

No Syria breakthrough

US blames Russia for backtracking on anticipated deal

AGENCIES

Syrian government troops renewed the siege of rebel-held parts of Aleppo yesterday, as Washington and Moscow failed to reach a deal on stemming violence in the country's devastating war.

Turkish forces and allied Syrian rebels meanwhile expelled the Islamic State group from the last stretch of the Syrian-Turkish border under its control, a monitor said.

President Barack Obama said earlier that the two sides were "working around the clock" on the sidelines of a summit in China, but that it was "a very complicated piece of business."

The State Department said a deal was close and could be announced by Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, but hours later admitted defeat for now.

"Russians walked back on some of the areas we thought we were agreed on, so we are going back to capitals to consult," a senior State Department official said.

Kerry and Lavrov will meet again today in Hangzhou, where G20 leaders are gathered, he added.

The Secretary of State told reporters: "We're going to review some ideas tonight, a couple things on these couple of tough issues, and come back together and see where we are."

On the ground, Syrian state media said the army and allied forces had taken an area south of Aleppo, severing the sole route left into the eastern neighbourhoods held by the opposition.

The development leaves about 250,000 people living in rebel-controlled parts of the city cut off from the outside world once again, and will raise new fears about a humanitarian crisis in Aleppo.

Meanwhile, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said rebels backed by Turkish tanks and warplanes had seized the last parts of the border held by IS from the extremist group, cutting it from the outside world.

"IS has lost its contact with the outside world after losing the remaining border villages," the Britain-based monitor said.

The loss of the Turkish border will deprive IS of a key transit point for recruits and supplies, though the group continues to hold territory in both Syria and Iraq.

DEVELOPMENTS

Regime cuts off rebel-held Aleppo, renewing siege

Turkey says Syrian-Turkish border completely secured from IS



(From top, clockwise) Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkey counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan talk as G20 leaders pose for a photo; Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Barack Obama chat prior to a dinner banquet; Brics leaders pose for a photo; and Obama and Erdogan meet at the sidelines of the G20 summit in Hangzhou, China, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS



Ice cream diplomacy

AFP, Hangzhou

Despite warm relations between Moscow and Beijing, Vladimir Putin brought a chilly gift for his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping as they met on the sidelines of the G20 summit Sunday: a tub of ice cream.

Putin did not divulge the flavour of the frozen gift as he was welcomed by Xi at an official government guesthouse in the eastern Chinese city of Hangzhou.

"I promised to bring it for you. And I've brought you a whole box of ice cream," Putin said.

Xi thanked the Russian president for his "kindness", before adding that he'd developed a taste for Russian ice cream on his many official visits to Moscow.

"Every time that I come to Russia, I ask them to buy me Russian ice cream. And after, we eat the ice cream at home," said Xi, according to comments provided by the Russian delegation.

"The fresh cream you have is the best, that's why your ice cream is particularly delicious. I like it a lot," he added.

Avoid empty talks at G20: Xi

AGENCIES

Chinese President Xi Jinping urged world leaders to avoid "empty talk" and confront sluggish economic growth and rising protectionism as their summit opened Sunday in the scenic city of Hangzhou.

Xi welcomed Group of 20 presidents and prime ministers with a handshake, and an extended clasp with Barack Obama, as both men smiled despite protocol stumbles around the US leader's visit.

The Chinese leader said the world economy "still faces multiple risks and challenges including a lack of growth momentum and consumption, turbulent financial markets, receding global trade and investment".

The rise of protectionism is challenging economic globalisation, imperilling multilateral trade arrangements, and despite regulatory reforms market volatility is gathering pace, he said.

"We hope the Hangzhou summit will come up with a prescription for the world economy and lead it back to the road of strong, balanced, comprehensive and sustainable growth," Xi said.

The G20 brings together representatives of 85 percent of the world's GDP and two-thirds of its population.

But experts fear the gathering will be short on substance, with no acute crisis pushing leaders to defy rising populist sentiment and to take diffi-

cult steps such as liberalising trade.

In a circular conference hall in Hangzhou -- the eastern city left deserted by a vast security operation -- Xi told leaders the G20 "should work with real action, with no empty talk".

