

# Nato urges Pakistan to reopen supply route

Agrees to hand Afghans security lead by mid-2013

AFP, Chicago

Nato leaders yesterday called on Pakistan to reopen a key supply route into Afghanistan "as soon as possible" after talks with Islamabad on the border crossing faltered.

In a declaration at a summit in Chicago, the alliance expressed appreciation to Russia and Central Asian governments for allowing supply convoys through their territory and said "Nato continues to work with Pakistan to reopen the ground lines of communication as soon as possible."

"The countries in the region, particularly Pakistan, have important roles in ensuring enduring peace, stability and security in Afghanistan and in facilitating the completion of the transition process," the declaration said.

"We stand ready to continue dialogue and practical cooperation with relevant regional actors in this regard," it added.

Islamabad shut its border to Nato supplies in November after a botched US air raid that left 24 Pakistani soldiers dead.

To ferry troops, food and equipment into Afghanistan, the US-led force in Afghanistan has relied on cargo flights and a more costly northern route network that passes through Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Meanwhile, Nato leaders agreed yesterday to hand Afghan forces the lead for security from mid-2013 as they rush to end the unpopular war and ensure Afghanistan can ward off the Taliban after foreign troops leave.

In the summit declaration, US President Barack Obama and his 27 military allies confirmed plans to withdraw their combat troops by the end of 2014 and leave behind a training mission.

The leaders declared that the transition process was "irreversible" and

would put Afghan forces "in the lead for security nationwide" by mid-2013, allowing US-led troops to gradually shift their focus from combat to support.

"We are gradually and responsibly drawing down our forces to complete the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission by 31 December 2014," they said in a declaration setting in stone a roadmap agreed in 2010.

US President Barack Obama yesterday vowed that the international community would not abandon Afghanistan as it seeks to take control of its own security and shape its future.

As the Taliban remain resilient after a decade of war, Nato leaders sought to reassure Afghan President Hamid Karzai that the international community would not abandon his country after 130,000 foreign combat troops are gone.



US President Barack Obama arrives at a meeting during the Nato summit in Chicago, Illinois yesterday.

## Syria forces kill nine deserters

AFP, Damascus

Syrian forces ambushed and killed nine army deserters in a north Damascus suburb yesterday, a human rights watchdog said, as Nato ruled out military action against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

The bloodletting also appeared to spill over into neighbouring Lebanon where two people were killed overnight in street battles between pro- and anti-Syrian groups in Beirut, a security official said.

The latest violence in Syria comes after a rocket-propelled grenade exploded on Sunday near a team of UN observers in a Damascus suburb.

The nine army deserters were killed as they were retreating under cover of darkness from the village of Jisr al-Ab, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

## INDIAN PRESIDENTIAL RACE

# Mamata non-committal on Pranab as president

PTI, New Delhi

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee yesterday remained non-committal on backing Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee as president saying her party would strongly support Speaker Meira Kumar for the post.

"No, I didn't say but if allows him who am I to oppose it? It depends on the majority. It is a democratic country. He (Mukherjee) is finance minister...for Pranab Mukherjee I am very much sincere. About this I am very much serious. It's Congress party's decision (as to) who will be the candidate. We cannot say. I cannot interfere in Congress party's business.

"But if you ask my party's choice or the personal choice, then I'll say, I love Miera Kumar. She is a soft-spoken lady from the scheduled caste background," she told CNN-IBN.



She was replying to questions about her party's stand on the coming presidential election and why Mukherjee's name is not on her wishlist for the post of president.

Banerjee also favoured former Governor Gopalakrishna Gandhi or former president APJ Abdul Kalam.

"These three names are better, I think so," she said, according to the transcript of the interview issued by the channel.

Asked about Pranab Mukherjee, the chief of Trinamool Congress, which runs a coalition government with the Congress in West Bengal, said, "Is he the son of Bengal? He may be the son of world... I don't think so but it is his choice. I don't know."

To a query about Mukherjee not being in Mamata Banerjee's wishlist for the post of president, Banerjee said "No, I didn't say. But if country allows him, who am I to oppose it."

## Mali solves political impasse

AFP, Bamako

A last-minute deal signed with Mali's junta on a transition government solved a political impasse, but as mediators left yesterday, a crisis in the rebel-held north loomed large over the new leaders.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mediators wrapped up a mission to Mali after securing their choice for transition president by offering the leader of a March 22 coup the status of former head of state.

