

Shape a different future

Says UN chief as world leaders meet in Istanbul to fix 'broken' aid system

REUTERS, Istanbul

Global leaders met in Istanbul yesterday to tackle a "broken" humanitarian system that has left 130 million people in need of aid, a near insurmountable task for a two-day summit that critics say risks achieving little.

Billed as the first of its kind, the United Nations summit aims to develop a better response to what has called the worst humanitarian crisis since World War Two, mobilise more funds and find agreement on better caring for displaced civilians.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on governments, businesses and aid groups to commit to halving the number of displaced civilians by 2030. "We are here to shape a different future," he said in an address at the start of the conference.

"I urge you to... find better long-term solutions for refugees and displaced people based on (a) more equal sharing of responsibilities."

But that may be difficult to attain. The global aid agency Medecins sans Frontieres pulled out of the conference earlier this month saying it had lost hope the partici-

pants could address weaknesses in emergency response.

Critics say the global aid system needs greater financing to cope with a proliferation of regional wars and failed states that have ballooned the numbers of displaced people, and to reduce inefficiency and corruption that consume considerable humanitarian funds before they can benefit those most in need.

President Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, which is saddled with around 3 million refugees from neighbouring Syria's civil war - the world's largest refugee population in a single country, again accused the West of doing little to help Syrians.

Erdogan has been among President Bashar al-Assad's fiercest critics and sees his removal as essential to ending Syria's war.

Addressing the summit yesterday, he criticised the UN Security Council, saying it should have more than five permanent members - the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China.

"It is illogical, unconscionable and unfair to confine all peoples' fate to the political interest of five countries."

WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT



A general view shows a bus station that was targeted as part of multiple bombings that left many dead in the northern coastal city of Jableh, between Latakia and Tartus yesterday. At least 148 people were killed in a spate of bombings in two regime bastions along Syria's coast, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Story on Page 1.

PHOTO: REUTERS



No apology for A-bomb on Hiroshima visit

Obama tells Japanese TV

AFP, Tokyo

Barack Obama will not apologise for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima when he visits the city, he told Japanese television.

The comments are the clearest yet from his administration over an issue that raises hackles in the United States and has been the subject of heated debate for decades.

Asked if an apology would be included in remarks he plans to make, he said: "No, because I think that it's important to recognise that in the midst of war, leaders make all kinds of decisions."

"It's a job of historians to ask questions and examine them, but I know as somebody who has now sat in this position for the last seven and a half years, that every leader makes very difficult decisions, particularly during war time."

American airmen launched the world's first atomic strike on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, causing the deaths of about 140,000 people.

"My purpose is not to simply revisit the past, but to affirm that innocent people die in a war, on all sides, that we should do everything we can to try to promote peace and dialogue around the world, that we should continue to strive for a world without nuclear weapons," Obama said in the interview with NHK, aired Sunday.

India, Iran agree port deal, reviving trade ties

AFP, Tehran

India yesterday agreed to finance the development of an Iranian port as a trading hub, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to revive economic ties with Tehran after the lifting of sanctions.

The Indian leader met Iranian officials including President Hassan Rouhani during a visit that he said would mark "a new chapter in our strategic partnership".

Modi and Rouhani oversaw the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the provision of a line of credit from India's EXIM Bank to develop Iran's southern port of Chabahar, on the Gulf of Oman.

Rouhani hailed the project, saying it could become a "great symbol of cooperation between Iran and India".

Modi's visit, the first by an Indian premier to Iran in 15 years, comes after international sanctions against Tehran were lifted in mid-January following an agreement with world powers over its nuclear programme.

Since that long-awaited agreement was reached in July, officials from dozens of mainly Asian and European countries have visited Iran to seek a share

of its 80-million strong market.

India, China's greatest economic rival in Asia, is among the last regional powers to arrive.

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Iran in late January and pledged to expand trade to \$600 billion in the next 10 years. Xi's visit, only days after economic sanctions against Iran were lifted, was in line with his signature foreign policy initiative known as "One Belt One Road".

