills 1, wounds 6

REUTERS, Rome

A bomb exploded in front of a school in southern Italy yesterday, killing a 16-year-old girl and wounding at least six others, two seriously, authorities said yesterday.

The explosion, near the entrance of a girls' school named after the wife of murdered anti-Mafia judge Giovanni Falcone, occurred as pupils were preparing to enter the school at the start of the school day.

Authorities said two gas canisters appear to have been placed in rubbish containers at the school, which local media said was located near the main court in Brindisi, a port city located in Apulia, on the "heel" of Italy.

There was no claim of responsibility and no indication of who had placed the bomb but initial suspicions were directed at the mafia.



Supporters of the 'Stop the war' coalition and 'Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament' demonstrate outside the American Embassy in central London yesterday, as leaders of G8 countries meanwhile met at Camp David and Nato held a summit in Chicago. The demonstrators called for western troops in Afghanistan to be brought back home and for an end to Western military intervention in the Middle East.

PHOTO: AFP

China doesn't pose threat to us: India

PTI, Chennai

China posed no threat to India despite border dispute but the country was equipping itself well and having a strong deterrence posture so that no adversary took it for granted, minister of state for defence M M Pallam Raju yesterday said.

"I think it is not a threat. We have a very healthy economic partnership with China, which is our neighbour. Of course, we do have differences on the perception of the border, which again at a very high level meeting of national security advisers we are thrashing these things out," he said.

Raju was responding to a question from reporters on whether China was a constant threat to India and steps taken to counter it. He saw no reason for a conflict between the two neighbours.

Small countries call for UN shake-up

BBC ONLINE

Switzerland's UN ambassador Paul Seger has lost 7kg (15lb) in the past two weeks, not from hiking in the Alps, but from battling what is known as the five "Big Powers" of the Security Council.

His country belongs to the "Small Five", a group of middling nations that has been pushing to improve the way the Council does business with the UN's wider membership.

However, the "Big Five" -- France, Britain, America, Russia and China -- did not like it.

"They convened us as the Small Five to their office and explained to us in no uncertain terms that this is not the way we should proceed. This is infringing upon their sovereign rights and will be divisive and detri-

mental," Seger said in an interview.

"We got several clear notices both in our capitals and here in New York, to say 'don't do it'."

The dispute is over the relationship between the General Assembly, which represents all 193 UN member states, and the Security Council, the 15-member body that bears legal responsibility for managing threats to international peace and security.

At its core are the Big Five, also known as the Permanent Five or P5, who have permanent seats and veto powers, a political hierarchy established after World War II that has dominated the UN system ever since.

The Small Five also includes Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein and Singapore.

Most of the recommendations in their draft resolution suggested ways that the Council could better share information and improve access to its decision making, with the aim of making it more accountable and transparent

and operate with flexibility in order to fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter to meet the evolving challenges to international peace and security," said the British ambassador Mark Lyall Grant.

"But for that effectiveness and adaptability, it needs to be confident in its own decisions and procedures. It ultimately must remain the master of its own rules of procedure, as stated in the UN Charter."

The S5 claim they had support in the General Assembly from more than 100 member states, but their campaign was stymied on procedural grounds. Ultimately they were forced to withdraw the resolution.

Seger said the S5 would try to broaden its support base to prepare for the next struggle.

But lessons have been learnt. Asked if this was a clear demonstration of how power works at the UN, the Swiss ambassador paused for a nano-second before casting diplomatic courtesies to the wind: "Yes!" he said emphatically.

Canada passes law to stifle student protests

GUARDIAN ONLINE

Quebec's provincial government has passed an emergency law restricting demonstrations and shutting some universities as the government seeks to end three months of protests against tuition fee increases. Outraged students reacted by calling it an act of war.

Among the provisions of the law, which passed 68-48 on Friday, is a requirement that police be informed eight hours before a protest and told the route of any demonstration that includes 50 or more people.

Hours after the vote thousands of protesters marched in downtown Montreal to condemn the legislation, which students and supporters say limits their ability to demonstrate their disapproval of the fee hikes.

The crowd was much larger than the hundreds who gathered on Thursday night as the government introduced the bill to quell the most sustained student protests in Canadian history. On Wednesday protesters smashed windows and more than 120 people were arrested.

The Quebec premier, Jean Charest, said the provincial legislation would not roll back the tuition hikes of \$254 per year over seven years. Rather, it would temporarily halt the spring semester at schools paralysed by walkouts and bring forward the summer holidays. Classes would resume earlier in August.

The Quebec Bar Association said it had serious concerns about fundamental freedoms being abridged and the scale of the restraints was unjustified.