"We are all leaving, with the feeling that we have accomplished our mission" set by ECOWAS, Ivory Coast Minister of African Integration Adama Bictogo told AFP.

"The framework of the transition has been defined," he added.

# Putin names new Russian cabinet

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin has announced a new cabinet, warning that it will have to fulfill its duties in a difficult global economic climate.

Putin, who won a third term in March's election, said yesterday that the new cabinet - led by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev - should continue the course set in previous years.

Medvedev stepped down as president to allow Putin to reclaim the top job. Putin served as the premier for four years after having to relinquish his presidency after two terms due to limits.

Many members of the old cabinet have retained their seats, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, reports AFP.

Politicians in charge of the health, education, and interior ministries are to be replaced after facing strong public criticism.

"The situation the world economy finds itself in today is uncertain. There are a lot of



uncertainty factors," Putin told his new government in televised remarks.

"You will have to implement Russia's development programme in these conditions."

Putin's protegee and current Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said new names made up three-quarters of the cabinet, reports AFP.

The new cabinet includes a brand new position in charge of developing Russia's remote Far East while another deputy prime minister will be overseeing the country's preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.

But several analysts said the appointments did little to encourage reforms because Putin was still likely to keep a tight reign on most financial and business decisions.

Economists at Alfa Bank said earlier in the day the appointments indicated "a strong focus on maintaining the balance of power between the president and the prime minister rather than forming a proactive team of economic reformers."

## Italy quake zone hit by aftershocks

AFP, Finale Emilia

Several thousand Italians were sheltering in cars and makeshift tent cities yesterday as a series of aftershocks rattled towns across the northeast after a strong quake killed six people.

Sunday's 6.0 magnitude quake reduced homes and historic buildings to rubble in the densely-populated Ferrara area, Italy's industrial heartland but also home to priceless architectural and art treasures.

At least 24 aftershocks were felt through the night and heavy rains lashed the area as firemen and police made house-to-house checks and rescuers set up four tent cities to provide shelter for about 4,000 people.

"We are really afraid that there's going to be another big one," said one resident of Finale Emilia.

## NEWS IN brief

### Pakistan opposition boycotts PM dinner for Erdogan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's main opposition party said yesterday it would boycott a banquet being hosted by the prime minister for Turkey's premier, as a protest against the Pakistani leader's conviction for contempt.

The snub from opposition leader Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N is likely to embarrass Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani in front of his visiting Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is widely admired in Pakistan.

On April 26, Gilani became Pakistan's first sitting prime minister to be convicted in court, for refusing to ask the Swiss authorities to reopen corruption cases against President Asif Ali Zardari.

### Suu Kyi to give Nobel talk in Oslo on June 16

AFP, Oslo

Aung San Suu Kyi will make a speech in Oslo next month to accept the Nobel Peace Prize she was awarded in 1991, as part of her first trip outside Myanmar in 24 years, the Nobel Committee said yesterday.

"She will give the lecture on June 16 at 1:00 pm at the Oslo city hall," committee spokeswoman Sigrild Langebrekke told AFP, adding that Suu Kyi should arrive in the Norwegian capital on June 15.

Langebrekke said Suu Kyi's full programme was not yet known, but that as part of her first trip abroad since she was released from house arrest in 2010 she was scheduled to meet Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere.

### Gaddafi ex-spy chief charged in Mauritania over false papers

AFP, Nouakchott

A Mauritanian court has charged Moamer Gaddafi's ex-spy chief, arrested two months ago and the subject of several handover demands, with illegally entering the country, an official said yesterday.

Abdullah al-Senussi, feared former right hand man of the slain Libyan leader, was charged overnight for using false travel documents to illegally enter Mauritania on March 16 on a flight from Casablanca. "He was charged and put in prison, in a cell specially prepared ahead of the trial, whose date has yet to be set," a judicial source told AFP on condition of anonymity.

## Sri Lanka's ex-army chief freed from jail

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's ex-army chief Sarath Fonseka was released from prison yesterday after he was jailed following his unsuccessful bid to unseat the president in 2010, and vowed to "save" the country.

"I am free. I will devote my life for my people," Fonseka shouted to thousands of supporters as he emerged from Welikada prison in Colombo, after receiving a pardon ordered last week by President Mahinda Rajapakse.

"I will not betray the people who stood behind me. I will save the country. The people will correct the injustice caused to me... I was a victim of a vendetta," he said, referring to his incarceration of more than two years.



Members of the All India Anti Terrorist Front shout slogans after paying tribute to former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Amritsar yesterday. Gandhi was assassinated during an electoral campaign on May 21, 1991, allegedly by members of the Sri Lankan separatist LTTE.