The summit was preceded by a flurry of diplomatic activity on issues ranging from climate

DEVELOPMENTS

China president urges action, cure of global economy

EU says Europe 'close to limits' on refugee influx; urges world to share burden

Difficult times ahead, says May as world warns UK on Brexit

chang the war in Syria to international trade.

The US and China on Saturday ratified the Paris climate accord, a crucial step towards bringing into force the pact against global warming.

There had been hopes for another breakthrough, on the long war in Syria, after the US said it was close

to a deal with Russia on stemming the violence.

EU President Donald Tusk said Europe was "close to limits" on its ability to accept new waves of refugees and urged the broader international community to shoulder its share of the burden.

The issue has become a political hot potato for European leaders as Islamist terror attacks and rising anti-globalisation sentiment fuel public resentment of immigration.

The talks are being held in the wake of Britain's vote to leave the European Union, which leaves it with the task of renegotiating access to the markets of the rest of the world.

British Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday warned of possible "difficult times ahead" for Britain's economy as world leaders warned UK over Brexit fallout.

Speaking alongside May, Barack Obama said the US would continue to prioritise its trade deal with the EU ahead of all others. The US president said his much-derided warning ahead of the EU referendum, that Britain would be at "the back of the queue" for a deal if it voted to leave, still stood.

And Japan yesterday warned of dire consequences of Brexit.

Issued on the eve of the G20 summit in China, a document entitled "Japan's Message to the UK and EU" warns of dire consequences for "the interests of the world" if an open Europe cannot

NEWSIN brief

Kashmir separatists reject talks proposal

PTI, Srinagar

Separatists yesterday rejected Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti's invitation to them for a meeting with all-party delegation, terming such a measure as "deceitful" and insisting that it cannot be an alternative to a "transparent agenda-based dialogue to address the core issue". A day after Mehbooba invited separatists in her capacity as PDP chief, separatist leaders issued a joint statement here, rubbing her and her offer.

Turkey coup plotters to face justice: Obama

AFP, Hangzhou

The United States is committed to bringing the perpetrators of the attempted coup against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to justice, President Barack Obama said yesterday. Ankara accuses US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen of being behind the July uprising. US officials insist they will extradite Gulen if Turkey can present proof he was actually involved.

Rape charge: Delhi's ex-minister arrested

AFP, New Delhi

The former women's minister of the Indian capital -- who was sacked over a "sex tape" -- has now been arrested following a claim by a woman shown in the tape that he raped her, an investigator said yesterday. Sandeep Kumar was arrested on Saturday, days after he was dismissed as women's and children's minister of the region covering Delhi following the video leak to television channels.



A man holds a poster of Mother Teresa outside the Missionaries of Charity building in Kolkata yesterday as she was canonised during a ceremony held in the Vatican.

PHOTO: REUTERS

THE CANONISATION OF MOTHER TERESA

SEPTEMBER 4, 2016

Pope Francis declares Mother Teresa a saint

2015

Credited by the Vatican with healing a Brazilian man of brain tumours (2nd miracle)

2003

Beatified by Pope John Paul II for helping heal a Bengali woman of cancer (1st miracle)

SEPTEMBER 5, 1997

Dies in Kolkata

1979

Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

1960S

Opens centres for people with leprosy, dysentery, tuberculosis

OCTOBER 1950

Founds the Missionaries of Charity order

1929

Starts missionary and charity work in Kolkata, India. Teaches at St Mary's School for Girls

SEPTEMBER 1928

Becomes a Catholic nun in Ireland as Sister Mary Teresa

AUGUST 26, 1910

Born in Macedonia to Albanian parents. Baptised Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu

HONG KONG LEGISLATIVE POLLS

Young activists take on China

AFP, Hong Kong

Young Hong Kong independence activists calling for a complete break from China stood for the first time yesterday in city-wide legislative elections, the biggest polls since mass pro-democracy protests in 2014.

They were fighting for seats in the Legislative Council (LegCo) as concerns grow that Beijing is tightening its grip on the semi-autonomous city.

Campaigners made a last-ditch push for votes in the final hours and by early evening the turnout stood at nearly 40 percent, or 1.5 million.

But victories for the young activists could split the vote for the pro-democracy camp -- and end up playing into the hands of pro-Beijing parties.