Woman conquers Mt Everest at 73

THE TIMES OF INDIA ONLINE

Japanese national Tamae Watanabe, 73, on Saturday became the oldest woman to climb Mount Everest breaking her own previous record, according to the trekking agent who organised her climb.

Watanabe reached the summit of the 8,848m Everest from the northern side at 7:00am yesterday. She along with three climbing sherpas and another Japanese had left camp three at 8,300 metres 8:30pm on Friday.

Watanabe had earlier set the record of being the oldest woman to climb Everest in 2002 when she climbed the mountain from the south side in Nepal when she was 63.

China dissident heads for US

BBC ONLINE

Chinese activist Chen Guangcheng - who was at the centre of a diplomatic crisis with Washington - was on his way to the United States yesterday, according to reports.

The blind activist and his family boarded a flight to Newark, near New York, after being taken from a Beijing hospital to the capital's airport.

Chen recently spent six days in the US embassy in Beijing after escaping house arrest in north-east China.

He has been offered a fellowship at New York university.

Chen Guangcheng, a self-taught lawyer who campaigned against forced abortions under China's one-child policy, was jailed for four years in 2006 for disrupting traffic and damaging property, and placed under house arrest after his release in 2010.

Earlier yesterday, at the airport he and his family were handed passports and allowed to leave.

"Thousands of thoughts are surging to my mind," Chen told the Associated Press news agency from the terminal.

Referring to his supporters, he said: "I am requesting a leave of absence, and I hope that they will understand."

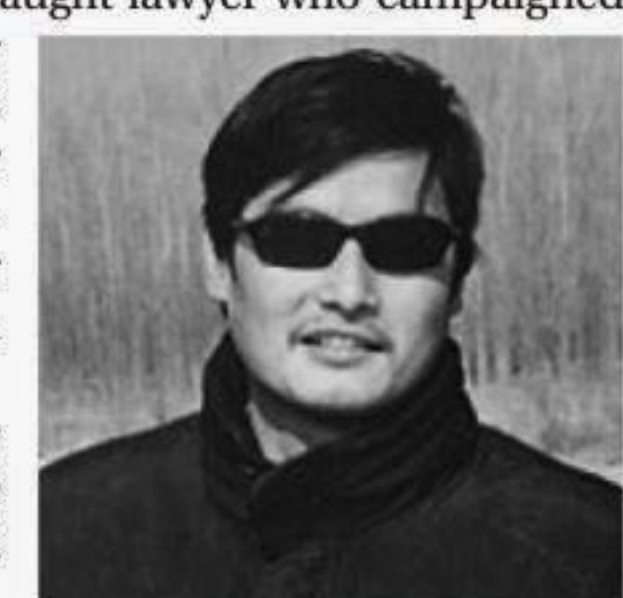
The state-run Xinhua news agency said Chen had applied to study abroad "via normal channels in line with the law".

US state department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the administration was looking forward to welcoming Chen to the US, and expressed "appreciation for the manner in which we were able to resolve this matter".

The dissident may stay in New York for two to three years.

With the activist on his way, both China and the US will want to put this extraordinary diplomatic dispute behind them, says the BBC's Martin Patience in Beijing.

Last month Chen fled from house arrest in Shandong province. With help of friends, he was driven hundreds of kilometres away to the American embassy. He took refuge there during a visit by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who was in Beijing for high-level talks.



Chen Guangcheng



Security Council during meeting session

Guardian Online

Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese democracy leader and Nobel peace prize winner, is to visit Britain next month in her first trip outside the south Asian state for 24 years. She will address both houses of parliament as a guest of the British government, as well as receiving an honorary degree at Oxford University, where she studied in the 1960s.

She will also visit her sons and grandchildren, whom she has rarely seen.

The visit follows David Cameron's trip to Burma last month and represents a possible sign of a rapid shift to democracy in the country. Aung San Suu Kyi is also expected to visit Ireland and Norway in week-long visits starting on 18 June that is likely to be a celebration of her personal courage and the shift away from repression in Burma.

Western governments will want to hear from her directly on how they can best foster

the shift to democracy, and whether the military government is willing to follow reform to its logical conclusions.

She has not travelled abroad partly due to having been under house arrest for 15 of the past 22 years and partly due to her fear that if she left the country, the Burmese military authorities would not let her back in. She remained in Burma even when her husband, Michael Aris, was terminally ill with cancer, fearing she might not be readmitted. Aris died in 1999.

Aung San Suu Kyi, whose father negotiated Burmese independence from Britain, was released from house arrest in November 2010 and was elected to parliament. Her UK-based sons have travelled to Burma recently to see her.

Aung San Suu Kyi gained a degree in PPE in 1969 from St Hugh's College, Oxford, where she is an honorary fellow. Cameron said he would be honoured to welcome her back to her "beloved Oxford" for the first time since she left the city in 1988.

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