## 16 wholesale shops

FROM PAGE 20

Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) jointly conducted the drives at fruit markets in Jatrabari, Mirpur and Badamtali, said a press release.

A mobile court led by Executive Magistrate Abu Sayed, conducted a drive at five shops in Kolapotti in Jatrabari and fined Noor Hossain, a banana shop owner, Tk 8,000 after detecting harmful chemical in the fruits. The team destroyed several thousand bananas of his shop.

Another court led by Executive Magistrate Md Jasim Uddin, in a drive at Badamtali wholesale fruits market, fined wholesalers Zakir Hossain and Md Parvez Tk 40,000 and Tk 10,000 respectively for using calcium carbide to ripen mangoes.

The court destroyed 126kg mangoes of Zakir's shop and 20kg mangoes of Parvez's.

In another drive at Mirpur Shah Ali Beribadh Prokalpa Market, a mobile court led by Executive Magistrate Md Rashunun Kader examined mangoes of 13 wholesale shops and found the presence of formalin in all of them.

The court destroyed 17,860kg mangoes of the shops.

The shops are Syedpur Enterprise, Shah Ali Pharma, Khawza Baniyya, Dewan Baniyya Bhandar, Janoni Baniyya Bhandar, Sikdar Enterprise, Dewan Traders, New Five Star Foler Aroth, Mirpur Shah Ali Farm, Akash Baniyya Bhandar, Bhai Bhai Traders, Kazi Tapan Enterprise and Tunitumpa Fruit Store.

## Kahn faces 'gang rape' inquiry

BBC ONLINE

A French prosecutor ordered an initial inquiry into claims that ex-IMF head Dominique Strauss-Kahn was involved in "gang rape" in Washington yesterday.

The allegations come from a Belgian prostitute who said she was at a hotel sex party in the city in December 2010.

Strauss-Kahn, 63, is already under investigation with three other men over their alleged roles in a prostitution ring. He denies the allegations.

A charge that he attempted to rape a US hotel maid was dropped last year.

But the case put an end to Strauss-Kahn's career at the International Monetary Fund.

# Myanmar sanctions to stay as 'insurance policy'

Says Hillary Clinton

AFP, Washington

The United States has vowed to keep broad sanctions against Myanmar as an "insurance policy" against "backsliding" on democratic reforms even as it seeks to open up certain types of investment.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi on Sunday night to discuss steps to promote investment in her country and the need for progress in resolving ethnic conflicts.

"They agreed that the important progress of the past several months remains fragile and that the international community needs to help protect against backsliding," the State Department said in a statement.

"In this regard, the secretary assured Aung San Suu Kyi that the United States is keeping its sanctions authorities in place as an insurance policy." President Barack Obama's announced



last Thursday that the United States was easing investment restrictions on Myanmar while maintaining wider US sanctions on the government and figures linked to the former junta.

Clinton and Suu Kyi talked about the need for specific steps to promote responsible, transparent investment, empower reformers, and target abusers," the State Department.

"Finally, they also discussed the urgent need for progress in resolving the ethnic conflicts and ending human rights abuses in the ethnic areas. They agreed to remain in close touch," the statement said.

Meeting last Thursday with Myanmar Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, Clinton said Washington was determined to help end the ethnic conflicts in the country as she expressed concern about recent violence in Kachin State.

## Malaysia's Anwar to be charged over protest

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim will be charged over an April protest demanding fair elections, his lawyer said yesterday, accusing the government of a fresh bid to remove Anwar from politics.

The move comes just four months after Anwar was acquitted of sodomy in a long-running trial that the charismatic leader has said was engineered by the government of Prime Minister Najib Razak to remove him as a political threat.

Anwar will be charged in a Kuala Lumpur court today with violating a contentious new law on public assemblies and a court order restricting the April 28 rally, his lawyer Sivarasa Rasiah told AFP.

"This is a fresh attempt to bar Anwar from participating in the elections. The sodomy allegations failed, and now this is a new attempt to disqualify him," Sivarasa said.

Tens of thousands of Malaysians hit the streets of the capital Kuala Lumpur for the rally organised by electoral-reform group Bersih 2.0, demanding changes to an election system they say is rigged in the ruling coalition's favour.

The demonstration turned violent when protesters breached a barricade set up around the city's central Independence Square, which authorities had ruled was off limits for the rally, prompting police to fire tear gas and water cannon.