Most established pro-democracy politicians do not support the notion of independence and may lose seats to voters who now favour more radical new groups.

If the democrats lose just four seats overall, they will forfeit the one-third voting bloc they need to veto bills, stacking the already skewed legislature even more in favour of Beijing.

Polis have shown that some of the handful of pro-independence candidates may win seats.

"This election is very much characterised by an inter-generational change of politicians and political leaders," Political analyst Joseph Cheng told AFP.

Pak cabinet gives go-ahead for security pact with China

PTI, Islamabad

Alarmed by the growing India-US defence ties, Pakistan's cabinet has given the go-ahead for negotiating a long-term defence agreement and security cooperation with its all-weather ally China, a media report said yesterday.

Pakistan's cabinet in a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on July 15 at the Governor House in Lahore gave the go-ahead for negotiating a long-term defence agreement with China, The Express Tribune reported.

The cabinet considered the summary to initiate negotiations on a draft agreement between Pakistan and China on a long-term strategic framework agreement for enhancing defence and security cooperation in diversified fields.

The cabinet was informed that the draft agreement was based on principles of mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty, non-integration and non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefits, and peaceful coexistence

for strategic gains in defence and security, including arms and technology transfers.

In April 2015, when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan, the two countries agreed that their relationship had acquired greater strategic significance against the backdrop of complex and changing international and regional situations.

They agreed to elevate the Pakistan-China relationship to the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership.

The reports of defence agreement surfaced a week after the US signed a key logistics agreement with India governing the use of each other's land, air and naval bases for repair and resupply.

Pakistan had called the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement between the US and India as an agreement between the two sovereign states.

"Pakistan would like to see that such arrangements do not contribute to polarising the region by disturbing the strategic balance in South Asia and escalating the arms buildup," Foreign Office spokesperson Nafees Zakaria told a news briefing on Thursday.

RESTORING DEGRADED FORESTS

World nears 2020 goal

AFP, Honolulu

The world edged closer to a 2020 goal to repair vast areas of damaged natural lands and forests, officials announced Saturday at the world's largest conservation meeting.

Malawi and Guatemala committed to restoring a total of 4.54 million hectares (11 million acres) of degraded land, officials said at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress.

The pledges are part of the Bonn Challenge launched in 2011 to restore 150 million hectares of degraded and deforested land by 2020.

"We have crossed the 100 million hectare milestone to 113 million hectares and we are well on our way to achieving the Bonn Challenge target," said human rights activist Bianca Jagger at a press conference.

"For those who don't think this is an important announcement, you should think twice. This is probably one of the most important initiatives that exist in the world today."

She said the lands will protect water resources, boost farming, provide jobs and fight climate change.

A total of 36 governments, organizations and companies have now committed to the Bonn Challenge, launched in 2011 by Germany and the IUCN and endorsed by the UN Climate Summit in 2014.

Its ultimate goal is to restore 350 million hectares by 2030.

AFTERMATH OF MERKEL'S OPEN BORDER POLICY

Germany's ruling party suffers state poll blow

REUTERS, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative Christian Democrats fell to third place in a state election yesterday behind the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, TV projections showed.

In a stinging defeat for Merkel in her home district one year ahead of federal elections, the upstart AfD won 21.4 percent of the vote in their first election in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern by campaigning hard against the chancellor's policies on refugees, according to a projection by ZDF TV at 1615 GMT.

The election took place exactly a year after Merkel's decision to open Germany's borders to hundreds of thousands of refugees and the discontent in the state was palpable.

"This is a slap in the face for Merkel - not only in Berlin but also in her home state,"

said Frauke Petry, co-leader of the AfD. "The voters made a clear statement against Merkel's disastrous immigration policies. This put her in her place."

Voters already punished Merkel in three state elections in March, voting in droves for the AfD and rejecting Merkel's Christian Democrats.

Founded in 2013, the AfD now has won seats in nine of the 16 state assemblies across the country. However, it has no chance of governing in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern since the other parties have said they would not form a coalition with the party.

The AfD is also making gains nationwide, a new poll showed yesterday. If the national election were held next week, the AfD would win 12 percent of the vote, making it the third-largest party in Germany, according to a poll conducted by the Emnid institute for the Bild newspaper.