Modi and Rouhani were joined later by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who landed in Tehran yesterday morning, to sign a three-way transit accord.

The three huddled and clasped hands gleefully like teammates after signing the accord. The deal, connecting Iran, India, and Afghanistan to central Asia

-- bypassing Pakistan, would boost economic growth in the region, Modi said.

"We want to link to the world, but connectivity among ourselves is also a priority," he said.

"The corridor would spur unhindered flow of commerce throughout the region. Inflow of capital and technology could lead to new industrial infrastructure in Chabahar."



KERRY VISITS MYANMAR

Suu Kyi seeks 'space' to address Rohingya issue

REUTERS, Naypyitaw

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi asked to be given "enough space" to address the plight of her country's Rohingya Muslim population, as visiting US Secretary of State John Kerry pressed the Nobel peace laureate to promote respect for human rights.

The Rohingya, most of whom live in apartheid-like conditions, are seen by many Myanmar Buddhists as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and referred to by many as Bengalis.

"Emotive terms make it very difficult for us to find a peaceful and sensible resolution to our problems," Suu Kyi told reporters at a joint news conference with Kerry in Naypyitaw.

"All that we are asking is that people should be aware of the difficulties we are facing and to give us enough space to solve all our problems."

Kerry said he had discussed the Rohingya issue with Suu Kyi during their meeting, describing the issue

as "very sensitive" and "divisive," in Myanmar.

"I know it arouses strong passions here," Kerry said. "At the same time, we all understand, as a matter of fact, that there is a group here in Myanmar that calls itself Rohingya," said Kerry, adding that the United States used that term.

"What's critical to focus on is solving the problem; what's critical to focus on is improving the situation on the ground to promote development, promote respect for human rights, and to benefit all of those who live in Rakhine and throughout Myanmar," he added. There is widespread hostility

towards Rohingya Muslims in the Buddhist-majority country, including among some within Suu Kyi's party and its supporters.

Taking up the cause of the beleaguered minority would carry a political cost for Suu Kyi, who took on the newly created role of state councillor in April.



NEWS IN brief

'Mosquito control failure fuelled Zika'

AFP, Geneva

The spiralling crisis surrounding the Zika virus is the result of decades of policy failures on mosquito control and poor access to family planning services, WHO said yesterday. "The spread of Zika... (is) the price being paid for a massive policy failure that dropped the ball on mosquito control in the 1970s," WHO chief Margaret Chan told the UN health agency's annual assembly.

India launches mini space shuttle

AFP, Bangalore

India successfully launched its first mini space shuttle yesterday as New Delhi's famously frugal space agency joined the global race to make rockets as reusable as airplanes. The shuttle was reportedly developed on a budget of just one billion rupees, a fraction of the billions of dollars spent by other nations' space programmes. The Reusable Launch Vehicle hurtled into a blue sky after its 7:00am lift-off.

Lanka mudslides death toll rises

REUTERS, Colombo

The official death toll has risen to 92 but 109 people are feared to have been buried in Sri Lanka's landslides. The cost of landslides and floods will be between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion at the minimum, the government said yesterday. Days of torrential rain forced more than 350,000 people from their homes, though many were returning yesterday.

Austria far-right loses presidential polls

BBC ONLINE

Alexander Van der Bellen has won Austria's presidential election, preventing Norbert Hofer from becoming the EU's first far-right head of state. Hofer led narrowly after Sunday's election but postal votes counted yesterday gave Van der Bellen victory. Bellen campaigned on a pro-EU platform, backed by the Green Party. Hofer said it was a sad day and that he would have gladly served as president.

Tajikistan okays charter changes

AFP, Dushanbe

Voters in Tajikistan have overwhelmingly endorsed changes to the Central Asian country's constitution allowing President Emomali Rakhmonov to run for an unlimited number of terms, the elections commission said yesterday. In a statement, the Central Election Commission said 94.5 per cent of votes cast in Sunday's referendum had backed the 40 constitutional changes.



HISTORIC MEETING IN VATICAN

Pope Francis talks with Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed el-Tayeb, Egyptian Imam of al-Azhar Mosque, at the Vatican yesterday. The meeting between the leader of the world's Catholics and the highest authority in Sunni Islam marks the culmination of a significant improvement in relations between the two faiths since Francis took office in 2013. PHOTO: REUTERS

India, Thailand, Myanmar work on 1,400km link road

PTI, Bangkok

India, Thailand and Myanmar are working on a 1,400-kilometre-long highway that will link India with Southeast Asia by land for the first time in decades, giving a boost to trade and cultural exchanges between the three countries.

Indian ambassador to Thailand Bhagwant Singh Bishnoi said 73 bridges in Myanmar, built more than seven decades ago during World War II, were being renovated with funding from India to allow vehicles to cross the highway safely.

When the repair work will be completed in 18 months, the highway could be opened to traffic from all three countries, he said.

The planned highway starts in India's Moreh to Myanmar's Tamu city. Negotiations are currently underway to conclude a tri-nation motor vehicle agreement for the use of the 1,400km road that will reach

Thailand at Tak, Mae Sot district.

"There has always been a meeting of minds between India and Thailand. Our two countries share cultural, spiritual and linguistic links. With this road, we will also have physical connectivity," Bishnoi told PTI.

The road will help in transportation of goods and further development of SMEs in north India, he said, adding the tri-nation highway exemplifies India's "Act East" policy.

Myanmar's Dawei deep-sea port and industrial estate project near the Thai border is also expected to help further integrate eastern India with South East Asian countries.

The planned port can be linked up with India's Chennai port as well as Thailand's Laem Chabang Port on the other side of the ocean, the envoy said.

India is also preparing to negotiate the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) on top of the current India-Asean free-trade agreement (FTA).

Everest safety under scrutiny

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A 43-year-old Indian mountaineer died while descending from the summit of Mount Everest, in the third fatality on the world's tallest mountain in as many days since climbing resumed after last year's avalanche tragedy at Base Camp.

Subash Paul, who climbed the 8,850 metre on Saturday, perished the next day due to exhaustion, Wangchu Sherpa of the Trekking Camp Nepal company said yesterday.

An Australian woman and a Dutch national have also died since Friday due to altitude sickness in the notorious 'death zone' where the air is so thin that only the fittest can survive without supplementary oxygen.

Hiking officials and climbing veterans say the deaths raise questions about the preparations and safety standards of some climbing operators. This year's Everest campaign has been hit by high winds on some days when climbers had been counting on the weather 'window' to open to make their summit bids before the monsoon sweeps in next month.

Search on for clues in crash

Cairo enlists a submersible to search for black boxes

REUTERS, Cairo

Egypt has sent a robot submarine to join the hunt for an EgyptAir plane which crashed in some of the deepest waters of the Mediterranean Sea with 66 people on board, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi said yesterday.

Ships and planes scouring the sea north of Alexandria have found body parts, personal belongings and debris from the Airbus 320, but are still trying to locate the black box recorders that could shed light on the cause of Thursday's crash.

Sisi said that underwater equipment from Egypt's offshore oil industry was being brought in to help the search.

"They have a submarine that can reach 3,000 metres under water," he said in a

televised speech. "It moved today in the direction of the plane crash site because we are working hard to salvage the black boxes."

An oil ministry source said Sisi was referring to a robot submarine used mostly to maintain offshore oil rigs. It was not clear whether the vessel would be able to help locate the black boxes, or would be used in later stages of the operation.

Air crash investigation experts say the search teams have around 30 days to listen for pings sent out once every second from beacons attached to the two black boxes. At this stage of the search they would typically use acoustic hydrophones, bringing in more advanced robots later to scan the seabed and retrieve any objects once they have been found.

EGYPTAIR DISASTER

